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From panic to productivity

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From panic to productivity

Abstract

Early today I was asked to substitute for a sick colleague in leading a two hour tutorial. The topic was very specific and physiologically based. It was not a topic that could be "waffled through". I accepted the challenge and then had to decide what to do. I had just over an hour to prepare. It was a nursing topic that I am familiar with but do not claim to have a deep knowledge of (certainly not at one hour's notice). I sat down quietly and pondered my predicament.

Marilyn Hales, a lecturer in Nursing, and ITT course participant, shares with us an extract from the reflective journal she kept during the course, which describes how she took a colleague's class at short notice. With no time to prepare material, she took a radically different approach which resulted in some surprising insights for her and the students.



From Panic to Productivity

Marilyn Hales

Early today I was asked to substitute for a sick colleague in leading a two hour tutorial. The topic was very specific and physiologically based. It was not a topic that could be “waffled through”. I accepted the challenge and then had to decide what to do. I had just over an hour to prepare. It was a nursing topic that I am familiar with but do not claim to have a deep knowledge of (certainly not at one hour's notice). I sat down quietly and pondered my predicament.

The students had previously had four lectures on the topic so I decided to test my belief in self-directed learning. There was no way in which I could do the subject any justice in one hour and I thought it better to spend the time working out how to conduct the tutorial session rather than to attack the topic itself.

I collected the four texts mentioned in the reading list, four blank acetate sheets, four pens for writing on the overheads, some notes on a different but allied subject and some courage. Approximately a third of the group had not done any pre-reading so I set them all a task. I divided the group into four and gave each group a question from within the topic to research, a textbook to use, a blank overhead and a pen. I told them to elect a scribe and a spokesman from their group and be prepared to share their research with the class. I left them alone for 45 minutes but told them where they could find me if they needed help. At the end of this time (I had checked on them once in that period) each group had prepared very creditable overheads and spoke on the contents with authority and confidence.

I did encounter some initial resistance to this method of teaching but as the time progressed and they became more absorbed in their tasks the resistance lessened. By the end of the session they stated that they had not realised how much of the lecture content they had retained and were able to add to the information they found in the textbooks.

This has made me realise that it is very important to test the knowledge that the student has retained. We do not have to continue to give new information, one layer on top of another layer, but we do have to occasionally re-visit past content to remind the student of the logical sequence that a topic has. I am sure that the students benefited from today's exercise.

I think that the tutorial was productive for students. They may have been given more detailed scientific information by their regular tutor, but I gave them the opportunity to revise and voice any concerns that they have about clinical placements. The information that they may have missed out on can easily be picked up on when they return to the lecture situation.

Preparing this tutorial has made me realise that perhaps in the past I have



been a little too 'content driven'. This tutorial was a major deviation from my usual style, and it enabled me to confront my discomfort with my own silence while the students worked. I found it difficult at first but as I realised the students did not need somebody with them all the time, I became more comfortable with my silence.

Overall the tutorial was productive for the students and for me. I had achieved my main objective of revision and had encouraged the students to take some responsibility for their own learning.

Marilyn Hales is a lecturer in the Department of Nursing at the University of Wollongong.

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The above group exists to provide opportunities for contact between staff involved in open, distance or flexible learning developments. Flexible learning approaches are increasingly being adopted in higher education in order to meet the needs of potential students, cope with increased numbers and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning experience. Often the development of such approaches are being facilitated by individuals and small teams who could benefit from contact with others engaged in similar activities elsewhere.

In order to facilitate such contact, the Network will offer:

1. The Flexible Learning Mailbase List

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The Flexible Learning List can provide an easy, quick and free way of making contact with colleagues at a distance.

2. Regional Circle Meetings

These are being arranged in localities where there is sufficient interest. The first was in Edinburgh, with others planned for Bristol and Liverpool. These meetings should provide a good opportunity for colleagues within given areas to get together for seminars and visits, to share experiences and to learn of new developments.

Please contact me if you would like further details about the Network, would like to become a member or would be prepared to organise or participate in a Regional Meeting.

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