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Supporting student success through connecting and belonging by using “Link Lecturers”

Donovan Jones

School of Nursing and Midwifery, Faculty of Health and Medicine, University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia

The importance of developing and sustaining welcoming and supportive academic and clinical environments for students undertaking health care programs is not new (Carolan-Olah & Kruger, 2014). However, the ways in which these environments interrelate and impact on student retention rates, academic success and engender professional belongingness is unclear.

This study is exploring the student experience of nursing and midwifery students from the University of Newcastle. Bridging the theory practice gap using the concept of link lecturers (linking the academic context and knowledge with the clinical context and skills) may positively impact on nursing and midwifery students' academic connectedness, professional belongingness and academic outcomes. Exploring nursing and midwifery students' sense of connectedness to the academic environment and learning activities as well as the development of a sense of professional belongingness within different models of clinical placement and linked academic support. The study objectives include identification of:

- Clinical placement models that best support a sense of professional belonging
- Academic practices that best support student learning in the clinical environment
- Academic practices that best support student success in the academic environment

Improving students' sense of professional belongingness and student connectedness with their academic environment has the potential to increase student retention rates and success. Clinical placements provide opportunities for professional socialisation and experiential learning; there is evidence of a pivotal relationship between the extent to which students' experience belongingness and their capacity and motivation to learn when undertaking clinical placements (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2008). The use of a link lecturer may afford a practical way to strengthen the connection and belonging of nursing and midwifery students.

Biography

With the current position of deputy program convenor for the Bachelor of Midwifery, Donovan has been actively involved in the development of new curriculum starting in 2016 for the Bachelor of midwifery at University of Newcastle. The new curriculum brings teaching innovation not previously used in undergraduate midwifery programs such as cadaveric anatomy labs, 3rd year clinical viva's and the use of technology to deliver midwifery teaching across a wide demographic context. In addition to this Donovan is the chair of the Bachelor of midwifery simulation committee and is responsible for strategic planning for the continuing advancement of midwifery teaching simulation programs, ensuring students become leaders in the field of obstetric emergency hi fidelity simulation and learning. Donovan is also a integral team member of the iLIVE project, looking at the integrated learning that meets the needs of individual students, clinical venues and universities.

Donovan.jones@newcastle.edu.au

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