Title

Developing digital literacies in undergraduate nursing: UniversIT Information Fluency Portfolio

Subject area

First year undergraduate Nursing course.

Scope and context

The Bachelor of Nursing curriculum was completely revised and revalidated in 2012. The programme reviewed requirements for the summative assessments of all modules. The rationale for promoting student engagement with technology was to make the new programme as dynamic and as current as possible. The original motivation was not specifically to develop student digital literacies. The purpose was to ground nursing practice in the reality of where health information is predominantly located for consumers of health information. Therefore, the design of the wiki-based assignment was to reflect much that is already available via the web.

A realistic scenario for nurses is that they are required to consider the needs of a family, not just an individual patient, and think broadly in terms of the health needs of an individual in the context of their family. The reality is that few students would naturally think of creating a web site to support this kind of requirement. It's one thing to search and find relevant content, it's quite another to provide a useful and usable resource for a family. Students will have done lots of different things with IT but very few will have created a web page or wiki, and certainly not for a meaningful purpose grounded in an authentic healthcare scenario.

Rationale and aims

There are two different modules concerned with health promotion, which run 'long and thin' and in parallel. The students receive lectures and make use of a wiki to support their core curriculum work. First year nursing students are required, as a group, to work collaboratively to build an online resource for a family with particular health care needs. The students have to source local health based information relevant for the family and bring it all together in a wiki.

Digital literacies addressed

The approach has been designed to encourage students to develop a heuristic or problem solving method to their IT requirement, so that they are not just thinking about where to point and click, but developing their understanding of how to troubleshoot and solve problems using IT. One of the things that annoy people about IT is that it continually changes and that the rate of change is so very rapid. So, we have to develop knowledge workers that are ready and able to cope with that. That's quite an important digital literacy.

The students develop their understanding and use of the wiki with the purpose of creating a useful information resource.

Overview

One member of staff (a lecturer with IT remit) was primarily responsible for leading on all technology related aspects of learning activities, with other teaching staff involved with planning and organising things from an subject matter point-of-view. There was also specialist input from subject librarians. Academic staff leading on the design of modules were ambitious in the variety and nature of the different kinds of assessment being set. The IT lecturer attended curriculum planning meetings to contribute ideas for embedding technology.

Drawn from either a cohort of 80 students (March intake) or 120 students (September intake) are put into groups of a maximum of eight members, which then work independently. The IT lecturer provides lectures, workshops and guides as and when the students require them. IT training sessions are run for each group over about 6 weeks to help them learn about CampusPack wiki. Drop-in sessions are arranged to discuss whatever a student is interested in. Although carefully timetabled to avoid any clashes they have not proven very popular. Different techniques have been used to encourage students to attend, but the reality is that students are quite strategic with their time. They only come if they believe they need to.

Many nursing students find using the wiki for the assignment a new and challenging learning activity. Many would say they are not 'computer people', and would never want to identify themselves as being so. They are adamant that they are training to become nurses. But there is usually a significant number of students who have no problem with the technological things they are being asked to do. The key is to get them doing so for a purpose. It presents them with quite a different context in comparison to their use of Facebook or other personal social networks.

One of the advantages of the CampusPack system is that teaching staff don't have to set up wiki spaces for each student. One of the frustrations with

BlackBoard is that it is very much constrained around members of staff having to set the spaces up, otherwise the students can't use it. This is the same with the synchronous chat platform in Blackboard. It is not possible for students to set up a session on their own. It is much better to empower students and for them to do it themselves. Using CampusPack allows the lecturer can devolve ownership and responsibility to the students to set up their own wiki spaces. So they have to manage the permissions, and it requires them to learn something about security, privacy and access. This is a very powerful concept that translates into the wider world of digital literacies.

The students are referred to the UniversIT as a resource. The online support resource ([UniversIT Information Fluency Portfolio](#)) includes information and resources about online collaboration. It enables the lecturer to refer student to a comprehensive resource in support of their studies.

The wiki is to be used only to address one of the module's assessment criteria. The students are required to use the wiki as the means for presenting the work they have done. It is acknowledged that this technology is an unusual platform for them to use to do a presentation. Although not resulting in a classic slideshow, it does allow students to easily illustrate what they have gathered and put together [n.b. there is information in the UniversIT online resource to help with presentations and presenting]. The assessment is done as a group and limited to the presentation. The students decide how they will do the presentation, for example who speaks. Students have about 15-20 minutes and it is marked there and then. The presentation has to demonstrate level three academic standards. There is a marking rubric for the presentation but not for the wiki. There is no peer review and only academic staff conduct the assessment. No other methods are used to evaluate the content of the wiki. A collective mark is allocated to the group for the presentation and for the wiki. The students are required to produce a written report as well. There is no direct assessment or feedback specifically concerning the digital literacies being developed.

