

An exploratory study into final year Midwifery students' experiences

Kay Rogers

Department of Health and Social Care

Background

Prior to this project there was a paucity of qualitative research specifically into the use of interprofessional learning in terms of Midwifery students. Furthermore, the project was timely, because the findings could feed into the validation of the new Interprofessional Learning (IPL) programme. It also meant that the student voice could inform the development of the programme.

Approach/methodology

A qualitative approach within the interpretivist paradigm was used and data was gathered using individual in-depth interviews with a topic guide, thus giving students a voice within their own frames of reference, whilst concurrently ensuring the data collected helped to illuminate the experiences of students within the context of the interprofessional programme. The interviews basically asked students about their experiences of their Midwifery programme. Students talked and the interviews were taped. Subsequent thematic analysis produced three major themes:

- professional identity and understanding
- socialisation and support
- making IPL relevant.

Outcomes

The findings from the interviews with students informed changes that were made to the interprofessional learning programme.

A significant discovery was that students did not find lectures very useful, and suggested that it took until Year 3 to understand why they did interprofessional learning in Year 1. In fact they valued the interaction with other health care professional students and learning what it means to be a professional and one that works in an interprofessional team. However, they wanted this to be a real engagement, not just sitting with other students in a lecture. They suggested that the Collaborative Practice module should come earlier, so they could really work with other health care professional students, learning from them, and about them, to enhance professional understanding.

Communication was recognised as very important for effective interprofessional working, but also the realisation that no one profession alone can look after someone with complex needs: surely such understanding is the starting point for effective collaboration in health care.

Another suggestion was that there should be a 'buddying' or mentoring system, not only with other Midwifery cohorts, so that the group ahead could tell them what to expect, but also across the disciplines so they could buddy with a Nursing or Mental Health student, for example. This would foster peer support and social networks. However, it is recognised that the logistics of this would be difficult.

The Programme Director had already had informal discussions with various health care professional students to help inform the revalidation process, and the research supported what those students had said, thus making it more rigorous.

There were also some very powerful findings about what it means to be a midwife and issues around professional socialisation. Students said that if they had not had certain placements they would have left the programme because they would not have been able to see what being a midwife really meant.

The discussion generated from the findings allowed four recommendations for local practice to be drawn:

- 'Buddy' mentor students across years and pathways, thereby cultivating social bonds, subsequently fostering peer support and learning.
- Mix students using a humanistic approach to learning, incorporating the synergogy model of teaching to facilitate this.
- Use interactive learning and teaching strategies, such as storytelling, to facilitate professional understanding and assist students in developing the skills necessary for collaborative practice.
- In Year 1 be clear on the relevance of interprofessional learning – concentrate on what it means to be a professional.

Evaluation is difficult because the new programme did not begin until September 2009 and the students involved in the research have qualified and moved on.

The findings have been presented at the *Nurse Education Today* (NET) conference in the UK and at a national conference for midwives in the US, where they do not have interprofessional learning.

Enhancing RIT

The project enabled us to think about how we teach health care professional students. It is very easy and cost effective to put 300 students in a lecture theatre but if they cannot learn effectively that way, then we have to balance learning with the budget. We have to support and inspire them to learn not only in their three years here but throughout their professional lives.

Reflections and any future plans

It was a real confidence boost to have funding for the research because it means that someone thinks that what you are doing is legitimate and worthwhile. That is very powerful and motivating.

Contact for further information:

kay.rogers@canterbury.ac.uk

A selection of Powerpoint slides from a conference presentation

Methodology / Methods

Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology

- **Data Collection**
 - In-depth interviews
 - Grand tour question
- **Data Analysis**
 - Thematic Analysis
 - Colaizzi's procedural interpretation

Tell me about your experience of learning to become a midwife during your midwifery programme?

– 8 students


FREC Approved

Professional Identity and Understanding

Re-affirmation

"it's made me realise that I made the right choice, I'm really glad I chose to become a midwife" (Anna)


"yeah that was quite an eye opener the Collaborative Practice, it was really good and it made me realize that, oh thank god I chose to be a midwife..... I do really admire nurses" (Kinsey)



Professional Understanding

Self - *"I feel quite strongly that actually midwives need to refer more. That is one of the things I do feel very strongly about but there are....." (Beth)*

Others - *'the give and take of talk' (Bruner 1996:93)*
"it's good to know how they view themselves. Like midwives are always saying, we're autonomous practitioners but all the nurses felt they were as well and that isn't something that I'd ever viewed as a nurse being an autonomous practitioner..... I started to look at it from a different. Look at nursing from a slightly different perspective" (Davina)




Difficulties with Professional Socialisation

"...sometimes there is negative attitudes from different nursing staff of and why, why you shouldn't be a midwife, you have no nursing training" (Nell)

"Some people still think direct entry midwives need to be nurses first, even some midwives think that" (Sam)

"if I hadn't had the midwifery led placement, I, I'm not sure that I'd still be training to be a midwife because I think I'd have.....found it really difficult to see what the midwives role was. I think the programme is fantastic because we come back here and you know, the midwives and teachers here are so focussed on knowing their role as a midwife" (Abi)



Socialisation and Support

The Value of 'getting to know people' (Nell)

"Because you are so used to working with, you, you feel safe with friends don't you" (Anna)

"I think it's helpful from the point of view that you get to know other students around the site and that you're going to be mixing with them a lot over the three years. From an educational point of view, it's probably not so beneficial at that early stage but from a social point of view, it helps. And then further on, when you meet up again, in different groups, at least you might know somebody's name or you might know that they're a nurse" (Anna)

