

Time for change? Bringing SCPHN Practice Assessment Documentation into the digital era

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Title:

IS IT TIME FOR CHANGE? BRINGING SCPHN PRACTICE ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION INTO THE DIGITAL ERA: WHAT COULD THIS IMPROVE FOR STUDENTS AND ASSESSORS?: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract:

This paper examined the need for innovation in the form of Practice Assessment Documentation within SCPHN education following developments in undergraduate nursing and midwifery programmes across the UK, alongside regional demand and poor historical practice. To successfully identify the evidence-base for this development a critical appraisal of several papers from the available literature was undertaken to examine aspects such as: the value and contribution which technology generates in the enhancement of student learning, and the theoretical drivers from both an educational and professional perspective. The paper concludes there is a necessity of this development in meeting the educational needs of students, while increasing the robustness of the assessment process for assessors.

This paper aims to drive the development of a National SCPHN PAD in accordance with the new NMC Standards of Proficiency (2022) and plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the developed SCPHN PAD at the end of the upcoming academic year 22/23.

Conflict of Interest:

I can confirm there are no conflicts of interest.

I can confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere, nor has not been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere.

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Title:

Is it time for change? Bringing SCPHN Practice Assessment Documentation (PAD) into the digital era: what could this improve for Students and Assessors? : A critical appraisal

Abbreviations:

SCPHN – Specialist Community Public Health Nursing

PAD - Practice Assessment Document

NMC – Nursing and Midwifery Council

Key words

SCPHN education

SCPHN assessment

Electronic Practice Assessment Document

Reflective practice

Specialist Community Public Health Nurse

Key Points

- The understanding of andragogy in SCPHN educational development is pivotal in satisfying the learner and making the educational journey more meaningful
- A stepped approach to reflective practice is suggested to be a contributing solution to sophisticated high-level reflection
- This paper identified through considering digital platforms which are flexible, robust and user-friendly, the quality and reliability of practice assessments can be enhanced

Introduction

The evidence is overwhelming in support of the digital era in nursing practice, the need for development is now! Over the past few years as in higher education I have become more aware of the myriad of approaches which are utilised to ensure 'knowledge is transferred' (Green, 2017, p.27) and that students (both pre and post registration) attain the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to achieve professional qualification. According to Swift (2021) the transformation of nurse education has accelerated in recent years, incorporating technology to increase both the student experience and enhance the learning process. The adoption of digital systems to meet student's needs has been achieved in many areas, yet others appear to be lacking. Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN here after), practice assessment documentation (PAD here after), has not nationally followed the undergraduate nursing developments in a transition to digital assessment documents, despite anecdotal feedback locally calling for this development. Bacon and Cunningham (2020) claim the implementation of an electronic practice assessment document is a natural progression if the quality of practice learning experiences for pre-registration nursing education is to be enhanced. Therefore, has there been a missed opportunity within SCPHN training to create a new digital platform which would ensure a level of continuity in accordance with learners needs and reduce poor written reflection, which Price (2017) claims is all too prevalent in nursing education.

In a bid to trail-blaze and keep up with pre-registration nursing, in 2021 I created a digital SCPHN PAD in accordance with the local need and the supporting evidence (Bacon and Cunningham, 2020; Swift, 2021). Although in its current iteration the assessment documentation incorporates the now outgoing Standards of Proficiency for Specialist

Community Public Health Nurses (Nursing and Midwifery Council, [NMC here after], 2004), this is a pilot implementation for the SCPHN 2022/23 cohort within our organisation. The aim is to evaluate this through focus groups with practice assessors and supervisors from the 6 local NHS Trusts who will be using this new SCPHN PAD to assess SCPHN students on the course 22/23. A subsequent development of this on a National level will then be suggested, providing the feedback is positive, which will align to the new Standards of Proficiency for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (NMC, 2022).

A critical appraisal of 4 papers was undertaken to examine aspects such as: the value and contribution which technology generates in the enhancement of student learning, and the theoretical drivers from both an educational and professional perspective (Spies, Seale, and Botma, 2015; Price, 2017; Donaldson, Stainer, and Cooper, 2020; Bacon and Cunningham, 2018), which were fundamental in the SCPHN PAD's creation.

