Adolescent Health Topic App Design Assignment

The literature recognizes that engaging graduate students in the learning process increases their attention and focus, motivates them to practice higher-level critical thinking skills, and promotes meaningful learning experiences (Harden & Laidlaw, 2013). Suggested techniques for promoting student engagement include practicing active learning, leading dynamic discussions, and teaching with technology. In-classroom technologies—such as podium-based computers, web-based tools, and wireless, real-time response systems—continue to change rapidly. These tools have the potential to support student learning in creative and innovative ways when properly aligned with the instructor’s learning objectives and the course content (Klein & Kientz, 2013). More importantly, the goal is not to merely integrate technology into the classroom—it is, more specifically, to integrate the study of technology into the classroom so that prospective practitioners can use technology effectively in their future practice.

With this more advanced goal in mind, a learning activity for an advanced practice adolescent health course was updated. Instead of designing paper brochures, students developed smartphone applications, or apps, related to common adolescent health topics. The purpose of this article is to describe this novel learning activity. Nurse practitioners are not necessarily software designers; however, the goal of this activity (a) aligned with course objectives, (b) supported students’ understanding and utilization of concepts of both health maintenance and health education and promotion, and (c) deepened the students’ ability to relate to adolescents in a meaningful manner.

Not only are graduate nursing students, instructors, and classrooms technologically advanced, but the patients, particularly adolescents, for whom they provide care are also technologically savvy. Adolescents are often the earliest adopters and heaviest users of new technology. Ninety-four percent of adolescent subscribers self-identify as advanced data users who turn to their cellphones for messaging, Internet use, multimedia use, gaming, and other activities (Lenhart, 2011). In addition, 40% of adolescents report spending more than 4 hours per day on their phone (Baloglu, 2012). Although the literature is limited, the average adolescent has 25 apps installed on his or her mobile device (Baloglu, 2012). Adolescent smartphone users are avid users of a number of games, social media apps, and location-based services (Lenhart, 2011). Therefore, it is important to prepare nurses to care for a population that will increasingly depend on mobile technology for health information, disease management, and lifestyle choices. This learning activity underlined that nurses need to understand how technology and health can complement one another and provided students with more tools that can be used to provide patient care and management.

Learning Activity: “There’s an App for That?”

The learning objectives of the app assignment included (a) supporting individual interests in adolescent health topics, (b) encouraging independent review of available resources and research, and (c) developing skills in concisely presenting academic and professional information to adolescents and their families. Students were told to select an adolescent health topic and to create an innovative mobile app to be used by adolescents, parents or guardians, or health care providers in the practice, home, or school environments. In this activity, each student (a) searched available resources and current literature related to a health topic, (b) developed a mobile app appropriate for the target audience, and (c) described how the app would look and function, as well as its key features, cost, and utility, in a two-page paper and short oral presentation.

The app ideas that came from the 12-student class were original, thoughtful, and highly individual. One example, Let’s Face It: An Acne Attack Application, educated adolescents about acne and treatment options, reminded the app’s users to complete their prescribed treatments, encouraged daily journaling, and allowed users to take serial self-photos to show treatment progress. Another example, Scout It Out, was a searchable database app that helped users identify volunteer or job opportunities at local parks and community centers, which could be used to fulfill school volunteer or college application requirements.

Faculty Reflections and Student Feedback

Students found the learning activity to be relevant, innovative, and fun. Each presentation provided an opportunity for dynamic discussions about the students’ health topic app designs. Comments taken from student course evaluations included “I really enjoyed the assignment, it allowed for a lot of creativity along with evidence-based research” and “I loved the app project. What a great, current project idea. It provided a great learning opportunity.” Faculty believed that the assignment was timely and that the students’ creativity surpassed expectations. Possible future changes to the assignment include (a) allowing group work, (b) comparing the student-designed apps with already-existing apps, or (c) asking adolescents to provide feedback. This learning activity was properly aligned with both the instructor’s learning objectives and the course content and has the potential to support student learning in creative and innovative ways.

References


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The author has disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise. doi:10.3928/01484834-20140422-11