Digital resources and know-how used

When nurses get out into clinical practice they soon realise the level of IT skills required of them is pretty basic. They pretty much need to be able to navigate patient information systems, retrieve lab results, type up a report, email people and perhaps search for information to do with a particular care pathway or something like that. None of this is particularly challenging. But there is a need to develop the digital literacies of student nurses for lifelong learning and not just for professional practice reasons.

It's still early days in terms of uptake and use of UniverIT and therefore difficult to judge its value. However, there are not many academic staff who say that what it replaced, the ECDL, was efficacious in terms of what it purported to do, i.e., equipping people with IT skills. Students certainly like to have it on their CV, but in terms of learning IT it did not work. The School of Nursing also needed to put something in place instead of the ECDL course because the funding for doing it was to be withdrawn.
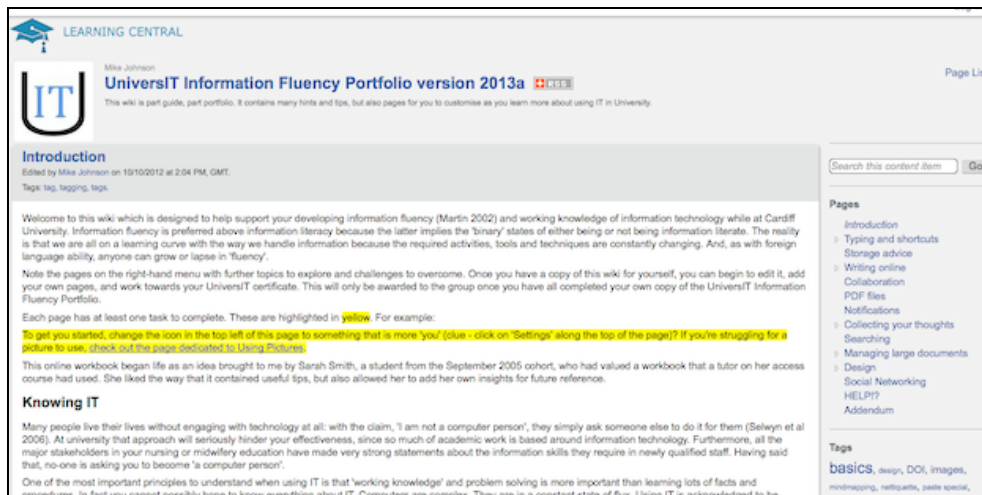
The experience is that students with well developed IT skills can get frustrated with the platform being used (CampusPack - http://www.learningobjects.com/campuspack.jsp). For example, they try to do more advanced things with the aim of brining more interactivity into the web site, such as providing an online quiz. However, this is complex and challenging to achieve using CampusPack, demanding time and effort that would detracts from the main focus of the learning activity.

It was evident in this context that group projects can help motivate students engage with technology. But educators also need to be sure that encouragement and direction is provided at individual level. The universIT Information Fluency Portfolio is intended to operate at an individual level, providing a framework for learners to help them identify the digital literacies they need to develop and the necessary resources to do so.

Benefits and impacts

The versatility of the CampusPack wiki is quite limited from a technical point-of-view. The way it works is sometimes overly constraining for students who expect to be able to implement more sophisticated interfaces. However, it has been argued by some teaching staff that these constraints are not necessarily a bad thing because it prevents a student, who should be concentrating primarily on the subject matter, spending too much time and

effort on wiki design and development. What they have to do instead is make the best use of what they are given, and effectively creating a level playing field for students. Although, it remains unclear how well this is achieved. Being limited to using the wiki may just serve to increase their frustration. But ultimately they do produce something as a group that is fit for purpose with respect to their assessment. Whether it's fit for purpose in terms of what a professional web developer would be happy to sign-off is questionable.

The reality is that in any group based work there will be some who have specialist skills or are more competent who end up doing the work, whilst others perform other less demanding IT dependent tasks. If people can achieve their goals by proxy then they will do that and this is often what happens. Not everyone develops the same literacies or achieves the same level of maturity/fluency.

Conclusions and lessons learned

The biggest challenge continues to be getting nursing students to dedicate sufficient time and effort to developing their IT skills and digital literacies. This is something best achieved through learning activities that are an integral part of the mainstream curriculum and appropriately contextualised through meaningful tasks. Whilst the UniversIT wiki provides a useful resource for students, it has to be something that they are systematically referred to as an integral part of their core curriculum.

Links and further information

UniversIT Information Fluency Portfolio
https://cardiff-ac-uk.campuspack.eu/Users/Mike.Johnson/SONMS_Information_Fluency

Blog - 'What is networked learning?"
http://networkedlearning.blogspot.co.uk/

Further opportunities

The success of this approach is highly dependent on factors that motivate students to engage and explore the wiki-based resources. Further work is required to identify how best to enable academic staff to design opportunities in the context of subject specific learning activities that make clear the benefit and value of developing digital literacies.

Contact details for further information

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http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/sonms/contactsandpeople/academicstaff/johnson-mike-mr-overview_new.html

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