He@lth Information on the Internet

Making practice-based learning work

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Details of the **Making Practice-Based Learning Work** *project and the learning materials and resources made freely available on the Web.*

Do you:
- *Supervise students who learn in the workplace?*
- *Deliver courses to prepare people for supervising students in the workplace?*
- *Learn in the workplace?*

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then there is a Web site for you.

The *Making Practice-Based Learning Work* project has developed a Web site that aims to enhance the quality of student experiences whilst on practice, i.e. work-based placements. Key parts are the learning materials and resource sections containing materials that can be used by anyone involved in many aspects of practice-based student supervision, including supervisor preparation and support. These resources were either commissioned by the project or externally sourced Web materials have been peer reviewed. The materials are freely available for anyone to use in enhancing the nature of practice education.

The problem

Successful practice-based learning needs practitioners able to recognise learning opportunities and able to communicate their professional knowledge. Many practitioners have not acquired the necessary language to describe their practices and need opportunities to help them in preparation for sharing their practice. Supervision can be one medium for learning such skills but has mixed success in healthcare settings. This may be because it is often seen as an add-on activity resulting from insufficient numbers of suitably experienced and prepared staff expected to cope with clinical workloads that often fail to reflect their educational responsibilities.[1]

The proposed solution

The *Making Practice-Based Learning Work* project aimed to: Enhance the professional development of the practice educator thereby maximising the learning experiences of health and social care students undertaking practice. The project's objectives were to:

1. *Identify and collate evidence from a range of healthcare disciplines on how practitioners are prepared for their educational role in supporting student learning during clinical placement.*

2. *Identify practitioners' needs in the provision, support and supervision of practice-based learning.*

3. *Agree on principles of good practice that meet the identified needs.*

4. *Design, pilot and implement an open learning (including e-learning) and communication resource to enhance practitioner awareness and understanding of good practice.*

5. *Prepare, pilot and implement the learning resource for culturally diverse health and social care teams.*

6. *Disseminate and embed the project outcomes in a planned and comprehensive manner within and across health and social care disciplines.*

The project had three distinct phases.

Phase One
The project team comprised Joan Mulholland (Project Director, University of Ulster), Chris Turnock

(Project Manager, Northumbria University) and Janet Scammell (Project Manager, Bournemouth University). The project commissioned staff from the universities participating in the project (Ulster, Northumbria and Bournemouth) to produce a case study for each of the five disciplines involved in the project – dietetics, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and radiography. These case studies involved an audit of the practice undertaken by universities throughout the UK and Ireland on the methods used to prepare practitioners for their educational role in supporting students during practice placements. The audit commenced in September 2003 and was completed in January 2004. The project team also held regional events in Newcastle on 4 December 2003 and in Bournemouth on 15 December 2003 to analyse development of good practice in the educational preparation of practice based supervisors.

The findings of the case studies included examples of good practice that emerged from both the audit and regional events. For example, courses for preparing practice educators conformed to professional requirements. Examples of practice educator preparation courses that were either shared by disciplines or by institutions emerged in several case studies. All case studies identified the use of interprofessional learning activity, though this was normally in the classroom rather than practice settings. The case studies all felt the role of the practice educator needed greater formal recognition and more resources to enhance the status of the practice educator.

Phase Two
The Phase One case studies were used by the project team to inform development of materials, which can be used by practitioners to make them more effective at helping students learn whilst on placement in the workplace. The materials cover various aspects of the educational role of the practitioners supervising students on practice placements. The materials have been divided into two sections – Learning Materials and Resources.

The Learning Materials section contains a variety of materials that were commissioned by the *Making Practice-Based Learning Work* project. The materials came from a range of professionals in various health and social care and educational establishments throughout the UK. These materials utilise a range of presentation media, including text and video. The project team supported enhancement of these materials prior to being made available on the project Web site. At present there are ten items:

Supporting dyslexic students in practice
Failure to fail
Preparing new registrants for teaching in practice
Introduction to reflection in practice
Facilitating learning in practice
Managing learning environments
Communication skills workbook
Learning and assessing through reflection
Skills for facilitating placement learning
Mentoring

The Resources section contains external links categorised into the following themes:

Learning and teaching in practice
Supporting learning in practice
Assessment in practice
Interprofessional learning in practice
Reflection in practice
Diversity in practice
Generic skills

These resources were identified through consultation with a range of stakeholders and quality assured by a panel of evaluators, whose details can be found at <www.practicebasedlearning.org/ evaluation/ evaluation.htm>. The evaluation teams included practitioners, academics and experts in the themed areas.

Phase Three
The project team published the materials on the project Web site in the latter half of 2005, with an official launch taking place at Northumbria University on 16 September 2005. The project Web site is located at <www.practicebasedlearning.org/>. The materials are available to you to use either for personal development or in the development and education of co-workers or students.

The commissioned authors and the project staff have sought to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the content and the information contained in each resource, but do not warrant that it is accurate, complete or up-to-date: we accept no liability for any use made out of any of the resources. The learning resources are intended only for general and information purposes.

There is no charge made for use of any of these materials. Permission is granted to reproduce the materials for personal or education use only; however, sources should be acknowledged when used, as in usual academic practice. Commercial copying, hiring or lending is prohibited.

We are keen to receive feedback from you on these learning materials, and an online evaluation form can be found on the project Web site, located within the horizontal navigation bar.

Conclusions

Whilst the work of the project team has focused on five health disciplines, much of the material contained within the project Web site are generic in nature. This means that the materials are pertinent to other healthcare disciplines that require students to undergo supervised placements. In addition, the materials can also be used in various approaches to interprofessional education, particularly when learning takes place in the workplace.

Furthermore, the project team has secured additional funding to evaluate the transferability of the materials into a non-healthcare context. This work will be undertaken during the latter half of 2006 in collaboration with a number of university departments delivering Sports Sciences' degrees that contain a student placement component.

The project team has put in place measures that will promote maintenance of the project Web site, which includes identification of unavailable external links, replacement of unavailable links with links to new locations and inclusion of appropriate new external links suggested by persons completing the online evaluation form.

Reference

1. Spouse J. Work-based learning in health care environments. *Nurse Educ Practice* 2001; **1**: 12–18.