Making learning relevant

When learners start their clinical placement years, it is quite common to hear that they have some difficulty making the theory-to-practice leap. Translating what they have learned into the application of workplace-based skills and knowledge can be complex.

This issue of REd explores ways of preparing pre-service learners for real-world work through authentic learning and assessment tasks. The integration of these activities into a programme’s educational design help make the curriculum more relevant for students, teachers and the health industry.

Pam Harvey
(pam.harvey@monash.edu)

Natalie Radomski, Head, NWRMEU
(natalie.radomski@monash.edu)

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

Nelson Mandela
1918-2013

Authentic learning and assessment

Contents

1. Authentic learning and assessment
2. In Focus…Making learning relevant
3. In Practice… Authentic learning activities
4. Review; Humanities in Health Care; Find out More

About REd

REd is published four times a year by the North West Rural Medical Education Unit of the Monash University School of Rural Health. It provides resources and practical tools for clinical educators. Back issues are available. Phone (03) 5440 9000 or see our web site: www.med.monash.edu.au/med/srh/medical-education/resources.html

If you would like each issue of REd sent directly to you, contact pam.harvey@monash.edu

ISSN: 1835-1891
The recognition that learning should be aligned to skills needed in the real world is not new. Industry expectations of higher education graduates now include capacities beyond knowledge acquisition and skill mastery, and tertiary educators face the challenge of providing a curriculum that includes genuine links from the abstract to real-life situations. **Authentic learning** provides a framework to design and implement learning and teaching programmes that assist in meeting these expectations.

Authentic learning is an extension of experiential learning. With its basis in practice environments, it:

- is situated in a context that reflects the way that knowledge and skills will be used in real life
- uses tasks and activities that have real-world relevance
- encourages sustained effort and investigation over time for problem-solving and solution generation
- requires learners to be involved in activities with multiple roles and perspectives
- requires access to expert task process and performance modelling
- enables collaboration
- promotes reflective practice as a basis for professional learning, and
- encourages the teacher to provide coaching and scaffolding at critical moments.

The foundation of authentic learning is that it makes the understanding and solution of problems the main learning focus, rather than the theory or knowledge. It encourages a deeper and more complex learning experience based on the practical application of active learning principles.

Authentic learning must be linked to authentic assessment. It is widely acknowledged that assessment drives learning for many students, and has a significant impact on educational design. Developing authentic assessment tasks for learners provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge in an industry-relevant way.

The elements of authentic assessment link closely to those of the authentic learning framework. Assessment includes a challenging task that requires analysis and synthesis to produce an outcome in the form of a performance or product that is often complex but reflects a real-life workplace environment. It also demonstrates that skills and knowledge learned in one domain can be used in another, incorporating elements of metacognition and deep learning. Finally, authentic assessment tasks need to be accurate, collaborative and of high real-world fidelity, with time for performance feedback.

**Key Concepts**

**Experiential learning:** Learning by doing. A conscious process of observation, reflection, sense-making and practice in real clinical situations. Includes perception, cognition (ways of thinking), behaviour, experience and emotions.

**Situated learning:** Learning that occurs within a particular context and culture.

**Cognitive Modelling:** A demonstration of an activity while explicitly explaining the underpinning reasoning and decision-making process.

In Practice … Authentic learning activities

Designing and implementing authentic learning activities is an integral part of creating real-world learning experiences for students. Below are some ideas you may want to use in your health professional programme if you aren’t already doing them:

**Shadowing**

Partnering a clinician for a day or a shift and being involved in their day-to-day work activities is a valuable activity for learners. If the clinician ‘talks through’ their day, making explicit the organisation and reasoning behind their tasks, the student experiences how time management and teamwork contribute to effective clinical care.

**Simulation**

Simulation is an oft-used teaching method in health professional education. Extending simulation into areas that are not typically learned this way allows learners to practice particular skills before encountering them in the real world. For example, simulating a team-based home visit with a chronically ill person introduces learners to team assessment, the professional skills of others, and clinical work in a community environment.

**Patient journeys through health systems**

Use de-identified, real-world material to demonstrate how a patient has journeyed through various health services. Ask learners to predict a pathway and discuss if or how the real journey differed. Involve clinicians from the services to discuss health management issues or use an expert panel so that learners can formulate clinical reasoning around their answers.

**Workplace integrated learning**

Ask learners what specific challenges they are having while on their clinical placement. This might be a lack of knowledge in an area, mastery of a particular clinical skill, or issues around communicating with patients and clinicians. Implement an activity to assist students with this, and let them return to their clinical environments to consolidate their skills or knowledge.

**Popular Culture as a teaching tool**

Using material that is recognisable to a learner and from their world helps to ‘bridge’ a gap from theory to reality. For example, using a few minutes of a clip from a current or well-known TV series or film and connecting it to a discussion of real life practice may help link the topic you are studying to how it actually plays out in the workplace. Although educational audiovisual material is often readily available, ‘borrowing’ from popular culture may make your teaching more immediately relevant.

**Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP)**

Setting up an online VCoP can assist in connecting learners to experts and other learners from across many disciplines. Real life problems or activities can be discussed, tested and solved within a VCoP that works collaboratively. Discussion threads, blogs and wikis are obvious digital technology tools for collaborative use but facilitators could incorporate videoconferencing technology such as Skype or Google Hangouts for interactive sessions.

**Case Studies**

Using de-identified data, construct case studies from real patient experiences. Involve learners in the real task of determining what is happening to the patient at various points of time, and the appropriate management and treatment of a person with their particular life circumstance. Use evidence of expert clinical reasoning, spelled out so that learners can see how clinicians arrive at decisions important for patient care.

---

**Key Concepts**

- **Authentic learning**: Experiential learning in real practice settings
- **Collaborative learning**: A social educational approach that involves groups of learners working on the same task or activity
- **Scaffolding**: Structuring learning experiences depending on the needs and stages of the learner
- **Fading**: A decrease in the level of support for a learner in order to let them be more independent and self-determined while providing them with assistance if required.
Humanities in Health Care

The Visit

Lemon verbena and lavender - the smell of furniture polish perhaps - soft strains of classical music; glass bowl of peppermints; rosewood bookcase; dark leather chair; framed seascape: these things had become so familiar. She ran her palms over the armrests, smooth and comforting. But today the seascape was gone. Un-faded wallpaper where it had once been marked its absence. On the wall opposite there was a new print.

*Still Life with Gilt Goblet* is its title, Rose. I see you are wondering.

It glows and dances with light and energy.

Yes. Like love, Rose.

So, I guess you want to hear what I had to say about love?

Rose read from her counselling journal in her reading voice.

**Love**

*In the middle of the night when the lightening cracks in the dark sky and I am afraid, what I know of love is what the poets know. It’s like air. You only really know it when it isn’t there.*

Is that all, Rose?

Yes, that is all.

Perhaps you’ve never really known love.

Perhaps. If that is so, I will keep on waiting. One day it will find me.

Case Notes

Client continues to show progress. Mary Pomfret

‘Humanities in Health Care’ submissions are original creative pieces that reflect the nature of a health professional’s work and the care of patients. Direct all queries to pam.harvey@monash.edu

Review

Monash University eEducation Centre blog

https://blogs.monash.edu/eeducation/

If you are interested in innovative ways of engaging and educating students, this blog will introduce you to showcased ideas from Monash. One of the many public blogs Monash produces, it has a focus on ‘Better education through research and development’. Recent topics include interactive small and large group teaching, the concept of blended learning (a recent push at Monash) and REd itself! The eEducation blog is part of the newly constructed Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and its archives contain a range of useful teaching tips.