What to consider from an educational perspective?

In creating the digital SCPHN PAD for the purpose of enhancing learning, it is critical to consider the underpinning educational theory which influenced the development. Many educational theories already drive the learning within SCPHN training, such as Vygotsky (1962) and Brunner (1966) which focus on a scaffolding approach and spiral curriculum respectively, yet it was the work of Malcolm Knowles (1988) which underpinned the SCPHN PAD development.

Spies et al (2015) study of 18 postgraduate nurses in a Higher Educational Institute (HEI) aimed to identify if postgraduate learners, described as 'mature' with their professional knowledge and experience, exhibited the characteristics associated with Knowles' (1988) adult learning theory. Spies et al (2015) used Knowles et al (2005) andragogical principles to

allow the students to self-identify which (if any) were potential ways of improving their educational experiences and discovered key themes. This study helped form the foundations on which the SCPHN PAD was developed as the students on postgraduate SCPHN programmes, conform to this demographic.

Spies et al (2015) suggested that the facility for reflection in association with the achievement of set goals not only helps to construct new meaning and identify future learning needs making the learning experience more meaningful, but it 'satisfies the adult learner'. Spies et al (2015) conclusions corresponded to earlier findings as their suggestions were consistent with the principle that adult learners need immediate and frequent feedback as they progress through learning events (Collins & Martin 2010).

Conversely to the findings which were suggestive that adult learners are led by self-directiveness developed from reflection and an understanding of their own learning needs, the results in this paper also identified several participants who were slow, hesitant and rule bound due to a lack in confidence around new and unfamiliar environments. To consider this from a theoretical perspective, despite having what Spies et al (2015) suggested was clinical and life experience which they could draw upon, this experience and confidence came from environments and situations which presented a level of familiarity where they would have been considered 'competent' in Benner's (1984) novice to expert continuum, however Spies et al (2015) students had in fact moved towards 'novice' or 'beginner'.

Initially considered a main limitation to the study was that the participants were a group of 18 post-graduate students studying in a South African University, reducing the generalisability for UK populations given the myriad of variables involved. However, there is certainly a level of transferability as the conclusions surrounding the andragogical approach

were consistent with the findings in a study by Mackintosh-Franklin (2016) who examined the pedagogical underpinnings of 40 pre-registration nursing programmes ran by HEI's in the UK.

Despite some of the identified limitations of this study and the challenges around generalisability, there were key aspects discovered which are supported by the wider literature and were influential in the development of the 'SCPHN PAD'. Spies et al (2015) concluded that the findings would be beneficial to HEI nurse educators attempting to conceive the most advantageous approach for 'mature learners'. This deeper understanding of the perceptions surrounding mature students and adult learners, in the context of confidence alongside the need for persistent feedback, were instrumental in the development of the SCPHN PAD. Key factors such as it being accessible anywhere, together with worksheets consisting of reflective templates and the course requirements, enable students to fulfil their desire to reflect and have immediate feedback on their knowledge skills and behaviours to identify future learning needs. Although, an acknowledgement that not all students in this 'mature' demographic follow the work of Knowles (1980) andragogy, guidance sheets and supportive information have been included as to guide those lacking confidence to gather the required evidence necessary to 'Pass' the course.

Could technology improve reflective practice in SCPHN students? What to consider.

A key influential aspect of the SCPHN PAD was the consideration of the purpose of the resource. Although there may be numerous benefits which result from this development from both an assessor and a student perspective, the initial aspect which was focussed upon was reflection. Later evaluations may identify may further benefits reported from the focus groups, although the direction of these is yet to be considered.

Price (2017) claimed that poor or 'low level' reflective practice was prevalent with nursing students, which is also consistent with some of the experiences reported within the SCPHN course. Price (2017) aimed to provide guidance on adopting a stepped approach to reflection to increase the reflective process. Price's (2017) acknowledgement of the significance of improving reflective practice is a beneficial concept as this aligns with guidance stipulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council 'The Code' (2015) (now 2018), which states nurses must reflect and act on any feedback they receive to improve their practice.

