Chapter XXV

Developing an ePortfolio for Health Professional Educators: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the development and implementation of an ePortfolio to support the Graduate Certificate in Health Professional Education (GCHPE) at Monash University, Australia. The GCHPE addresses the skills and knowledge of teachers working in health, and encourages the development of a professional approach to teaching practice. The ePortfolio was developed primarily to enable the preparation and sharing of reflective tasks and assessment items constructed from the workplace of the course participants, and to facilitate written peer and tutor feedback. The first interprofessional cohort completed the course in 2003. In this chapter, the development process, evaluation methods, and results of the first year of implementation will be summarized. Problems experienced in the development and implementation process are identified along with recommendations for further action.

INTRODUCTION

Monash University is the largest university in the Southern Hemisphere, operating out of several campuses in various Australian and international locations. As such, there is a plethora of organizational and quality assurance challenges in delivering high-quality education to large numbers of students in diverse locations both nationally and internationally. To
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achieve the goal of mass-dispersed higher education of high quality, Monash has developed a strategy and set of associated aims. In this, the university statement of purpose is summarized as follows:

Monash University seeks to improve the human condition by advancing knowledge and fostering creativity. It does so through research and education and a commitment to social justice, human rights and a sustainable environment. (Monash Directions 2025, 2005)

Monash’s strategies are directed toward achieving or enhancing excellence in education, management, research and scholarship, innovation and creativity, diversity, international focus, fairness, engagement, integrity, and self-reliance. One means to achieve excellence in teaching is to use information technology creatively; for example, to increase flexibility in teaching and learning, whether on or off campus. Additionally, staff are encouraged to implement the principles of student-centred, flexible learning, emphasizing the discovery, analysis, and integration of information, problem-solving, communication, and a preparation for a lifetime of learning.

With this strategic vision and pursuit of educational excellence as central tenets of institutional activity, academic staff at Monash are required to be at the forefront of contemporary educational practice. This encompasses “eLearning” and is actively promoted within the organization. Monash actively encourages innovative practice in eLearning via a number of schemes. In the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing, and Health Sciences (the faculty in which the authors are located), an IT committee organizes an annual competitive funding scheme. Under this scheme, staff are invited to submit proposals for funding to develop innovative educational projects supported by any aspect of information technology. It was under this scheme that the authors received funding to develop the ePortfolio to support teacher training on the GCHPE within our faculty. It was envisaged that this would be a pilot for similar activities in the larger and more complex undergraduate arena across the various disciplines in the faculty.

This chapter describes the ePortfolio and also appraises how successful its development has been. Major obstacles to its development, implementation, and further application and refinement are identified and a variety of practical recommendations made for others considering similar projects. The authors will describe what the tutors were trying to achieve in terms of meeting principles of student-directed learning and how they went about achieving it. Strengths and weaknesses will be outlined from the participants, tutors, and institutional perspective. In addition, the case study will be critically appraised for educational best practice.

BACKGROUND

Traditionally, academics in higher education have not been trained for their teaching role (Laurillard, 2002). This is true of most health professional groups, with the notable exception of the nursing profession. Typically, it has been widely assumed that in-depth content or discipline-specific knowledge is enough to ensure that lecturers are able to pass on their knowledge to future generations of learners. There would be public concern if this were the case for our children’s teachers in school, or even if there were widespread recognition in society that students at university are not routinely taught by staff with a formal teaching qualification. However, this is changing now, and an
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