

Executive Summary of Report
Exploring Student Midwives' Experiences
(ESME study): an appreciative inquiry
July 2019



Acknowledgements

The researchers and co-inquirers would like to acknowledge the student midwives, midwives, midwife educators, midwife managers, clinical midwifery consultants, and women for their input and the development and generation of the data and the resources produced in this study.

We acknowledge the important leadership from the Nursing and Midwifery Office, NSW.

We would also like to thank the hospital sites, Nepean hospital, St George hospital, Blacktown hospital and John Hunter hospital for their warm welcome and support throughout the study.

Suggested citation: Dewar, B.¹, Stulz, V.², Drayton, N.³, Buliak., A.⁴, Connolly, L.⁴, McLaughlin, K.⁵, Newport, K.⁶, Rebolledo, S.⁷ & Stephenson, L.⁷, MacBride, T.⁸ (2019). *“Exploring Student Midwives’ Experiences (ESME study): an appreciative inquiry”* prepared on behalf of the Nursing and Midwifery Office, New South Wales.

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Executive Summary

Creating a supportive learning environment can help student midwives to flourish in the complex health environment of midwifery practice. There is scope to develop our understanding of the positive behaviours and experiences that are currently valued in the student midwife learning experience. This study was commissioned by the NSW Health (Nursing and Midwifery Office), and was a collaboration with NSW Health, University of the West of Scotland, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Centre for Nursing and Midwifery Research, Nepean Hospital, Western Sydney University and three other local health districts including South Eastern Sydney (St George hospital), Western Sydney (Blacktown hospital) and Hunter New England (John Hunter) to progress improving the experiences of student midwives. The researchers worked with Essentials of Care Coordinators (EOC) (co-inquirers) in each of the local health districts to generate an experience based understanding of being a student midwife, and from this understanding, co-created ways to enhance the experience with student midwives and midwives.

What did we try to find out?

The aims of the study were to:

- a) work collaboratively with key stakeholders (student midwives, midwives) to generate an experience based understanding of what was working well in relation to the student midwife experience and from this understanding, co-create ways to enhance the experience;
- b) support the development of appreciative inquiry skills among Essentials of Care Co-ordinators (co-inquirers) at each site and
- c) create and produce resources that student midwives, midwives and midwifery managers can use and embed into their practice so that they continue to work to develop a positive learning experience.

How and what did we learn?

1. Generating experience based understanding of what is working well for student midwives and co-create ways to enhance their experiences

This research involved using an appreciative inquiry approach that enabled the research team to discover what matters and works well at present in the student midwife experience from the perspective of student midwives, midwives, midwifery managers and to use this knowledge to create enhanced experiences in the future.

Appreciative inquiry has a four-phase inquiry process of Discover, Envision, Co-create and Embed that offers a methodology for learning in and from practice. Inquiry starts with a process of *Discovery* of what is already working well and why, what matters and what is valued in the 'here and now'. These insights help those involved to jointly *Envision* a desired future, then to *Co-create* and share ideas about potential ways to bring what has been envisioned into being. Small 'tests of change', trials or prototypes are devised by the participants to try out what might be possible. Meaningful ways to measure the success of investigating in practice are devised and data gathered. The final phase of *Embed* is about successful developments becoming part of routine practice and considering what is needed to continue learning and flourishing.

The findings of this research were based on the data that were generated across four local health districts and consisted of over 450 data generation interactions with staff including student midwives and midwives over the course of eight months. The findings were mapped to the 'Senses Framework'. This framework aims to support the creation of enhanced learning and caring environments and suggests to experience enriched learning and caring environments a focus on promoting the senses of security, belonging, purpose, continuity, achievement and significance for everyone involved is important.

The data culminated in the refinement of the senses framework for use in the midwifery learning context. Student midwives and midwives need to feel safe, to feel that they belong, to experience continuity in their learning and work, to have a sense of purpose, to have their achievements and their contributions to be recognised and to feel that they matter. The relational framework for learning

together in the workplace has the potential to support achievement of the sense of security, belonging, continuity, purpose, achievement and significance for all involved.

