

Passing on words of wisdom:

Using graduating student nurses' experiences to influence the development of new entrants to a BSc Honours Nursing programme



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Introduction

According to QAA (2007) strategies should be sought to raise the level of student engagement in the first year of higher education. Teaching and learning approaches which encourage students to learn from peers are suggested to maximise student engagement with course content and facilitate effective adult learning (Ramsden 2003, Biggs 2002, Jaques 2001). This poster describes how lecturers in nursing at Queen Margaret University - Edinburgh used 'welcome' letters written by final year students to inform new entrants about the realities of studying in an honours degree programme.

Aims

- To use the experiences of graduating nursing students to help new entrants feel more relaxed and reassured about starting the programme.
- To provide a forum for novices to discuss their concerns about the programme

Methods

Final year graduating student nurses (n 25) were asked to anonymously compose open letters to new entrants, recalling how they felt on their first day on the course, articulating the aspects of the programme they had found useful or interesting, and identifying things they wished they had done differently during their time at university. Graduates consented to their letters being distributed, discussed and disseminated.

The letters were distributed individually to new entrants on their first day of induction. In small groups, students shared their letters as part of an icebreaking exercise. Entrants (n 29) then completed an evaluation form, framed around a reflective cycle, to identify feelings and new learning.

Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

Results

Q1: How are you feeling now that you have read the letter?

The following key themes emerged:

- Reassured
- Excited about starting programme
- Importance of working hard while having fun

That someone who failed a module still managed to go on and finish successfully

I was surprised...on the advice to use academic tutors as a resource. I wouldn't have thought of that

Q3: Was there anything not included that you wish had been in the letter?

Themes

- Information about placements
- Coping with being away from home

A lot of emphasis has been placed on the support that is available to students. Very good to know

Keep up the work as you go along and do not leave everything to the last minute. Make use of tutors and enjoy it!

Discussion

While achieving the primary aim of helping students to feel more relaxed during induction, the letters also enabled new entrants to actively construct their own learning needs for the forthcoming programme. This was an unexpected finding. In our experience, the use of peer written welcome letters appears to be a powerful tool in engaging year 1 students in the induction period and may promote conditions for effective adult learning.

References:

- Biggs J 2003 *Teaching for quality learning at University* 2nd ed. Buckingham: SRE and OU Press
Jacques D 2000 *Learning in groups* 3rd ed. London, Logan Page
QAA(2007) Enhancement themes. Year one Overview. Online [Available] <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/overview.asp>
Last accessed 18th Oct 2007
Ramsden P 2003 *Learning to teach in Higher Education* 2nd ed. Routledge Falmer, London

I feel encouraged to work harder and have a good time at the same time.

"A bit more relaxed now, knowing that someone else knows how I feel!"

Q2: Were there any surprises in the letter?

Themes

- Success despite setbacks
- Tips for successful learning

More on placements, difficult and enjoyable aspects of placement

Q4: Do you think it will make you do anything differently?

Themes

- Make use of academic tutor, support
- Ask lots of questions
- Keep up with coursework