

Stork Talk: A community instrument to engage students to improve learning skills and provide support during work placements

A Challenge To Engage

In recent years, Liverpool John Moores University noticed that midwifery students were often disengaged when learning about the compulsory Government Reports ('gray data') while at the same time, when on work placement, wanted to see more engagement in the way they had encountered in their first year of study.

Traci Hudson, Senior Lecturer Midwifery at LJMU, decided that the standard didactic lecture approach would not provide a solution and thus started looking for a new way to engage students, develop their critical thinking skills early on in the course, support students on work placements, and provide them with a stronger sense of community.

A Solution Called Stork Talk

In September 2007, Traci Hudson created a special online community in the Blackboard Learn™ platform called 'Stork Talk' as the vehicle for engaging the students with the Government Reports. All students were enrolled onto Stork Talk and were asked to carry out the following activities:

- Summarize one of the Government Reports and publish it as an essay on the Stork Talk community;
- Review the essays in Stork Talk and provide feedback on each report, either from home or a computer on campus. Traci Hudson was observing the student activity on Stork Talk during this review session.

Stork Talk uses the Blackboard Learn platform

Blackboard Learn for Community Engagement.

- An organization is set up within the Community Module, called 'Stork Talk', on which all students taking Midwifery modules are enrolled, across all the years.
- The main tools used are the discussion board and the use of groups within an organization.

Passing The Test

How well did students learn in Stork Talk? Traci Hudson observed the following:

- The student essays illustrated improvement in their critical thinking skills;



The Challenge:

How to increase student engagement, develop critical thinking skills, and provide support to students on work placement.

- Through creating, reviewing, and providing feedback on the essays, students demonstrated that they were assimilating knowledge and were able to make their own recommendations on related government policies;
- Students were so motivated and enthusiastic about the meaning of the grey data that they carried on with the discussion for an extra 2 hours after the session had ended. The 'Black Report' on inequalities in Health proved very popular.
- Students re-visited Stork Talk on their own accord and re-read the essays and the feedback.

Student benefit from Stork Talk

- Students requested (through their Board of Study committee) to have continued access to Stork Talk throughout their entire study at LJMU because they enjoyed the interaction with each other;
- Stork Talk became a shared community for First, Second and Third Year students, and now acts also as a coaching instrument, with advice being shared between students at different levels;
- Students on work placement find it very useful for keeping in touch and staying connected;
- Students have asked to be allowed to use Stork Talk for at least one year after they graduate. They currently use it for a few months after graduation up to the point when the university closes their account on Blackboard;
- Within the Stork Talk community, students have asked for sub-groups to be set up so that they can collaborate online (e.g., a group for all first year students, a group for all course reps).

'Stork Talk is the "Gateway to our Learning". It allows us to communicate with other students and lecturers whilst being able to support others and be supported in return.'

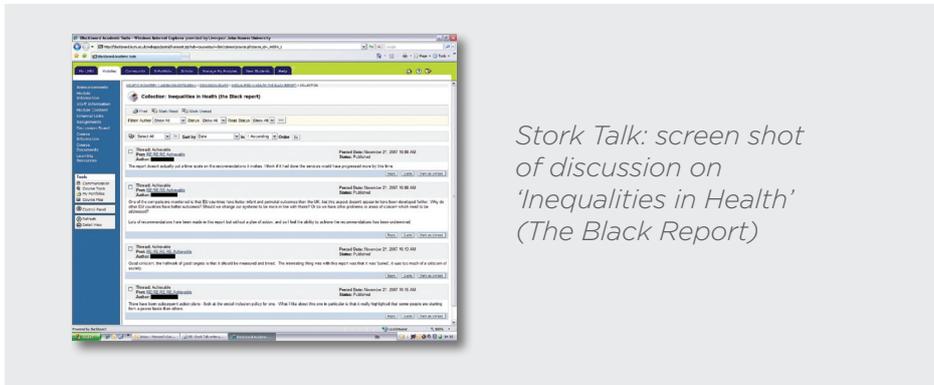
First-year student

'I think Stork Talk is great. As we are out on placement, we don't get to see each other that much and it is nice to know others' feelings and thoughts so you don't feel like you are on your own out there.'

Second-year student

'Invaluable! I must say I love discussions, and I really, really enjoyed it when we did the government papers in the 1st year.'

Third-year student



Stork Talk: screen shot of discussion on 'Inequalities in Health' (The Black Report)

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