Pre-registration midwifery education: is 'cleverness' the seventh C?

Abstract

The benefits of higher education to society include greater social cohesion, trust and tolerance; less crime and greater social mobility. The benefits to the individual include increased employability and skills development; higher earnings and less exposure to unemployment (Department for Business Innovations and Skills, 2013:6). All graduates develop generic graduate skills such as organisation and action planning; problem solving; persuading, influencing and negotiating and self-management (Changemaker Hub, 2019). Pre-registration midwifery education is vocational, requiring the teaching of specific skills and knowledge in preparation for a career as a midwife. In addition to being competent and confident in practice, student midwives are also expected to possess six fundamental values in order to deliver care of the highest quality: care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment (Commissioning Board Chief Nursing Officer and DH Chief Nursing Advisor, 2012).

This article will outline how the University of Northampton's (UoN) midwifery team and colleagues in Library and Learning Services (LLS) work in collaboration to support student midwives in their academic journey to develop sound academic skills, thereby nurturing the seventh C: 'cleverness' aiding their ability to pass the programme of study with a BSc (Hons) degree and enter the workforce as a committed life-long learner.

Keywords: 6 Cs; vocational; digital capabilities; academic skills; reflection; life-long learners

Context

Employers and service users expect midwifery graduates' values and behaviours to align with the values of the NHS Constitution (Department of Health and Social Care, 2015), with Approved Education Institutions (AEIs) expecting them to meet the stringent academic (United Kingdom Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA), 2018) and professional (NMC, 2018a) requirements of their programme of study. Library and Learning Services (LLS) at the University of Northampton (UoN) are a core team to help midwifery students and staff develop digital capabilities, which enhance communication, project management and evaluate information (JISC, [n.d.]).

Library and Learning Services: what we do

At UoN, LLS supports each faculty with a range of teams, specifically the Faculty of Health and Society has a named Academic Librarian and Learning Development Tutors to support and facilitate these digital capabilities. The Academic Librarian and Learning Development Tutors work closely with the midwifery team to design their courses to incorporate these key skills. This approach enables students to reach their full potential and the academic and professional demands of their programme of study. Without timely and relevant support, they may struggle to meet these demands. This justifies why a structured support system across all three years of their programme of study has been designed, developed and implemented [Figure 1].

1st Year

Critical Thinking

Evaluating Sources

Reflection

Essay Writing

Ethical Use of Information

2nd Year

Finding Research Literature

Critiquing Research

3rd Year

Exploring the evidence base

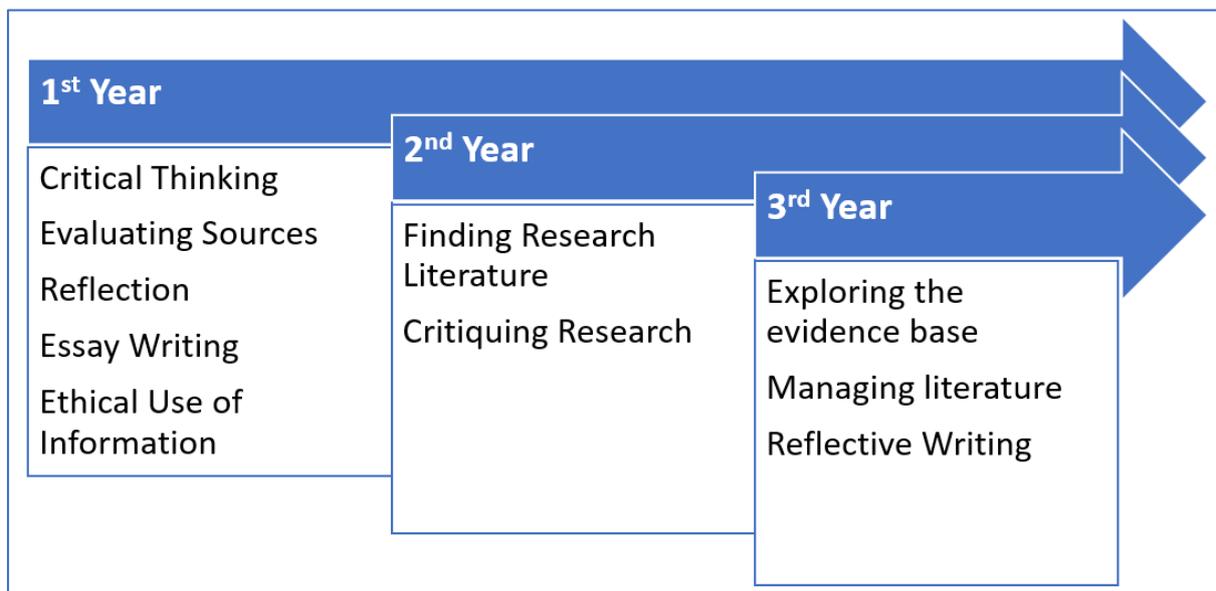Managing literature

Reflective Writing

Figure 1: embedded support from Academic Librarian and Learning Development during the Midwifery degree.

