Chapter 14

Using Students' Own Mobile Technologies to Support Clinical Competency Development in Speech Pathology

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ABSTRACT

The need to adequately prepare students for the workplace competencies of a health professional in the 21st century demands exploration of alternative learning opportunities. Two such examples are the appropriation of mobile technologies and the use of standardised patients to support clinical learning. This chapter will discuss the appropriation of students' own mobile devices to support the development of clinical competency for speech pathology students in a standardised patient clinic. The chapter includes descriptions of a project that focussed on the role of mobile technologies in supporting learning across different contexts. The results indicated that the use of mobile technologies in a clinical practice setting can make a positive contribution to clinical competency development. Issues for future integration of mobile technologies in clinical practice are raised.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes and reports on a project that explored the use of students' own mobile technologies to support clinical learning and competency development within a clinical module. This module uses standardised patients who are actors or real patients, carefully trained by professional staff to enact the role of a patient according to prescribed educational goals and specific skill development requirements (Barrows, 1971). In particular the chapter focuses on:

- The importance of competency development in clinical practice including an outline of the challenges and barriers faced in developing clinical competencies
- An outline of standardised patient clinics and their role in workplace learning and practice education
- A discussion of 'mobility' in learning and how this can be enabled through the use of mobile devices
- An outline of the use of mobile learning to support learning across different contexts
- A discussion of applications of students' own mobile technologies to support teaching and learning activities
- A detailed description of the project phases
- A discussion of the project outcomes and implications for mobile learning in relation to practice and workplace learning
- Implications for future developments in the appropriation of mobile technologies in clinical practice.

BACKGROUND

Tertiary education programs in the health sciences rely on the inclusion of clinical practice and work-integrated learning components in order to graduate professionals competent to work in their chosen discipline. University programs report increasing difficulty in obtaining sufficient traditional clinical practicum placements for students within the workplace. In response to this, allied health professionals are challenged to be innovative and to embrace new technologies within the development and implementation of a clinical education curriculum. Consequently, in 2008, the Division of Speech Pathology within the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at The University of Queensland introduced a clinical education module utilising standardised patients in a third year undergraduate student voice clinic.

While the standardised patient clinic was deemed successful in providing opportunities for clinical practice, it was identified that more needed to be done to support the development of clinical competencies, in particular to encourage and support transfer of learning across different learning contexts. Accordingly, in 2009, mobile technologies were introduced into the program to create a blended learning environment that linked different learning contexts and modes of learning including clinical practice, mobile learning, eLearning and face-to-face activities.

COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

Developing competency for professional practice is critical for students in the health sciences. Professional competency is the ability to perform the required tasks of a designated profession to an appropriate standard as determined by that profession. Competency and the capacity to integrate effective reasoning within a professional domain develops gradually. Higgs and Titchen (2000) suggest it is the result of interaction of a complex mixture of propositional knowledge, professional skills or wisdom and personal knowledge and attitudes. Undergraduate and professional Masters tertiary programs provide opportunities for students to develop competency, in particular knowledge and skills, through academic curricula with a strong foundation in case-based learning.

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