Promoting Student Engagement through the Use of Mobile Applications

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Objective

1. Describe the use of mobile learning technology as an innovative approach towards facilitating student engagement in an experiential learning environment.

Background

Technology is a driving force in today's society and plays a significant role in higher education. In seemingly all facets of life, technology is used for convenience in an effort to simplify daily living. Many forms of technology can be found in entertainment, social platforms, as well as educational forums. Mobile technology has found its way into nursing education as a way to in enhance learning and engage today's techno savvy student. With the growing use of mobile learning in higher education, students can easily access information from a mobile device, giving them the ability to connect with the educator securely and confidentially (Hoglund, 2015).

Experiential learning pedagogy offers an innovative approach to learning that moves beyond traditional classroom rhetoric. Mobile applications can be used to create an experiential learning environment, whereby students connect to both the content and educator in a meaningful way. Student use of technological devices allows the educator to direct the focus of classroom learning and/or responsibilities by engaging students beyond the traditional classroom environment (Fang, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Experiential learning in nursing education is gaining increasing acceptance as an alternative to more traditional forms teaching. Educators are recognizing the need for innovative practice in the classroom as a means of enhancing nursing education (Ridley, 2007).

The experiential taxonomy is reflective of constructivist-based learning which incorporates a student-centered approach to learning, thereby enhancing their ability to think critically.

The use of mobile applications within higher education builds firmly on the theory of constructivism, which promotes autonomy in an active learning environment. In this setting, the educator facilitates the learning process (Bonnel & Smith, 2010). Constructivism acknowledges that learning occurs in contexts, while technology refers to the designs and learning environment of the student (Nanjappa & Grant, 2003). Educational design allows the educator to engage the student using a mobile device and/or smartphone as the medium.

Description of Teaching Strategy

Remind© was selected as an example of a mobile application that can be used to enhance student engagement with both the course and the educator. This free app allows educators to generate messages that immediately transmit to a mobile device. Ideally, mobile learning technology can be utilized at any level of nursing education and can serve a variety of purposes including assignment reminders, transmission of visual aids and resources, as well as schedule/calendar changes. Traditional baccalaureate junior level nursing students were chosen to pilot this innovate technology due to their experience with the rigors of nursing school. This particular cohort was chosen as an exemplar as they are heavily invested in their schoolwork, yet still require guidance and instructional support. The purpose of utilizing this innovative teaching strategy was to enhance student engagement and connectivity via mobile learning technology, specifically, the Remind© application.

Implementation of Teaching Strategy

During the fall semester of the junior year, nursing students were encouraged to install Remind© for their class or clinical. Participation was voluntary and all information was replicated and dispersed through the university's learning management system (LMS). Weekly messages were sent via Remind© and the university LMS. Messages included reminders, supplemental resources, course updates, and words of encouragement allowing the educator to engage students outside the four walls of the classroom. The benefit to Remind© versus traditional LMS is that it is not necessary to login to a website or create an account, the information is transmitted as a text message to any phone or mobile device that that receives text messages.

Outcomes of Teaching Strategy

Remind© was utilized by 50 students out of 56 enrolled in the junior level course/clinical. Of the six that chose not to use Remind©, two stated they preferred to use the university LMS and four stated they simply forgot to download the app. Students expressed a greater connection to the educator stating the encouraging texts and reminders helped them to stay on track and encouraged them to put forth their best effort. They had a greater sense of personal connection stating they felt as if the professor truly cared for them and their success in the course. Others reported ease of use stating they preferred a direct text message rather than having to log on to the university LMS. Additional feedback included important information was quickly accessed and helped to prepare them for their upcoming class.

Implications for Education/Educators

The use of mobile technology and learning is relatively new in the area of higher education. More research is needed to understand its potential in impacting student learning and engagement. Creating meaningful interactions in nursing is essential to engaging students who are accustomed to living in a world of immediate feedback. The use of mobile technology creates an experiential learning environment that connects the student and creates more authentic learning experiences (Salazar, 2010). Mobile technology such as the Remind© demonstrates how quickly and accessible information can be transmitted, thereby promoting student engagement, communication, and inquiry. As technology continues to revolutionize education, nurse educators must meet the challenge by adapting to this new style of learning.

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