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Can Connecting With Students Create a Seamless Transition From ADN to On-Line RN-BSN Programs?

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The push for entry into practice for nurses being a bachelor's degree has been ongoing for decades, starting with the American Nurses Association (ANA) voting to push for baccalaureate education as the foundation for professional nursing practice in 1964 (AJN, 1965). Fast forward to the present and the requirement of a bachelor's degree is becoming a reality. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends 80% of nursing workforce have a bachelor of science in nursing by 2020 (Billings & Halstead, 2016; Robb, 2016) and the state of New York passed legislation, NYS senate bill S6768, requiring registered nurses to obtain a baccalaureate degree within ten years of initial license (University at Buffalo, 2017). Changes within the profession and the increase in the complexity of patient care call for a shift in nursing education. Associate degree nurses have increasing education expectations and the IOM and Carnegie Foundation has called for seamless transition from Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) programs to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs (AACN, 2015b). Registered nurses with an associate degree are being pushed to obtain a bachelor of science in nursing degree and embark on a journey and learn through a mode of course delivery that is completely new. Associate degree nursing programs are historically delivered completely in a face-to-face classroom, and little research has attempted to address the learning needs and preferences of students in online registered nurse to bachelor of science in nursing (RN-BSN) programs.

Further, millennials are currently the largest group in the work force and make up the majority of students filling seats in online BSN completion programs (Suh & Hargis, 2016). Identifying the learning needs of nursing students pursuing a BSN completion is crucial. Many research studies identified that millennial students prefer communication through technology, and learning online is an extension of their upbringing in a world where they have only known technology; however, a gap exists in that little has been researched on the preferences for online learning in this age group. The purpose of the single exploratory case study of millennial online RN-BSN students was to identify and understand the preferences of this unique group and to learn how to effectively engage and instruct them as they transition from face-to-face learning into the often online only format.

It was found that online learning was not the preferred way of learning and benefits of face-to-face classrooms were missing in the online platform. Social constructivist theory suggests that learners construct new knowledge from old through experiences and collaboration. This theory guided the study and sought to identify the preferred activities and assignments in the online classroom that this group felt improved learning. It was

found that students did not identify specific activities or assignments as improving learning, but the instructor commitment to facilitating the learning to be most important. Thematic analysis identified eight themes: Preference for face-to-face learning activities, Obligations influence choice, Instructor Commitment, Relevant to practice, Research required, Not challenging, Lectures, Uninvolved instructors. These themes emerged through semi-structured interviews, document/artifact review (handbook, syllabus, assignment guidelines, rubrics), and direct classroom observation in the 2017 spring semester at one Midwest University online RN-BSN program. The data collected attempted to answer the questions:

RQ1: How do millennial nursing students develop preferences for learning activities and assignments in online RN-BSN programs?

RQ2: How and why do millennial nursing students believe certain learning activities and assignments facilitate learning in online RN-BSN programs?

RQ3: How and why do millennial nursing students believe certain learning activities and assignments hinder learning in online RN-BSN programs?

A major theme that was supported by other themes in the study was *Instructor Commitment* and indicated that intentional behaviors by the instructor is interpreted as commitment to the student, and an overall dedication to guiding learning through interaction promotes learning no matter the specific activity or assignment. More specifically, the theme *Instructor Commitment* identified perceptions that learning was facilitated if the instructor was committed to the online classroom, and that instructors should be involved and be present in the online classroom constantly. Some examples found to be identified as instructor commitment were instructor participation in discussion boards, communicating clear directions, answering questions in a timely manner, and being available to clarify directions. Students overwhelmingly identified the preference for face-to-face activities that they experienced in their ADN program and found similar experiences online to improve learning. The results identified online lecture and intentional and personal communication with the instructor as strategies to simulate the experiences of the students. Participants described feeling a connection with the instructor and other students in the face-to-face classroom and felt that was lacking in the online classroom.

Specific strategies that bridge the gap between the face-to-face classroom and build connections within the online classroom were identified through the qualitative findings and will be shared in the presentation. Implementation of these behaviors in the classroom could identify an instructor as committed and therefore improve outcomes. Finding ways to connect with the students, connect information in the online classroom to practice, and connect students to each other for collaboration is imperative for successfully increasing nursing skills and caring for complex patient care needs.

It is important to note that the higher education classroom is continuously changing, as well as the characteristics of the students in the classrooms. The significance of the results of the study advanced the body of knowledge of preferences of millennial nursing students in online RN-BSN classroom, and by extension, strategies to improve outcomes in these programs and ultimately increase the number of bachelors prepared nurses through successful completion of online programs. Information presented will help to guide novice online educators, as well as, experienced online educators that are searching for new approaches to online pedagogies. All online educators interested in

improving outcomes may consider implementing strategies to intentionally connect with their students to ease the transition from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. Further, online educators may utilize the information to thoughtfully reflect on their practices and consider what it means to be committed from the students' view.

Title:

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Keywords:

Instructor Commitment, Online Education and RN-BSN

References:

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Abstract Summary:

Nurse educators play a pivotal role in the transition from Associate degree nurse to online RN-BSN student, particularly in the execution of pedagogy that utilizes their past experience. This session will highlight the need to convey commitment to online students and will share strategies to connect with students.

