

Webwords 46

Social media in clinical education and continuing professional development

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In this edition of “Webwords”, the use of social media in clinical education for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and in ongoing clinical education as a component of clinical professional development (CPD), is explored. Approaching these uses from four unexpectedly alliterative perspectives, they fall under the headings of Association, Aspirants, Academics and AAC.

Social media is a collective term used to describe a set of highly interactive platforms that promote discussion and community, allowing people to build relationships and communicate user-generated information. The range of social media platforms, described in **Webwords 44: Life Online**¹, is applied in the delivery and pursuit of both clinical education and CPD. They include podcasts, RSS feeds, video sharing, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, wikis, Internet discussion groups and email lists, cloud computing, social bookmarking and keyword tagging, and informal sharing of resources “socially”.

Association

Recognising the critical significance of the clinical education of students, Speech Pathology Australia (SPA; 2005) encourages its members to engage in student supervision, urging them to regard it as a professional responsibility. Clinical education is the component of a bachelor or masters degree program that directly equips a student who aspires to become a speech-language pathologist (SLP) with the skills and experience required to work in clinical settings in our field at the level of competent “beginning practitioners”.

Whether they are “beginning” or further down the track, a main objective of the Association is “to facilitate and promote opportunities for members to pursue knowledge and develop professionally”. Consistent with this objective, it provides a continual selection of relevant, authoritative and enjoyable continuing professional development (CPD) events for members and non-members. Members’ credentials can be enhanced if they engage in the Association’s voluntary **Professional Self Regulation (PSR)**² program. It provides an objective means of measuring and acknowledging an SLP’s commitment to CPD. As a participant in the PSR program the SLP must accrue a minimum number of points annually, over a 3-year period, in clinical practice, becoming entitled to use the post-nominals CPSP.

Members pursuing Association and non-Association professional development for PSR points are advised to be mindful of the level of evidence, or in some cases the lack of evidence, associated with available offerings. The necessary 10 points per year related to clinical practice can be earned by reading articles or attending workshops on assessment and intervention; providing peer support

and attending special interest groups that have a clinical focus; undertaking quality assurance projects designed to impact service provision to clients; and engaging in activities related to topics such as benchmarking, case mix, evidence based practice and clinical pathways. On 25 March 2013 SPA announced on Twitter that active online learning relevant to speech pathology practice was worth 1 point per hour in the “extends professional skills/knowledge category”, and gave as an example following #SLPeeps.

Speech Pathology Australia provides a **Social Media and Speech Pathology**³ document to guide its members. Its own use of social media in CPD contexts extends to a public Facebook presence, a private Facebook group called APPropriate Apps for members interested in sharing information about Apps, an active Twitter account in which tweets are often appended with the #SLPeeps **hashtag**⁴, email blasts (National and Branch e-News and the SPA Evidence Alert from the National Advisor, EBP & Research, Cori Williams), video sharing, and email lists related to Member Networks, including the Student Member Network.

Aspirants

It is probably fair to say that the vast majority of students in communication sciences and disorders aspire to find work in their field of study, and that was certainly true of Julie Sheridan who graduated from Birmingham City University (BCU) in June 2011. In February 2013, still without a job as a speech and language therapist (SLT), Julie wrote,

The job situation in the UK for newly qualified SLTs is not good and in tough times like this, social media provides clinical education, support and helps maintain clinical skills for those searching for jobs. I was employed by Birmingham City University to set up an employability and clinical skills website for SLTs. I used social media sites to find out what SLT graduates and undergraduates wanted from the BCU site and what was already out there.

As an invited guest on the Skills for Graduates resource that Julie developed in **Moodle**⁵, Webwords was impressed with the scope and practicality of what was on offer.

Speaking of her own student and new graduate experience, Julie said,

Truth be told, I don’t know where I would be without social media for SLTs. I am a member of Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and LinkedIn, mainly to keep in touch with SLT, new developments and most of all for the great support you receive from other therapists and organisations. I follow organisations such as RCSLT, ASHA and Speech Pathology Australia and I follow experienced SLPs. I find Pinterest fantastic for resource ideas and LinkedIn’s groups and discussions provide a wealth of information on clinical education.

Academics

In our professional Association's main academic publication, three of many academics, Lyndal Sheepway, Michelle Lincoln and Leanne Togher from the University of Sydney, point to the need for research in the area of clinical education. They emphasise that traditional models have not been investigated in their own right, or compared with non-traditional models in relation to their effectiveness in developing professional entry-level competencies as specified in Speech Pathology Australia's CBOS document.

The international study of clinical placement and supervisory practices in speech-language pathology (SLP) by Sheepway, Lincoln and Togher (2011) involved a survey of university personnel in 45 programs across seven English-speaking countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the US. It revealed that archetypal traditional models, characterised by block and weekly placements with an SLP as supervisor working directly, one-to-one with a student, were the most widely used. Non-traditional models, such as *specialist*, *interprofessional*, *rural*, and *international* placements, adopting a variety of *direct*, *indirect* and *distance* supervisory structures involving electronic communication (Dudding & Justice, 2004; McLeod & Barbara, 2005), some with SLPs as supervisors and some using peer supervision, were utilised with differing frequencies across the countries.

