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Developing a case based learning curriculum with a salutogenic perspective

Neesha Ridley, BSc (Hons), PGCertHE. RM, FHEA. Senior lecturer and course leader University of Central Lancashire, UK*, Anna Byrom, BSc (Hons), PGCertHE. RM, FHEA. Senior lecturer and course leader

University of Central Lancashire, UK

A B S T R A C T

At the University of Central Lancashire, in the North West of England, United Kingdom (UK) the midwifery team introduced a new and innovative case-based learning (CBL) curriculum for the undergraduate midwifery course. CBL is a student-centred approach to teaching and learning and encourages students to learn from each other, develop essential skills when caring for women and families including collaborative working and effective communication. In this article we share our approach and experiences of developing and delivering a CBL curriculum informed by salutogenesis, including how it enabled us to support effective learning and skill development for women and families.

Setting the scene for a new curriculum

In 2012, as part of our revalidation process we set about planning our new pre-registration midwifery curriculum. Developing and designing curriculums for learning in midwifery education can be arduous and complex. There is an imperative to balance regulatory, professional and educational requirements alongside the variable, shifting needs of childbearing women and families. To ensure our curriculum was 'fit for purpose' we canvassed relevant literature at the time (NMC 2011, DoH 2010, Francis, 2013) and engaged a relevant stakeholder group of clinicians, academics, students, service-users and wider multi-disciplinary team members. We began by locating a shared vision of the 'ideal' midwife as outlined in Fig. 1.

This vision informed the development of a shared philosophy that steered the selection of an appropriate curriculum model. Our vision and philosophy helped in articulating relevant aims and objectives for the curriculum: to nurture the development of compassionate, competent, informed and caring midwives of the future.

The salutary curriculum philosophy

We turned to Antonovsky's (1979) philosophy of salutogenesis which offers a philosophical orientation that moves beyond the purely pathological paradigms of dichotomising normal, abnormal, low-risk and high-risk childbearing. Salutogenesis perceives health on a transient continuum situated within the context of our environment and social lives (Lindstrom & Ericksson 2010). As a philosophy, salutogenesis is well aligned with midwifery, which embraces being 'with-woman' and understanding childbearing as a healthy physical and psycho-social phenomenon.

We aimed to select a curriculum that would embrace Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence (SOC) construct, a global orientation in which an individual perceives life as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (Mittelmark & Bauer, 2017). SOC theory applied to both how we supported student well-being and in turn encouraged them to enhance health and well-being of the women and families in their care. Informed by the concepts of woman-centred and family-centred care, underpinned by salutogenesis, the midwifery team selected a CBL curriculum model to design a suitable midwifery pre-registration degree programme.

Case-based learning as a curriculum design – creating a sense of coherence

Case-based learning (CBL) is an approach to curriculum design and delivery. It is defined in numerous ways across disciplines (Thistlethwaite et al 2012) and closely aligned to Problem Based Learning (PBL). CBL differs to PBL by providing more structure to enhance student development and achievement of specified learning outcomes. Crucially, CBL encourages 'guided inquiry' supported with a range of resources (literature, videos and core learning activities) pulled together through active tutor facilitation and feedback (Srinivasan, Wilkes, Stevenson, Nguyen and Slavin 2007). CBL embraces and builds upon other approaches (e.g. PBL and definition-based learning), offering an educational paradigm with core characteristics including:

- Development of 'real-life' cases to review and critique
- Small group learning (4-8 students)
- Lecturers as facilitators of learning
- Active participation from students
- Peer learning and sharing

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: nridley1@uclan.ac.uk, neesharidley@yahoo.co.uk (N. Ridley).

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Table 1
Benefits of CBL

Benefit	How	Impact
Preparation for placement and practice	Engaging with 'real-life' cases and scenarios in the safety of the classroom environment.	Building confidence to care for women and families. Development of clinical and caring skills. Closes the theory-practice gap.
Collaborative and communication skills	Students working in small teams and sharing their ideas through regular feedback sessions.	Enables students to become effective members of a multi-disciplinary team.
Encourages active and motivated learners	Blend of directed and self-directed study.	Helps to develop autonomous practitioners with life-long learning skills.
Improves research and critical evaluation skills	Through research clubs and searching for and sharing current literature and evidence to support weekly feedback sessions.	Enhanced evidence-based practice. Improved confidence to access and critique research and literature.
Develops reflective practice	Weekly reflection sessions exploring learning and personal development.	Develops self-awareness and ensures ongoing practice development.