Content Outline:

I. Introduction (2 minutes)

A. Presenter Name and Position: Holly Farley Ed.D, RN
Assistant Professor of Nursing at Eastern Illinois University

B. Title: Can Connecting with Students Create a Seamless Transition from ADN to Online RN-BSN programs?

C. Presentation Type: Education, focus on online education

D. Presentation Topic, Objectives, and Main Idea:

This presentation focuses on online nursing education, particularly with millennial students transitioning from face-to-face ADN programs to online RN-BSN programs. The objectives are to give a background of the problem and study details, as well as, cover some of the specific strategies that can be implemented in the online classroom. The main idea is to create online classrooms that build on students' previous knowledge and experience while building connections within the classroom. The online classroom is currently the most popular mode of delivery for BSN completion programs and students want committed instructors that guide their learning in this platform.

II. Body of Presentation (13 minutes)

A. Background information about the Topic:

This section will include a brief discussion of the current climate of nursing education, the push to increase the number of BSN prepared nurses and the need to understand this group of students and intentionally create online environments to improve outcomes and ultimately increase the number of BSN prepared nurses. Further, a brief description of the qualitative study methods, outcomes, and literature review findings.

B. Specific Strategies to be Discussed:

1. Connecting with Students through Intentional Communication:

Emailing students independently for no specific reason throughout the course just to "check-in" with the student.

Allowing students to call outside of office hours.

Share information about yourself and encourage your students to share their experiences.

Follow-up with students when assignments are missed. Show empathy and concern through communications, in the face-to-face classroom you see and talk with students

regularly and emotion can be relayed through facial expressions and voice pitch. This must be intentional through the written word in the online classroom. Don't wait for the student to email you, would you ignore behaviors in the face-to-face classroom? Respond to students in a timely manner, it can be frustrating to have questions that you cannot get answered. In the traditional classroom, you meet regularly and can ask others in the class, this isn't easy in the online classroom and therefore timely feedback is important.

Use students' names in feedback, pre-typed responses that are used over and over are ok, but not for an entire course. Take the time to give personalized feedback. Students want to know their instructors and know they are doing a good job.

Always give feedback, just because a paper was perfect, doesn't mean it does not require feedback. What was exceptionally good or impressive? Participants expressed the concern that with online teachers that they may never see or communicate with them and just getting a good grade isn't enough. One participant questioned if an instructor was actually grading their work and without some feedback, it felt like a waste of time.

2. Connecting with Students through Assignments and Activities:

In discussion board assignments, the instructor should include an initial post sharing your thoughts and experiences on the topic. This not only guides the student to make a thorough post that meets guidelines, but helps the student to connect to the instructor and share experiences. The RN-BSN classroom is unique because the students are working nurses. Participants expressed the need to share experiences and learn from others.

Don't simply require students to make an initial post and respond to two others. This should only be the basis for the discussion board assignment. Create a detailed rubric that includes building on knowledge and asking questions of others and following up. Don't be afraid to take off points when the posts and discussion do not meet the criteria. Students want to be challenged and their work be meaningful, not just going through the motions. This was identified as hindering learning.

Eliminate fill-in-the-blank assignments. Create assignments that force the student to research and learn new knowledge. One participant suggested giving less assignments that were more work and research, and eliminating any assignment that was simply copying information from a Power Point.

Know your students' knowledge base and build on that avoiding repeated information from past courses.

Connect the assignment to the theory or concept. Give clear guidelines identifying the objective the assignment is covering and how the knowledge will improve practice. Students want to know they are learning what is intended, without clear information, this can be impossible. And without regular class meetings and discussion students can feel they are in the dark with assignments. Don't make them guess at what is expected.

3. Connecting Students with Each Other:

Face-to-face classrooms cultivate collaboration and create relationships, this can be difficult in the online classroom. Online group work was not found to be helpful in improving learning outcomes, but could help to make student connections.

If you have the ability to do synchronous class meetings/lectures/presentations, this can help to bridge that gap. Participants wanted lecture, even if was recorded. Seeing the instructor and hearing others' questions helped to simulate the face-to-face classroom. Encourage students to connect and share outside the classroom through other platforms such as creating a class group on social media. This gives a platform to share and collaborate.

III. Closing Summary

Transitioning from face-to-face can be difficult, even for an age group that is very technologically savvy. Creating an environment where students feel connected to the instructor and other students improves their satisfaction and learning outcomes. It was found that students want instructors that they perceive as committed to their learning and that means being involved in every aspect of the online classroom.

IV. Questions from the Audience (5 minutes)

First Primary Presenting Author

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Author Summary: Holly Farley is an Assistant Professor of Nursing at Eastern Illinois University. She has been an academic nurse educator for 13 years, and holds a Doctorate of Education degree and a Master's degree in nursing education. Prior to her current position, she taught for 9 years in an Associate Degree Nursing program. Dr. Farley holds a Master Online Teaching certificate and has given oral and poster presentations on the topic of online education.