Bronwyn Hemsley of the University of Newcastle, Australia, works in a speech pathology program that makes innovative use of social media for teaching, learning, and clinical education, and is engaged in a formal pilot project that has been ethically approved by the University of Newcastle. As part of the pilot, second- and third-year students are trained to use social media as an extracurricular activity and engage with social media in their coursework for "Complex Communication Needs 1" and "Swallowing Across the Lifespan".

Bronwyn writes,

A small group of students will visit Vietnam in April 2013 on Clinical Placement, during which time they will be taught to use a blog for documenting issues relating to cultural competence and their clinical education experiences. Lessons from this use of "blogs" with their classmates will be used to guide curriculum in the use of blogging during clinical education. The pilot project is progressing alongside development of University policy on the use of social media for teaching and learning, for both students and staff. The pilot project also informs this development of policy, and will lead to its use in curriculum in the future. The research part of the pilot is in "data collection phase" with focus groups of academic staff and students of speech pathology on their views on using social media (Twitter) for teaching and learning; results will be reported on at the 2013 Speech Pathology Australia National Conference and submitted for international publication.

AAC

Discussions on Twitter bearing the #AAC hashtag quickly reveal that people working with people who use AAC, including SLP AAC service providers, are skilled in the use of social media.

Twitter is a free social networking micro-blogging service in which users send and read updates or "tweets" of no more than 140 characters. All six MRA signatories tweet: ASHA with the Twitter handle @ASHAWeb, CASLPA with @CASLPA, IASLT with @iaslt, NZSTA with @NZSTA, RCSLT with @RCSLT and SPA with @SpeechPathAust. A hashtag is a tag embedded in a message posted on Twitter, consisting of a word within the message prefixed with a hash sign, for example #SLPeeps. All messages containing #SLPeeps (note that it is not case-sensitive) are listed in date-order on a dedicated page so that interested parties can find them all in the same location. Among the most enduring and influential SLP-related hashtags are #SLPeeps (number one), #aphasia, #apraxia, #augcomm, #dysphagia, #SLP2b, #slpchat, #SLT2b, #augcomm, and #spedchat.

A colleague in the US, **Carole Zangari**⁶ who has taught AAC graduate classes for 20 years, responded to Webwords' request (on Twitter, for course) for information on how instructors use social media in their work as clinical educators, and for their top 5 social media resources.

Carole began by describing her efforts to get students engaged with tools such as blogs, **digital curation**⁷ Facebook and video sharing. Below are her top 5, explained in Carole's own words.

Blogs

These give student clinicians insight into the issues faced by practicing SLPs. We use our own blog, **PrAACTical AAC**⁸, to build AAC knowledge in our students and stay connected with them post-graduation. We also direct them to blogs by other SLPs, parents, and educators (e.g., **Jane Farrell**⁹, **Uncommon Sense**⁹, and **Teaching Learners with Multiple Special Needs**¹⁰).

Facebook

AAC-related pages and groups are used to connect student SLPs with professionals, other students, and families who share information, offer new perspectives, and engage in collaborative problem-solving (e.g., Augmentative Communication Resources and Help, IRSF Communication Information and Device Exchange, PrAACTical AAC).

Scoop.It

We model and encourage the use of digital curation tools, like **Scoop.It**¹¹ that allow students to become aware of new resources by following topics of interest. They can peruse resources in a visually compelling format. Students can build their own topics and use this to share information with clients and families (e.g., **Aided Language Input**¹², Communication in Autism¹³).

Twitter

Following individuals, agencies, and specific hashtags for topics (e.g., #augcomm, #AAC, #assistivetech) and conferences (e.g., #ISAAC2012, #ASHA12) allows students to stay current and connected with professionals who have similar interests.

Ted Ed

This tool allows us to select YouTube videos of people with AAC needs and pose clinical questions. We use these as outside assignments and discuss the cases in class, do related activities, or have students post to an online discussion board in the course website.

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Links

1. http://speech-language-therapy.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67:ww44&catid=13:professional&Itemid=108
2. <http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/library/PSR%20Booklet%202012.pdf>
3. http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/library/M_and_CO/SpeechPathology_and_SocialMedia.pdf
4. <https://support.twitter.com/articles/49309-what-are-hashtags-symbols#>
5. <https://moodle.org/>
6. <http://praacticalaac.org/author/carole-zangari/>
7. <http://www.dcc.ac.uk/digital-curation/what-digital-curation>
8. <http://www.praacticalaac.org/>
9. <http://www.janefarrall.com/>
10. <http://niederfamily.blogspot.com/>
11. <http://www.scoop.it/t/communication-and-autism>
12. <http://www.scoop.it/t/aided-language-input>
13. <http://www.scoop.it/t/communication-and-autism>

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