Adapted from Williams (2005)

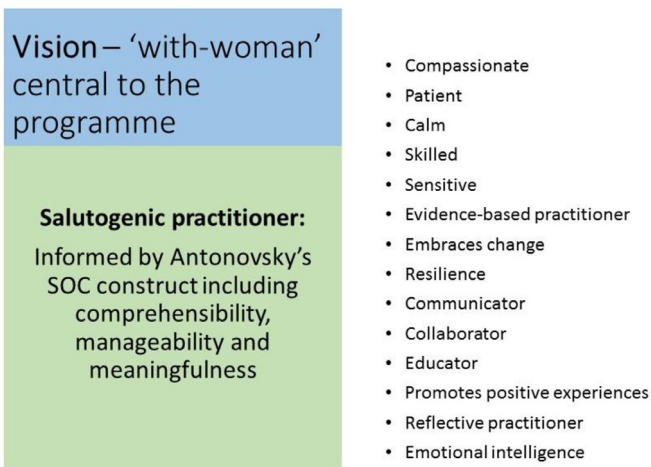


Fig. 1. Characteristics of an 'ideal' midwife generated from stakeholder meetings (adapted from Byrom, Perez-Botella and Heneghan 2016).

Why CBL? Rationale for selection

With CBL, students develop skills in analytical thinking and reflective judgment by reading and discussing complex, real-life scenarios. This enables learners to put theory into practice in the safety of the classroom setting, which is ideal for midwifery, where students spend equal time in clinical and education-based settings (Wood, 2003; Thistlethwaite et al, 2012). Additionally, exploration of specific, practice-informed case studies aligns with salutogenesis theory. Students are supported to consider the physical, psycho-social, cultural and professional factors that influence midwifery and how they can enhance childbearing women and families' sense of coherence through improved manageability, comprehensibility and meaningfulness (Byrom et al 2015). CBL enables students' exploration of specified learning outcomes, using critical thinking rather than relying on the lecturers dispensing of wisdom (Taylor, 2014). As a student centred approach to teaching and learning, CBL also supports peer-learning developing collaborative working and communication skills as outlined in Table 1.

Identification of these established benefits reassured us that CBL would enable us to meet our course aims, objectives, and vision for the future midwife. We have charted benefits through ongoing formative and summative evaluation (questionnaires, feedback events and interviews) with the midwifery lecturing team and all students during each stage of implementation. Implementing CBL has been a learning journey for us as a team.

Making it work in practice – our step-by-step guide

It was essential that our curriculum reflected the standards expected by the UK Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and vision outlined in stakeholder meetings (NMC, 2009). To respond to these requirements, we developed core curriculum themes (Fig. 2). The three core themes: 'the midwife', 'the woman and her childbearing experience' and 'the baby and the family', became the focus of the three core modules that students engage with during their training. The learning outcomes for each module are addressed collectively through structured CBL 'cases' to allow development of midwifery practice.

CBL practicalities

Team work was crucial as we developed the CBL curriculum content and delivery structure. Fig. 3 identifies the team roles and responsibilities for CBL. The development phase was resource intensive, as we required whole-team input to write and facilitate individual sessions, however experience has enabled us to adapt curriculum design and delivery to improve our efficiency. We learnt to balance work-load across the team and reduced the need for multiple facilitators by organising for case-leads to take feedback from all groups. We also recognised the importance of having a year lead to oversee module development and ensure students receive adequate support throughout the academic year. Year leads work carefully with module leaders, ensuring learning outcomes are met, and students' sense of coherence maintained throughout the year.

Students are organised in small groups to engage with our CBL curriculum. Group membership is rotated at each theory block to support student relationship growth across the cohort. Small group work increases student engagement and improves confidence during group feedback. Importantly small group work strengthens students' team work, reflection and communication skills - essential for midwifery practice and compassionate care.

Student engagement with the curriculum follows a clear process (Fig. 4) to promote consistency and quality across cases and between case leads/facilitators. This is an essential feature of curriculum development. Having a simple and structured framework for each case, enables students to assimilate with a new approach to learning. Regular communication, evaluation and feedback between facilitators, students and course leaders ensures the course content and cases are adapted, reviewed and revised to respond to individual, group and class needs. The responsive capacity of CBL has been an overwhelming benefit. It has enabled us to care for students' needs and to respond to our own needs as midwifery educators.

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