Price (2017) identified key aspects related to increasing reflective practice including the impact of students knowing the purpose of reflection and the significance of building a reflective portfolio, which were both instrumental in the development of certain templates within the SCPHN PAD and a necessary requirement of the SCPHN programme as validated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Key reflective models were mentioned throughout the paper including Gibbs (1988) Jasper et al (2013) and Johns (2010), although the paper lacked a distinct analysis of any benefits or limitations of these. Nevertheless, Price's (2017) discussion around reflection being a process where experience is examined in ways to give meaning to interaction was synonymous with Kolb (1984) experiential learning process and nursing placements. This guided the need to create reflective opportunities at several stages in the SCPHN PAD to encourage this cycle of learning.

Price (2017) suggested lower-level reflection was associated with 'rigid rules' which specify the events reported on and the reflective model used, and that higher level reflection was associated with flexibility for students to scrutinise the experiences and interactions of the event. However, Price (2017) also argued a necessity for rules due to a correlation with the student's level of experience and confidence, where those with less confidence required

more guidance. This was supported in the context that where reflection was not clearly defined, with specific terms of reference and expectations, it was challenging for nurses to engage with the process appropriately. Although this is somewhat contradictory of educational theory which dictates adult learners require a level of autonomy and self-directedness, Price (2017) reported over two thirds of student's reflections did not align to the educators' expectations due to the broadness of the task causing confusion about what was required. By acknowledging this, the SCPHN PAD both allows for choice and autonomy in selecting a reflective model, yet specific guidance and set reflective points have been scheduled to support this notion, including hints to the proficiencies which students need to evidence their achievement of.

Price (2017) identified a correlation between the quality of reflection and student's understanding around the purpose of reflection. In accordance with Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1988) and Price's (2017) results, the necessity of reflection in accordance with meeting the NMC requirements has been included in the SCPHN PAD. Nevertheless, Price (2017) focussed on clinical skills. Wider consideration of the non-technical skills, including public health and health promotion, could have further supported the application to the broader nursing profession.

A major strength of Price (2017) work was an acknowledgement that regardless of the reflective model used and student understanding of its purpose, where students considered reflection as a 'one off' it was detrimental to the level of reflection achieved. Price (2017) discovered completing a series of reflections towards a final piece resulted in reflective practice evolving from lower-level observations to sophisticated higher-level reflection. Acknowledging this significance influenced the SCPHN PAD to include 3 stages; initial,

intermediate, and final for each semester, to allow for personal and professional development and evidence of achieving the required NMC proficiencies.

The transition from paper to digital systems: the benefits for students and mentors.

Donaldson et al (2020) examined the benefits and limitations of transitioning from a paper-based Practice Assessment Document (PAD) to an Online Practice Assessment for Learning (OPAL) portfolio for undergraduate nursing. Conclusions were drawn to highlight the myriad of benefits for both students and mentors, which despite some negatives endorsed the rationale for the SCPHN PAD.

Although Donaldson et al (2020) focussed on issues around confidentiality and data protection, which were not applicable to the SCPHN PAD as PebblePad currently conforms to the necessary requirements, the paper did identify that poor timeliness, quality, and quantity of feedback for students **was** associated with paper PADs as identified through direct comparison of 20 paper documents and 20 OPALs. This was significant on a 2-fold basis. Firstly, OPAL has increased accessibility due to digital devices and internet being an essential part of the nursing role, resulting in instant entries following events and not relying on memory. Secondly, OPAL was made as a stepped assessment process, meaning that one section had to be completed before the next would be available (initial, to intermediate, to final) and Donaldson et al (2020) claimed this increased student reflection on the assessor's feedback. This was influential in the development of the SCPHN PAD as this also resembled the research of Price's (2017) reflective portfolio.