This year UoN introduced the Integrated Learner Support Model which embedded support throughout the first year, linking to assessments to help scaffold key information and academic skills (Munn and Small, 2017). This content was planned after discussions with the Midwifery team, to make sure they were at the most relevant and effective points in the curriculum (Mostert and Townsend, 2018). The curriculum must be developed to integrate and assess both theory and practice (NMC, 2018a) using a range of learning, teaching and assessment strategies. The curriculum adopts an Active Blended Learning (ABL) approach, meaning the programme is 'taught through student-centred activities that support the development of subject knowledge and understanding, independent learning and digital fluency' (Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 2017). Students engage with online and face to face learning in a variety of formats such as workshops, seminars, tutorials and clinical skills sessions. In order to achieve their full academic potential, the midwifery team work in collaboration with the Academic

Librarian and Learning Development tutors who plan targeted sessions to develop students' academic skills [Figure 2].

1st Year	Critical Thinking	Understanding the expectations of the work and how to apply the evidence.
	Reflection	Using an appropriate model to critically reflect on their experience in practice.
	Evaluating Sources	Questioning the quality and reliability of the source.
	Ethical Use of Information	How to use and refer to evidence in an ethical manner e.g. referencing.

Figure 2: Information and academic skills taught in the first year of the Midwifery degree.

Library and Learning Services: how we do it

In the first week of term, midwifery students had two-hour long sessions, one with an Academic Librarian and another with a Learning Development tutor. These sessions were designed to demystify the expectations of academic skills [Figure 3] in higher education and equip them with the study skills to start their academic journey in the best possible way (Harwood and Hadley, 2004).

By the end of the programme students will be able to:
  a. critically analyse and synthesise information to develop an evidence-based argument.
  b. select and apply appropriate tools and techniques for academic communication.
  c. gather, assimilate and critically evaluate information from a range of sources, spheres and media.
  d. evaluate appropriate legal and ethical frameworks surrounding information and make judgements about their selection and application.

Figure 3: LLS Learning Objectives for Integrated Learner Support.

The session from the Academic Librarian was a small group, activity-based workshop, supporting students to evaluate and explore a range of different sources. This was important to help students develop key information literacy skills (SCONUL, 2016). The workshop delivered by Learning Development incorporated activities surrounding assessment language, clarifying and supporting students to break down assessments (Minogue et al, 2018).

In relation to LLS input into the midwifery curriculum, a variety of pedagogical approaches were incorporated into the first-year programme. Asynchronous online tutorials using Xerte software (University of Nottingham, 2008) were designed to explore key academic skills, at their own pace and in their own time (Lage et al 2000; Bergmann and Sams, 2007; Wilson, 2013). These tutorials were in addition to the content available on the Skills Hub, an open access repository of resources to support students developing key academic skills (LLS, 2018). The face-to-face workshops were designed to support students with their assignments (Appleton, 2005, p.171). The first being reflection as this is acknowledged to be a key skill required by all midwives, so they can identify improvements or changes to their practice as a result of learning from previous experiences and relating this to the Code (NMC, 2018b). It is also a requirement of revalidation – the process by which midwives evidence they are fit to practice safely and effectively (NMC, 2019).

In a second session the Academic Librarian and Learning Development tutor delivered a joint face to face workshop focused on their first essay using examples such as endometriosis. Learning Development emphasised planning, essay structure and paraphrasing. The referencing activity, from the Academic Librarian used a relevant source and imagery (Munn and Small, 2017) helping to embed the academic skills into the subject content.

The midwifery and LLS teams have responded to student feedback and adapted the sessions to make sure they are clearly aligned to specific assessments. The sessions are active and engaging where students feel confident to ask questions, offer suggestions and link to subject knowledge. This timely response to feedback has been well received by the current cohort, with one students stating:

> *I struggle academically and always worry about referencing: getting it wrong and other things regarding academic writing. Gillian and Sheryl made the session they taught us so informative and settled my nerves about a lot of things surrounding academic writing. They uncomplicated what I felt was complicated and gave me a slight confidence boost. Even though this is their job the passion they have shines from both of them as ultimately, they want us as students to thrive. I would also now have no concerns going to a private session with any member of the team in regard*

to any issues I have as they are approachable and are there to help. (Emma)

Library and Learning Services: why we do it

Input by LLS into the midwifery curriculum demonstrates inter-professional working and collaboration across professional areas, as the midwifery lecturers are present in the session and link content to professional areas, requirements and experience. This approach gives credibility to LLS content and demonstrates a "super supportive" approach to the curriculum (University of Northampton, 2018). In year one of the undergraduate programme, the aim is to build a solid academic foundation.

The upshot…

Collaboratively, the midwifery team and Library and Learning Services at the University of Northampton want to support students in developing sound academic skills or 'cleverness' so that as newly qualified midwives (NQMs) they not only possess the core values and beliefs outlined in the NHS Constitution (DH, 2015) to provide high quality care (the six Cs), but they also have the academic ability (the seventh C) as life-long learners (NMC, 2018) to ensure that care is evidence-based.

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