Reflections on….

Training students to identify and capture learning experiences using ALPS mobile assessment tools

Within ALPS the sheer number of students, tutors and potential work-based assessors involved in the programme provided us with a unique set of training challenges. We had to train students and tutors to use mobile technology, new assessment tools, security software and a web based portfolio. In addition to this we had to teach the students to identify potential assessment opportunities, to explain the device and the purpose of the ALPS assessments to potential assessors and develop self and peer reflective assessment skills. Altogether this was a lot to ask of the students and throughout the implementation of the ALPS programme we learnt that the students will and capability to deal with various aspects of the ALPS assessment process varied considerably both within and between professions.

This variation of student will and capability could be explained by the individual learners (and possibly their tutors) attitude toward assessment for learning but was also influenced by the professional identity and curriculum design of the profession they are studying to become a part of. For example, audiologists are not traditionally assessed on their reflective skills in practice so this was a greater challenge for them than perhaps the nursing students who are used to being assessed on their reflective learning journals.

For each profession that used the tool an initial meeting was held with the tutor to decide which of the ALPS tools would be used, in what format and how many the students should complete. The initial engagement by students with the tools was directly related to the enthusiasm of the tutor and the extent of integration into the curriculum requirements of the students' course. For example in nursing, students were asked to complete an assessment on gaining consent that would later be used as the basis for a discussion of ethics in healthcare during a later module. This kind of integration made the tools seem more relevant to the students and tutors.

We designed a programme of training that consisted of 7 sections. We developed 2 levels of PDA training, a quick start session and a more advanced functionality session dependent on the requirement of the students. A typical ALPS training session consisted of:

1. An introduction to the purpose of ALPS
2. How and when the mobile devices and or tools will be used in the context of their placement/programme of study
3. A clear expectation of how many assessments students are expected to complete and how often tutors will check and respond to

assessments within the e-portfolio
4. One of the PDA training packages
5. The assessment suite e-portfolio training
6. Explanation of protocol for use of PDA and assessments in practice settings
7. Questions

The time available for the sessions varied considerably, ideally the session took 1 and a half hours but this was not always possible and there were times when the session had to run in a shorter time frame. If all the technology was functioning correctly the reduced time was manageable however if there were issues with the mobile devices, mobile assessments or the assessment suite this caused considerable disruption and meant that the focus of the session quickly turned to technical trouble shooting. The effect of this in the long term was that students were less likely to be able to identify assessment opportunities for themselves or understand why they were completing the assessments in the first instance. These technical difficulties therefore dramatically affected the students will and ability to engage with the programme.

Another affect of technical difficulty with devices was the students ability to use the device at all, some of the students exhibited good knowledge of this type of technology and therefore became unofficial technical support for other students-providing excellent opportunities for peer learning and teaching experience among students. However whilst this ability to support others could be seen as a developmental opportunity, it can also be seen as an unfair burden on the students involved, an additional requirement whilst on work based placement.

While timing and structure of training sessions did have an effect on student uptake probably the most influential factors within the training session were the opportunity to see an assessment being completed, mark an assessment themselves and understand the requirements of them in terms of assessment quantity, scenario etc. Students that were able to complete these exercises seemed to have a better understanding on leaving the session of what was expected of them.

When in practice students that completed more than one assessment generally went on to complete more, therefore the true value of assessment for learning was realised by some students, however those students that did not complete an assessment for technical or other reasons were not able to discover the value of the assessments for themselves which could arguably be an inequality in student experience, therefore we need in future work to ensure that technical difficulties are minimal and that students persevere through them to access the learning and feedback opportunities available.

Perhaps the most important factor in the implementation of a student led approach was the guidance, support and enthusiasm available from the tutor. Whilst other

members of staff were available to give technical and pedagogical advice students were more comfortable looking to their own tutor in the first instance and if they were not knowledgeable or dismissive of the programme students disengaged with the process.

It is important that students leave a training session confident in and familiar with their use of all aspects of the technology enhanced learning to then lead their learning in unfamiliar practice settings and gain maximum benefit from it. For this to be achieved it is clear from the ALPS experience that while being comfortable with the technology is important understanding the pedagogic drivers behind it are the key to maintaining tutor and student motivation and interest.