Student-Centered Approach

Examination Reviews: A
Taking the ‘Sting’ Out of
A Student-Centered Approach

Reviewing content in nursing examinations can be a complex and difficult process for both nursing instructors and students. After students complete multiple-choice examinations on unit content, it is common to hear them in the hallways vehemently discussing which of the choices to a particular question was the correct answer. It is important for students to have the opportunity to examine the rationales for their response choices.

During a typical posttest examination review session in the Family-focused Nursing course in an associate nursing degree program, faculty often felt defensive because students sometimes challenged rationales, whereas students felt frustrated because they may have disagreed with a faculty member but the discussion was “closed.” A literature review and survey were conducted to identify concepts and strategies that may enhance student learning during the examination review process. The concept of metacognition was defined in the literature by Poorman and Mastorovich (2008) as “thinking about thinking” (p. 176). The authors stated that “metacognitive skill helps students to focus on what they need to know and how to go about learning it” (p. 176).

In addition to the literature review, an informal e-mail survey was conducted to query nearby institutions and colleges of nursing about the processes they use for reviewing examinations. The survey results showed that a lack of consensus exists among the surveyed institutions in regards to the examination review process. The survey questions inquired about whether various examination review aspects, such as the timing of the review after the examination, the methods of review, the statistical analysis of the procedures used, and the approach used to make adjustments in scoring, were adequate.

As a result of the often negative and contentious atmosphere in the examination review sessions in the Family-focused Nursing course, the faculty collaborated to apply a more metacognitive approach in which students could truly focus on their learning. The goal was to change the environment of negativity, and sometimes even hostility, to one that helps students to focus on learning important concepts as a result of their examination item choices.

Poorman and Mastorovich (2008) stated that “the best time to review the test with students is immediately after the students have completed the examination” (p. 177). Prior to the examination review, faculty assemble grades and perform a statistical analysis of the difficulty level and the quality of each examination item. Grading adjustments are made prior to presenting the results to students.

Students are given the option to attend the review session or they can opt out. Interestingly, since the new process has been in place, attendance at the review sessions has increased. A student representative (typically a class officer) is asked to volunteer to moderate the discussion on examination questions. The faculty is present for clarification if necessary. The true focus of the student-driven examination review process is student discussion. Students who answered examination questions correctly often provide tremendous insight into how they approached questions and chose the correct answers. Faculty also benefit from hearing the student perspective, which occasionally provides important information and leads to item revision. The process changes the atmosphere of the examination review from one of student frustration to one of metacognitive processing in which the exchange of ideas, critical thinking, and student learning occur.

Student feedback on this approach has been positive. One student stated,

“This way of looking at things has really helped me a lot. I don’t dread being at the examination review because now I know I can hear other people’s perspectives in a classroom that is not full of angry students trying to get faculty to award additional points. I am really learning how to look at the questions.

To help students develop higher level critical thinking skills in nursing, it is important to help them understand how they think and process information. The student-driven examination review process is one that has taken the “sting” out of examination reviews and helped to create a more positive atmosphere in the classroom. In addition, the process has enhanced collegiality among students and faculty, promoted leadership skills among student class leaders, and, most importantly, encouraged students to collaborate and apply metacognitive strategies to their own learning processes.

Reference

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