How Nursing Students Study

Purpose:

The different study styles of nursing students today are as diverse and distinctive as the individual students themselves. With so many different ways to study, it can be difficult to determine the best practices for students to be successful and efficient in school and beyond. In an effort to better understand best practices and subsequently to help nursing students be more successful in school, Kaplan Nursing conducted a research project from March 2010 to May 2010 to determine how nursing students study. The purpose of this whitepaper is to discuss the various study methods of nursing students and the implications for faculty to help students improve their study habits.

Introduction

The stress of nursing school weighs not only on students but also on faculty. Faculty members are under pressure to maintain: enrollment, graduation numbers, NCLEX pass rates and job placement rates. Nursing educators have watched students year after year panic prior to not only their first exam, but also on every test taken during their time in school. To help lessen the levels of stress and panic, these educators try to determine how to help students best prepare for those nursing exams. How can faculty help students study successfully? To assist students, faculty need to know how they are currently studying. Studies show that students with good study skills have increased confidence, competence and academic success, and they approach both individual classes and school as a whole with a positive attitude. Conversely, students with poor study skills are passive and rely on others to help them study (White, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Comment</th>
<th>Preferred Method &amp; Tools</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>Recommended Faculty Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I learn from many resources and methods”</td>
<td>Textbooks, multimedia (audio, visual), practice tests, flashcards, tables, notes, etc.</td>
<td>Spend inordinate amount of time organizing, utilize social media to ask questions and search for answers</td>
<td>Provide “top ten” list of tools/reference material to assist student decision on products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I create order”</td>
<td>Organize multiple sources and prioritize them, highlight important material</td>
<td>Rewrite notes, multiple colors of highlighting – sometimes entire text is highlighted.</td>
<td>Provide note taking space by using bulleted handouts, indentify specific reference pages to match slides/notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I integrate”</td>
<td>Study in groups, discuss clinical cases and apply classroom principles</td>
<td>Attempt to integrate notes, audiovisual assets, texts</td>
<td>Assign study groups and activities. Provide guidance for organizing study groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I remember content”</td>
<td>Re-write and share class notes, utilize resources such as flashcards, highlighted notes, tests</td>
<td>Share notes and resources, divide work among peers</td>
<td>Assist students with determining salient content in their many reading assignments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Findings and methods for faculty to assist students.

Literature Review

First and foremost, studying is a skill to be acquired. It requires training and practice with specific techniques that help a learner acquire, organize, retain, and use information. Second, studying must be intentional. Effective studying requires not only the knowledge and application of skills, but volition as well. Studying differs from incidental learning in that it is purposeful and requires a deliberate and conscious effort on the part of the student. Third, studying is highly personal and individualized. Whereas classroom learning occurs within a social context through interaction and guidance from others (e.g., peers, teachers), studying is often an individual activity. Even when learning is fostered through a process of social communication, individual study behaviors still play a critical role in academic competence. Finally, studying involves a self-regulatory dimension (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).
Numerous articles provide faculty with ideas and tools to improve study skills. Some of the key strategies include “acquiring, recording, organizing, synthesizing, remembering and using information” (Hoover and Patton, as cited in Gettinger & Seibert, 2002, pg. 350). Students need to be guided through readings and information should be outlined and purposeful. White recommends faculty stimulate students’ thinking, arouse their curiosity and assist them both with major concepts and with vocabulary (2004, p.4).

Pressley and Afflerbach (as cited in Gettinger & Seibert, 2002) identify some key study strategies that could be taught to students to help create successful outcomes. These strategies include faculty providing an overview before the students complete their readings. This provides the context in which the students should apply new knowledge gained from the readings. Faculty can also instruct the students on how to use prior knowledge to draw a relationship between important points. When students appear to misunderstand the information, faculty should change teaching strategies and direct the students to look at the information differently.

Methodology

The study was designed to first determine how current nursing students study. Data was collected through contextual inquiry observation, a quantitative student survey and a faculty focus group. Participants of the study were obtained through a convenience sample.

Contextual inquiry consists of an observation, an interpretation session and a task analysis session. The observation is a specific type of interview for gathering field data from users. It is usually done by one interviewer speaking to one subject at a time. The aim is to gather as much data as possible from the subjects.

Conclusion

As nursing faculty strive to help nursing students be more successful in school, there are implications to assist with their efforts. Table 1 provides methods for faculty to apply in order to help to improve student study skills. The mission and goal of nursing faculty is to cultivate successful students who are then able to become successful nurses. Teaching study skills and enhancing the study methods of students is necessary for students to succeed in nursing school and beyond.

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References


