Title:
Postgraduate Student Support in Open Distance Learning: Using a Caring Curriculum Approach

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Session Title:
Research Poster Session 3

Slot (superslotted):
RSC PST 3: Sunday, 30 July 2017: 9:45 AM-10:15 AM
Slot (superslotted):
RSC PST 3: Sunday, 30 July 2017: 12:00 PM-1:15 PM
Slot (superslotted):
RSC PST 3: Sunday, 30 July 2017: 2:00 PM-2:30 PM

Keywords:
caring curriculum, open distance learning and student support

References:

Abstract Summary:
The presentation addresses postgraduate student support in an open distance learning context. Nodding’s four features of a caring curriculum was used as theoretical underpinning: modeling, practice, authentic dialogue and confirmation/affirmation. Integrating these four features into learning strengthens student interaction and engagement beyond levels that are normally experienced in this context.

Learning Activity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learner will be able to identify features of an open distance learning environment that reduce transactional distance, create presence, foster engagement, and provide students the opportunity to engage in transpersonal teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Student support strategies to demonstrate care for postgraduate students involved in research will be presented.</td>
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<td>The learner will be able to understand different activities to create (or enhance) purposeful interactions within the context of a caring relationship between and among postgraduate students and study supervisors.</td>
<td>Student support strategies for future educational and practice approaches that balance structure and freedom, provide quality learning, critical reflection and the spirit of</td>
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Purpose:

Student support is at the core of enhancing student success. Educators who are preparing students to reach the highest academic levels are continuously faced with the question on what is required to assist students to meet their learning outcomes and become successful in their studies. Open and interactive approaches to the teaching and learning environment of postgraduate students enhance a reflective culture and develop self-directed learning. The purpose of this study was to explore a caring approach to postgraduate student support in an open distance learning context.

Methods:

Features of open distance learning that reduce transactional distance, create presence, and foster engagement were explored. A qualitative design was used and data were collected by means of reflective essays and workshop feedback that was in the form of semi-structured narratives. The reflections were used to understand the support needs and the students’ experiences in an open distance learning institution in a developing country. Data were analysed using the eight steps for qualitative data analysis as proposed by Tesch. The themes identified were then discussed within the theoretical context of the Nodding’s model of a caring curriculum.

Results:

Learning activities that create purposeful interactions within the context of a caring relationship between and among postgraduate students and their supervisors were identified. Nodding’s four features of a caring curriculum was used as theoretical underpinning: modeling, practice, authentic dialogue and confirmation/affirmation. Integrating these four features with open distance learning strengthens student interaction and engagement beyond levels that are normally experienced in this context. The findings further revealed that ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ have become an integral part of the caring curriculum.

Conclusion:

Open distance learning aims at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers. It widens access to learning, provides for flexibility of learning provision, focuses on student centredness, and supports students by constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed. Supporting students within a caring curriculum during the postgraduate supervision journey enhances the quality of learning during research capacity development. A student-centered approach with a reflective practice paradigm provides a flexible approach to self-directness of postgraduate students. Constructive alignment of all activities and elements of effective learning opportunities are essential in creating reflective practices that could enhance student support. These elements include authenticity, activating of existing knowledge, creating a community of learning, engaging with new learning material, demonstrating competence and applying it to the real world, all within a caring philosophy.