Student Moderator Teaching—Learning Strategy

Nurse educators are tasked with designing practical learning activities that facilitate students’ engagement in learning experiences. To prepare future nurse educators, students enrolled in Master’s of Nursing Education programs need to be immersed in unique learning experiences that accurately mirror future nursing faculty practice. This article describes a student moderator (SM) learning activity that provided nursing education students practice with facilitating, synthesizing, and grading of discussion posts in the online learning environment.

Thormann (2012) and Vitale (2010) referred to the use of student-led discussions as an effective strategy for learners to actively build knowledge. A constructivist approach was used to develop this specific student-led SM activity. A constructivist approach traditionally affords students opportunities to be (a) engaged in realistic and relevant learning experiences, (b) encouraged to consider multiple perspectives of content knowledge and understanding, and (c) supported in taking ownership of learning (Dewey, 1916). Using this SM strategy afforded students an interactive, practical, and meaningful opportunity to practice engaging pedagogical strategies in the online environment for their role of an emerging nurse educator.

To prepare the students for the SM activity, the course faculty role modeled best practices in facilitation of online discussions in the beginning weeks of the course (Dusaj, 2015). Best practices included an encouraging and respectful approach, insightful posts to acknowledge or appropriately challenge student reflections to further stimulate additional rich discourse, timely and meaningful feedback, and honest evaluation of learning outcomes based on course objectives.

Next, a sign-up sheet with detailed SM activity guidelines was posted within the online course. To afford time for adequate preparations, each SM was granted early access to faculty-prepared course materials for their selected week. The SM responsibilities included crafting response postings that would expand ideas to promote and deepen learning through enhanced analysis and further meaningful dialogue. Each SM used the learning management system to review and track their peers’ postings to the series of questions presented at the start of each week. The SM used the course discussion forum guidelines and rubric to evaluate both the frequency and content quality of the postings. The descriptors provided on the guidelines and rubric facilitated the SM’s ability to measure student performance against a predetermined set of criteria. At the conclusion of the assigned week, the SM posted a summary analysis to highlight key take-away discussion points. The course faculty then evaluated each SM after the assigned week concluded using a specifically modified course grading rubric. Scored items included evaluating whether the SM (a) provided postings to encourage critical insights and analysis, (b) offered a summary of the main themes reflecting deepened knowledge, and (c) evidenced scholarly writings in posts.

Course faculty favorably viewed the students’ performances related to the designed learning objective of successfully performing in the role of the online moderator. Students’ positive considerations identified themes related to gains in self-confidence, as well as expanded perceptions for the nurse educators’ significant and unique challenges in the online environment. Having positive role preparation experiences within a safe and supportive learning environment strengthened the development of the student’s self-efficacy regarding his or her ability to guide, direct, and evaluate the participation of their peers in an online learning activity. Integrating a well-designed online SM learning activity is one strategy for affording students the opportunity to genuinely practice for their future nurse faculty role.

References


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The authors have disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.
doi:10.3928/01484834-20170518-13