Developing academic literacies in podiatry education: A model of good practice

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Learning development: The context

• The traditional model:
  – Remedial, reactive, lack of contextualisation (Wingate, 2006)
  – Perception of irrelevance (Kennelly, 2010)

• Best practice:
  – Embedding learning development in the curriculum
    • Targets all students, teaches academic skills within the context of the discipline

• At GCU, learning developers are based in academic schools
The embedded approach in healthcare education

• Academic skills may be especially important (Murdoch-Eaton & Whittle, 2012):
  – Students require academic skills in placement and academic contexts.
  – The professional context is constantly changing; lifelong learning skills are required for professional development.
  – Employers in health contexts look for these skills.
The challenge of fully embedding learning development in the curriculum

• Learning developers:
  – have an overview of thinking and writing across disciplines
  – are equipped with language and examples to teach

• BUT:
  – Students typically view delivery by discipline specialists as more valuable.
  – Fully contextualising teaching can be challenging.

• SO:

• Partnerships between learning developers and subject specialists may have a distinct role in promoting academic development (Blake & Pates, 2010).
Our approach

• How it evolved – Wendy’s background
• Team taught a longitudinal programme of academic development sessions.
• Key features:
  – Integrated within level 1 module
  – Highly contextualised to podiatry
  – Contributions from staff evenly distributed
  – Interactive teaching style
  – Timing carefully considered
Example session delivery (Trimester A 2015-16)

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The process

Meet to discuss student needs

Sessions planned

Reflection

Evaluation

Delivery

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Podiatry related example 1

- Note how the writer develops his/her points

Pressure plates are increasingly used as a tool for identifying... (X, 2013) Topic sentence. For example, in a recent study Y (2015) used a pressure plate to measure ground reaction forces and plantar foot pressures in participants suffering from... Example. Other conditions that can be assessed using pressure plates include... As described by (Z, 2012), pressure plate systems were used by... Explanation.

Activity

- Consider the following question:
- Discuss possible causes of plantar fasciitis (heel pain)
- How might you demonstrate critical thinking in your answer?

Try making this more concise

The patient was given some drugs so that they would become sedated and then an assistant went to get the patient and he was brought into the operating room. The patient was then positioned on the operating table and then he was helped into a supine position. The next stage was for the practitioner to put a pneumatic ankle tourniquet on the patient’s ankle. This was placed on the patient’s right ankle. This was to help create an area that had less of a blood flow which would help the practitioner perform the foot surgery. (95 words).
Evaluation data

• Overall, feedback very positive.
• Level 1 progression increased by 26% the year the sessions were implemented
• Qualitative data - key themes:
  – Increased academic confidence
  – Eased the transition to university
  – Team teaching approach contextualised and reinforced learning
  – Development of specific skills
  – Students were more likely to access support in the Learning Development Centre
Qualitative data examples

It was reassuring because you felt, ‘It’s not just me who’s panicking.

I think you complemented each other because you could each chip in different aspects; it makes it seem that you’re part of the team.

I liked how both Wendy and Jane delivered sessions together as it had relevance to podiatry.

I felt there was many methods that I was unaware of which helped me to optimise my personal studies.

I probably would have found it really hard to stay at university to be honest, ‘cause the first couple of weeks in I was finding it really hard to keep going and when we did that [the session], I was like, ‘Right, that’s why I’m finding it hard!'
Reflections on why it worked

• Subject specialist inherently values and is committed to academic development.
• Subject specialist can add context to learning points.
• Subject specialist can embed skills in assessment and feedback structures.
• Learning developer is seen as part of the team.
• Emotional aspects of learning/transition to university were explicitly addressed.
Challenges and recommendations

Challenges

- Perception that academic skills are not part of the disciplinary knowledge
- Lack of confidence / experience in teaching academic skills
- Lack of ‘buy in’ from institution
- Practical challenges – e.g. curricular structure, time constraints

Recommendations

- Harness each other’s skills
- Be willing to learn from each other
- View it as an iterative process
- Disseminate success internally
- Involve students in the planning and delivery of sessions
References