The Senses Framework: findings from ESME study mapped to each sense

Achieving an enriched caring and learning environment for student midwives and midwives through the Senses
<p>Sense of security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To feel safe to raise difficulties and sensitive issues in a supportive and facilitative environment. b) To work in the physical environment with the knowledge and skills to practice and learn at a level that is appropriate
<p>Sense of belonging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To feel part of a valued group who share similar values and beliefs. b) To feel part of a team with a recognised and valued contribution. c) To have opportunities to form/ maintain/ improve valued and meaningful relationships. d) To be able to confide in trusted individuals to feel that you are not alone.
<p>Sense of purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To work actively together to support us in our role now and in the future. b) To work together to have a shared understanding of our purpose, aspirations and a clear sense of what is valued.
<p>Sense of continuity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To experience links and connections. b) To be able to relate the current learning and practise to the past, present and future.
<p>Sense of achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To feel satisfied with one’s efforts b) To contribute towards goals as appropriate c) To use skills and abilities to the full d) To know what worked well and what can develop
<p>Sense of significance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To feel that they matter b) To feel learning in the workplace is valued c) To feel that one’s caring efforts are valued and appreciated d) To experience an enhanced sense of self

The student midwives were able to identify what was important for them in their learning and practical experiences in all areas of midwifery. More illustrative detail about the valued student midwife learning experience included:

- continual feedback in the moment;
- feeling safe to share experiences and level of knowledge to enable them to fulfil their role and aspirations and

- being able to practise autonomously, with the midwife in the background.

As student midwives worked in many different areas, they needed to know what mattered to each other to build a sense of community with all the midwives, educators, women and partners. Student midwives also valued consistency in approaches to learning and development and being supported to build on their existing knowledge so that they could make a valued contribution and achieve what was realistic.

The midwives valued the feedback from the student midwives and creating an environment where the feedback is reciprocal was highlighted as an aspect of practice that could be developed further. Midwives saw the student as having a 'fresh pair of eyes' and welcomed their perspectives on the reality of practice. The midwives also wanted to feel safe about sharing what they did not know and to explore what support for facilitating learning might look like in the future. The midwives valued the opportunity to share with the student midwife how they were feeling about the shift ahead and to be a part of their learning and this enhanced the relationship between the student midwife and the midwife. The midwives became acutely aware of enabling the student midwife to feel orientated to such unfamiliar environments and foreign jargon that they encouraged them as much as possible to feel like a member of the team.

There is much to celebrate in what is being achieved currently and the contribution that student midwives and midwives can and do make to enable the positive and reciprocal relationships that develop in the student midwife experience that support the development of enriched learning environments. In particular, what this study emphasised is that learning in the workplace is a relational endeavour, rooted in the day to day engagement between student midwives, midwives and others.

The data mapped well to the senses framework and enabled the articulation of greater depth and meaning for the learning experience than has previously been described. The Senses and relationship-centred practice can provide a framework for education and practice to enhance the creation of enriched environments of learning in which the hopes of all groups are captured and built upon.

2. Support the development of appreciative inquiry skills among co-inquirers

The research team explored the experience of co-inquirers (N = 6) in relation to becoming appreciative inquirers and further developing their skills in implementing appreciative inquiry into existing frameworks and studies within the local health districts and beyond into other discipline areas. In addition the team explored involvement in the study with members of the NAMO team (N=4). The co-

inquirers interviewed each other, and the NaMO team and used specific questions that related to thinking about their own experiences, relationships and improvement in the future. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Following a thematic analysis of the ten interview transcripts a number of themes emerged:

- Using appreciative inquiry tools to develop relationships and form better connections with people
- Changing ways of working and challenging the status quo
- Building a community of practice with teams
- Sinking in and rippling out which related to time that it takes to embed and the ripples of small changes that had the potential to make a significant difference.

