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Let's Check In: Engaging Student and Faculty in an Innovative and Collaborative Online Learning Environment

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper will be to speak to a collaborative learning community that was established through the development of "Let's Check In". Collaborative learning has been used in nursing education for several decades, yet gaps remain around the implementation process in the online environment (Zhang & Ciu, 2018). While collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches, common features include intellectual and social engagement by students, or between students and faculty (Andrew, 1994; Brufee, 1984; Kirshner, 2001). Collaborative learning activities vary widely, but most center on the students' exploration or application of the course material, not simply the faculty presentation or explication of course content. Collaborative learning supports the academic socialization process and facilitates the sense of social presence in the online environment (Beck, et al., 2018). It is important to note that faculty who use collaborative learning approaches tend to think of themselves less as expert transmitters of knowledge to students, but more as designers and coaches of intellectual experiences as part of an emergent learning process for students. This is critical as graduate education continues to shift to the online environment (Robinson & Volker, 2018). Collaborative learning is focused on building learning communities, where the priority is intellectual coherence for students. This requires faculty to move from a vertical position of authority to a longitudinal instrument by which knowledge and information is shared in a reciprocal and inspiring approach. This can be accomplished by linking weekly content with the building of relationships. An increase in non-traditional students pursuing doctoral degrees, requires faculty to identify strategies to support growth and persistence of this unique student population (Mooring, 2016). The goal of learning communities is to build both academic and social communities for students, by bringing them together to enhance intellectual dialogue and interaction between students and faculty. Learning communities directly confront multiple problems plaguing graduate education: the fragmentation across coursework (Volkert & Johnston, 2018), isolation of students in an online environment (Dixson, 2010), lack of meaningful connection-building between weekly lessons, the need for greater intellectual interaction between students and faculty, and lack of sustained opportunities for faculty development (MacGregor, 1991)

Methods: In this innovative project a weekly live forum hosted by the course subject matter expert for students and faculty, weekly course lessons, outcomes, and assignments are discussed, along with an overview of the lesson for the upcoming week.

Results: Through this strategic approach to student and faculty collaborative engagement, positive unintended consequences resulted. Our findings included enhanced rigor of student engagement in course discussions, improved collaboration

between faculty and students, and the building of connections between course subject matter expert, faculty, and students.

Conclusion: Project findings have fostered a continual drive towards the building of additional measures to support student and faculty collaboration and engagement in the online environment.

Title:
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Keywords:
Collaborative Learning, Collaborative Learning and Faculty Engagement and Collaborative Learning and Social Presence

Abstract Summary:
This symposium will engage nurses across roles working in the online academic environment, in a dialogue specific to challenges and opportunities inherent in designing and sustaining a collaborative learning environment. Presenters will share findings and strategies from their current innovative strategy in a large Online Program in the U.S.

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