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Your tutor is your friend

Reflections on the first year: Using experiential learning in first year as an induction tool for 2nd year nursing students

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Introduction

The sophomore slump theory suggests that after an enthusiastic first year, students experience a slump in second year, which results in poorer outcomes and increased attrition rates¹ QAA Enhancement theme (2008) asks, "what do we want students to get from their first year?" We asked students to reflect on their first year experience in order to identify their learning and perhaps reduce the potential for a slump during second year

Methods

2 cohorts of students beginning the 2nd yr of a 4 yr programme were invited to a one day induction prior to formal commencement of their classes. Students were assigned to groups and asked to reflect on some key questions in relation to their first year experience. Additionally each group was given a letter from a graduating student, reflecting on their experiences and their learning. Responses were collated and discussed together.

Results : common themes



- Students enjoyed forming friendships, becoming independent and more confident.
- Students wish they had been more organised and planned their time better.
- Students felt first year was about building a strong foundation.
- Students could see the link between theory and practice.
- Students saw their tutor as their friend, and wished they had used them more.
- Students found placement to be all consuming and tiring.
- Students identified with many of the issues raised in the graduate student letters.
- Organisational issues (timetabling, uniforms, supervision), made life difficult for students.
- Surprise was expressed by students about their own lack of knowledge in academic writing.
- Most students found referencing difficult.

Discussion

This process has served to illustrate to staff some of the hidden issues of curriculum and offered opportunities to focus on weaknesses such as referencing and academic writing. Top up sessions have been offered in these areas.

Conclusion

Using a combination of reflection, peer and experiential learning in induction may serve to transition students through the sophomore slump and contribute to producing 21st century graduates.

References

- Gump, Steven E. *Classroom Research in a General Education Course: Exploring Implications Through an Investigation of the Sophomore Slump* *The Journal of General Education* - Volume 56, Number 2, 2007, pp. 105-125
QAA (2008) *Personalisation of the first year* QAA Scotland