The digital platform to lead the way

In selecting an appropriate digital platform on which to construct the SCPHN PAD, it was imperative to consider the needs of the learners and users. Bacon and Cunningham (2018) aimed to develop an electronic Practice Assessment Document for the pre-registration nursing students in a University in England due to identifying the need to make a more efficient and user-friendly document. The current SCPHN PAD (a paper-based document on which the new PebblePad version is founded) had transitioned from a paper-based version to an electronic version several years ago, however no attempts were made to improve it and it remained simply a carbon copy of the paper-based version using Microsoft Word, which had caused issues with moderation, submissions, and student anxiety amongst others. Bacon and Cunningham (2018) explored the benefits and limitations of developing an e-PAD which were influential in the choice of platform selected for the asset. 50% of the SCPHN programme is practice-based and having a suitable platform is essential for the success of the course.

Bacon and Cunningham (2018) argued the necessity for HEI's to create a PAD which enhances the quality, validity, and reliability of assessments, claiming PebblePad was the platform to achieve this due to its flexibility, robustness, and user-friendliness. Although, this paper lacked a critical analysis of alternative platforms considered, PebblePad was also selected for the SCPHN PAD as Google Sheets was trialled initially and found to be confusing and cumbersome, whereas PebblePad was deemed user-friendly and efficient.

Despite Bacon and Cunningham's (2018) study being a pilot and only a short-term evaluation of this platform, the study identified a historical cultural resistance to advancements in technology due to both fear and lack of ability. However, initial feedback from mentors claimed it to be advantageous and reported increased efficiency and time

saving. Bacon and Cunningham (2018) highlighted that by keeping the electronic format similar to its initial version helps support a level of familiarity and individuals were not as overwhelmed with its change. Therefore, it was important that I used the initial SCPHN paper-based Microsoft Word version as the skeleton of the SCPHN PAD, while a level of familiarity was offered from using PebblePad as it is the system used for pre-registration nursing within Midlands, Yorkshire, and East regions.

Conclusion

The findings from these papers (Spies, Seale, and Botma, 2015; Price, 2017; Donaldson, Stainer, and Cooper, 2020; Bacon and Cunningham, 2018), were all instrumental in the development of the SCPHN PAD. By highlighting the significance of understanding how 'adult' learners' needs are best met, while acknowledging how confidence and unfamiliar environments can impact the approach required (Spies et al, 2015), shaped the SCPHN PAD to meet both ends of the spectrum. The importance of how a stepped approach to reflective practice improves the quality and impact of reflections (Price, 2017), was also considered in multiple levels within development. Finally, the significance of the PebblePad platform and how technology supports the accessibility and reflective needs of students was overall responsible for the development of the SCPHN PAD and improvement of student learning.

Through implementation of the SCPHN PAD in the 2022/23 academic year it is hoped that, following evaluation, the need for a National development of a SCPHN PAD in accordance with the new Standards of Proficiency for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (NMC, 2022) will occur, much like the development of the undergraduate PAD.

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Appendix 1. A snapshot of the SCPHN PAD

Contents
 Student Details
 General course guidance co... ▾
Semester 1 ▾
Semester 2 ▾
Consolidated Practice ^
Tripartite ▾
Alternative Practice ▾
Additional Evidence ▾

Edit this asset

Specialist Community Public Health Nursing HV&SN 22/23

Where there are more than one assessor/supervisor **or** where there is a change of supervisor/ assessor,
please add there details to the appropriate boxes below. Do not delete the details of anyone who has
contributed to this PAD.

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Name: | |
| Student Number: | |
| Placement details/address: | |
| Practice Supervisor: | |
| Contact details: | |
| Function/role: | |

Appendix 2. Digital Asset Descriptor 'SCPHN PAD'.

This digital asset was created using the platform PebblePad where the available technology was utilised to create a series of templates relevant to the asset as a whole. The asset now titled 'SCPHN PAD' was built by creating single worksheets detailing all the separate necessary elements of the entire asset, which in turn were then used to create workbooks in PebblePad. These smaller workbooks were used to create larger workbooks and formulated to create the tabs seen in the final asset. PebblePad was used in this way to create a user-friendly sequential assessment document. Each of the tabs in the SCHN PAD were separated into individual stages of study to make the asset easier to navigate while including the necessary instructional guidance for practice.