A Case Study of Online Peer Learning to Foster Cultural Awareness in Medical students

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Presentation Outline

Background & Introduction to Study

Reflection & Cultural Competence

Why Online Discussion?

Study Design

Discussion of Initial Findings

Introduction

- Internationalization of curriculum – cultural competence in medical students

- Purpose - foster reflection leading to cultural awareness of self and 'other'

- Pilot online discussions among diverse medical student cohort

Reflection & Cultural Competence

- Rationale for focus on reflection
  - Length of Unit
  - Core competency in medicine

- Reflection ⟹ cultural competence
  - Understand one's self as cultural being
  - Understand one's own assumptions, biases, values and shift world view

Why Online Discussion?

Socio-cultural learning – students articulate and negotiate meaning through discussion with peers (Laurillard, 2009)

Asynchronous communication — allows time for careful thought and more deliberate discourse (Curtis, 2006)

Constructivist approach — students construct knowledge as they engage in activities that have personal relevance (Levine, 2007)

Study Design

- 231 students & 23 tutors/groups

- 3-week Culture & Health Unit

- Two online assignments (Week 1 & 2)

- One post & one reply to peer / per week

- Required but not assessed assignment (Ma, 2010)

Example of Online Assignment

Week 2: *Based on film "Hold Your Breath"...*

How does the doctor's culture and perceptions impact his ability to provide culturally competent medical care?

Consider the doctor's, patient's and family's perspective in your posting

Student Post

- *... I'm increasingly ...convinced..that culture isn't so much something you belong to, but instead are the assumptions you make in your day-to-day activities and your way of thinking.*

- *Had the doctor inquired further into Mr Kochi's ... refusal of chemotherapy, he may have uncovered [why].. he wouldn't accept a pump.*

- *Instead the doctor's own assumption interfered, the assumption that the refusal was a part of Mr Kochi's faith (partially correct but nonetheless damaging) and that one should not enquire further into such matters.*

Initial findings

– **Multiple viewpoints**

"Just going off what Marc said I think you are right in looking at this case from their point of view... the established practice [for] their culture was their herbal treatments, I hadn't really thought of it in that aspect."

– **Diversity of student cohort**

"...In the Samoan culture there is a very significant spiritual aspect which permeates through all aspects of life, particularly a strong connection between the physical and the spiritual.

Thus the religious component of health means Samoans and Pacific Islanders in general will look towards the Bible for guidance rather than the hospital."

Student Feedback

"It made me think more deeply by reading other peoples comments... I had to try and comprehend what they were saying, and at the same time try to articulate my own thoughts. "

"...before this unit, I personally felt that I didn't have my own culture. But now I know everyone does."

Tutor Feedback

- *"Putting ideas into words seemed to give them some clarity and exposed them to new ideas..."*

- *"... they took their thinking to a deeper level--rather than just blurting something out verbally, they had to really think about what they were saying and how it would advance the discussion.*

- *We have such good discussions in class it was...not necessary*

Pedagogical challenges

- Structure and types of online tasks

- Students wrote what they thought we wanted to hear

- Public versus private reflection

- Participants unfamiliar with technology

Questions & Discussion

References

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