Many reported that this was a very different way of supporting transformational development and in some cases it felt counter cultural. Thematic analysis showed how the co-inquirers used the appreciative inquiry approach and tools to develop relationships, create better connections with staff, families and patients/women and spread long-lasting changes. The co-inquirers changed the way they worked by gently challenging the status quo and building a community of practice with the teams. They report having greater confidence, a stronger attitude of inquiry and a stance that seeks to explore things with people, rather than trying to fix or solve problems instantly. The ripple effects of the study infiltrated into the units and beyond. For example other departments within the hospitals inviting the appreciative inquirers to support staff to learn about appreciative inquiry and setting up meetings to discuss the use of appreciative inquiry to frame other initiatives in the hospital. A further development was that some of the participants in the study; student midwives, educators, managers and midwives were using the approach of appreciative inquiry in their daily practice.

3. Creating resources to embed into daily practices aimed at enhancing the e learning environment

Resources were co-created in order to stimulate further collaborative sense making, inquiry and learning from the study. The resources all have creativity and inquiry as a foundation. We believe locally created images, models, metaphors, sayings, acronyms and objects more powerfully evoke new possibilities. We hope that these resources are important in helping people to make meaning and voice knowledge that is not typically reportable in the sense of people having the facility to say what it is that they know or not typically 'say-able' because of cultural and workplace norms and dynamics. These resources consisted of:

- ♥ *Provocative image cards for discussion*
- ♥ *Emotional touchpoint resources to help people explore experiences of learning, becoming a midwife and becoming a mentor*
- ♥ *A selection of student midwife and midwife stories that illustrate the learning relationship at its best*
- ♥ *A framework for developing student midwife experience called the Senses Framework*
- ♥ *A unique film demonstrating learning and outcomes generated from the data.*

The resources produced from this study articulates a framework for supporting student midwives in practice and celebrate the learning generated within the collaborative inquiry groups and sharing of this learning locally, nationally and internationally.

Some concluding insights

A deliberate appreciative stance can be initially experienced as counterintuitive and potentially deflecting attention from difficulties, in this case the concern about retention of student midwives. In practice, in this study it worked to create intrigue or curiosity and motivated people to ask questions of each other. Appreciative inquiry has provided new insights and challenged previously held assumptions, for example, about the nature and value of the learning experience of student midwives and midwives; that sharing emotionally is unprofessional; that sharing what we don't know is not a deficit but a lever for more inquiry and learning; and why others might act in a particular way that may have previously been misunderstood or misinterpreted.

What emerged from this study was that the appreciative inquiry processes that were used to frame the study were also the strategies that could enhance the student midwife experience. All co-inquirers are now working with their sites to continue the development of appreciative inquiry processes.

There is now a critical mass of colleagues across the organisations who are using the appreciative inquiry philosophy, tools and techniques to improve the experience of learning for student midwives and midwives. By using this approach to highlight and discuss what works well and is valued, those involved in the study were able to gain new insights and in some cases develop significant shifts in behaviours that suggest a more relational, appreciative and collaborative style of learning in the workplace. These new ways of being with each other in the learning relationship helps to bring existing relationships to life in a different way and a greater understanding of each other and each other's values helps people to recognise what they have in common and their interdependence.

The researchers and co-inquirers from all sites continue to work together to spread the appreciative inquiry study into other areas of their work and build upon existing relationships and connections that student midwives and midwives have already instilled into their units. The study has stimulated numerous diverse ideas for change pursued by a range of people in the midwifery environment. All of the co-inquirers reported a range of relationship focused initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of the learning experience which will support a move closer to achieving the senses for everyone involved. This work has infiltrated into other areas that include nursing and organisational management and leadership. The co-inquirers continue to communicate across the sites to build capacity and strengthen and support each other as they continue the appreciative inquiry work.

More about appreciative inquiry

If you are interested in reading more about appreciative inquiry there are a sample of free online resources listed below which may be of interest:

My Home Life Scotland- <http://myhomelife.uws.ac.uk/scotland/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/>

How Being Appreciative Creates Change – theory in practice from health and social care in Scotland- <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1476750316684002>

Forming New Futures through Appreciative Inquiry

<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/forming-new-futures-through-appreciative-inquiry>