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Learning To Collaborate: Midwifery Students' Evaluation Of Team-Based Academic Assignments

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Background:

Effective collaboration is essential for optimal maternity care provision and is expected of all midwifery graduates (CMACE, 2011; NHMRC, 2010; ANMC, 2006). One way to teach these skills is through student participation in team-based academic assignments (Wong & Abbruzzese, 2011).

Aim:

To evaluate Midwifery students' experiences of being involved in team-based academic assignments including giving and receiving peer feedback on teamwork skills

Participants:

First and third year Bachelor of Midwifery students who each undertook two team-based assignments in the same semester of the course; participants were allocated to teams.

Methods:

This is a multi-method Participatory Action Research project. Teamwork was begun during study block but was primarily conducted online. Specific written instructions about teamwork skills were provided along with very specific marking criteria. Teams submitted draft versions of their work to Blackboard for academic guidance. Individual student marks differed according to amount and quality of team contributions. Students' experiences were evaluated by voluntary, anonymous online surveys; 42.8% response rate.

Key findings:

Peer marking criteria was deemed appropriate by 100% of students. Participation in team-based assignments was valued because it 1) improved understanding of effective teamwork (96%), 2) prepared students for teamwork in practice (91%) and 3) assisted students to develop communication (100%) and social skills (91%). The team-based approach was viewed as fitting for different types of assignments (88%), even essays. Team based assignments were enjoyable (76%) although stark divisions were evident between first year students resistant to undertaking team-

based assignments and those who were willing. Students identified problems with power issues, unprofessional communication, and with team coordination.

Implications:

Well structured and supported team-based academic assignments are a valuable way to teach teamwork skills to midwifery students. Teamwork skills need to be actively taught and practised in lectures and tutorials so that students clearly know what is required.

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