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SUPPORTING NURSING STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF RESEARCH CONCEPTS THROUGH SCAFFOLDING OF ASSESSMENT ITEMS

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Background

An increasing number of Registered Nurses in Singapore are completing Bachelor of Nursing degrees to improve career progression options. Core content in these undergraduate programs is mandated by the Singapore Nursing Board and must include research methods and appraisal. Most students are intimidated by the difficult concepts and unfamiliar language of research (1). Many nursing students are unable to see the clinical relevance of learning these difficult concepts and they rarely see clinical nurses leading research projects (1). In comparison to other program offerings, research courses are usually poorly evaluated by undergraduate students (2). In response to these concerns, Griffith University has developed teaching and learning strategies and aligned assessment items which incrementally develop student skills and understanding of research concepts, methodology and linking to evidence-based practice.

Sample of Assessment Item 1

	Parts of the bibliography entry	Summary
1	Author's viewpoint A short statement on the purpose of the study	The authors examined to what extent South Korean nursing students cheat in their studies and the elements that are linked to cheating. The authors also review the students' views and principles regarding academic honesty.
2	Summary A succinct account of ideas, theories, research or arguments used in the article	The author conducted a quantitative study in 5 institutions in South Korea, using a cross-sectional questionnaire. Surveys included demographics, and individual and contextual factors affecting 11 exam-cheating behaviours and 15 assignment-cheating behaviours. The results showed that at least 50% of the students had cheated in the last semester. Most students cheated to get good academic results and better prospects. Results also showed that students cheated because they did not have enough time or had low morale.
3	Appraisal Comments on strengths and limitations	The strength of the article is completion of surveys in the absence of lecturers and facilitators, ensuring that students' responses were fairer. The main limitation was that researchers used convenience sampling.
4	Usefulness Clearly explains the potential usefulness of article to poster	This research explains how academic integrity affects the reputation of the nursing profession. The research supports the claim that the less seriously they thought of a cheating behaviour, and the more people they knew that had cheated, the more likely they will cheat themselves.
5	Reference Citation in correct APA6th format	Park, E., Park, S., & Jang, I. (2012). Academic cheating among nursing students. <i>Nurse Education Today</i> , 33, 346-352.

Results

Providing context for understanding research and evidence-based practice develops student confidence in engaging with current research. Students reported that they appreciated the scaffolded approach and being taught how to search, read and critique research articles. Having opportunity to "practice" skills associated with doing research in the computer labs and tutorials improved their understanding of difficult concepts. Most students responded positively to working more closely with their tutors than in other courses as they worked through the tutorial activities, participated in their own "research" role plays. The students enjoyed presenting their completed posters in a context that allowed them to demonstrate their developing understanding of research concepts and being able to link this to their own clinical practice experiences.

Strategies

The teaching for the course, *Understanding Research in Practice*, occurs in intensive face to face blocks in Singapore, and through an on-line learning platform. The following teaching and learning strategies are used throughout the semester

- ◆ Face to face and recorded lectures, with study guide and lecture notes provided in advance
- ◆ Interactive tutorials with guided worksheets support student understanding of research concepts. Including:
 - #Exemplars of annotated bibliographies and posters
 - #Participation in a computer lab session where search strategies are demonstrated and practiced.
 - #Students are assisted to search for and identify research articles appropriate to their topic of interest
 - # In class quizzes, brainstorming and presentation of ideas
- ◆ On-line learning modules, written study guide and course readings provide students with a range of literature and activities to guide self-directed learning.
- ◆ Incremental assessment items stepping students through the process of searching, selecting and critiquing research during the completion of an annotated bibliography and the subsequent development of an evidence-based poster.

Sample of Assessment Item 2

Conclusion

Using a range of teaching and learning strategies to introduce nursing students to research concepts provides context which helps them to understand and integrate evidence-based practice. The strength of this style of teaching is the development of student confidence as they become more comfortable with the language of research. Their enhanced understanding of the complex concepts of research allows students to incorporate current research into their own practice when working with patients and other health professionals.

References

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