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Brief, easy, wise interventions to support belonging and learning in first term of undergraduate nursing education

Kris Weymann and Sara Vlajic, School of Nursing, OHSU

Keywords

Students, Nursing; Resilience, Psychological; Education, Nursing, Baccalaureate; Belonging; Intervention; Mindset

Abstract

Background:

Nursing education is stressful^{1,2}, with students required to gain competency in diverse areas. Trainings and workshops were used among twelve studies to foster learning and resilience in nursing school³, most being several hours in length. This is in contrast to other college programs where brief “wise interventions”⁴ of 20 to 60 minutes are incorporated near the start of a program.

One intervention is reading words of advice from a “near peer”, communicating that challenges are common and can be overcome, and do not indicate decreased potential or belonging. The student later writes their own words of advice to an incoming student, fostering the “saying is believing effect”.⁵⁻⁹

Another common wise intervention is a brief video about growth/learning mindset and how the brain can change with effort.¹⁰ This intervention used with high school students increased college enrollment, integration, and grades.¹¹ There is evidence of a synergistic benefit of combining information about growth mindset with information about “stress-as-a-benefit” mindset.¹² The measured outcomes of these studies tend to be retention and grades, with a general higher benefit among disadvantaged students.⁷

Importantly, the perspectives of students on how a learning mindset was beneficial for their learning or professional development was not found in the literature. This gap, addressed in our study, is important since retention and grades overlook important benefits perceived by students. It is not reported if these interventions have been used in a flipped course, where it might be more important for students to practice a learning mindset.

There is a pressing need to strengthen belonging and resilience in nursing education, with a desired outcome of increased resilience and retention in the profession.¹³ Supporting belonging, learning, and resilience confers benefits while in school, and may improve success in nursing practice.¹⁴

Research Question

Which of six brief and easy interventions do students find most supportive of their belonging, learning, or resilience in the first term of their undergraduate nursing program?

Methods

Six brief, easy, wise interventions were incorporated into a first-term nursing program course. The interventions were: 1. A student introduction that included something the student was not sure they could accomplish, and a strength of theirs that helped them; 2. Two brief videos about learning/growth mindset and that the brain can change; 3. Weekly 1-minute learning reflections submitted to the instructor; 4. A short video on stress-as-a-benefit mindset, with this topic also included in course content on physiologic responses to stressors; 5. Encouragement to form study groups and the option to collaborate with peers on weekly formative short quizzes; and 6. Words of support from “near peers” provided at the start of each class.

Anonymous and voluntary quantitative and qualitative data on the six interventions were collected at the end of the first term. The study was deemed exempt by the institutional Internal Review Board.

Results

Forty-three undergraduate nursing students completed the survey at the end of their first-term, with 18 in an accelerated program. Forty-two percent of respondents identified with three or more of seven historically excluded groups in nursing. 35% were first in their family to attend or graduate college. In order of highest benefit, 92% reported a large benefit from collaboration with peers on formative quizzes. The 1-minute learning reflections were rated as large (49%) or moderate (41%) benefit by students. The vulnerability introduction post was rated as large (35%) or moderate benefit (46%). Words of support from near peers had 56% reported a large benefit, and 19% a moderate benefit. Learning about and reinforcement of learning mindset was rated by 30% as a large benefit and 41% as a moderate benefit. Students expressed using their learning mindset with changing study strategies and reaching out for guidance. The stress-as-a-benefit had the lowest ratings, with 22% of students rating as a large benefit and 43% as a moderate benefit. Qualitative expression of benefits will be presented, along with comparison of different 1-minute learning reflection prompts.

Diversity, equity and inclusion. Students expressed that multiple interventions supported their belonging, learning, and resilience. In their words, “Reminders about practicing a learning mindset were helpful and grounded me, making me feel like I belonged and to reflect on my own resilience”. Another expressed, “I enjoyed these reflections as I think they gave me a chance to check in with myself, and also made me feel heard and that (our instructor) really cares about what is going on for us as students. This impacted my sense of belonging, and increased sense of belonging increased my resilience.”

Possible applications are in any learning environment.

Learning Objectives

1. Give an example of a brief, easy intervention to increase student belonging, learning, or resilience.
2. Reflect and write how you might modify and incorporate one of these brief, easy interventions in your teaching.

Active Learning Strategies.

The vulnerability introduction will be used for participants to introduce themselves to their neighbor. A 1-minute learning reflection will be used at the session end, and different 1-minute reflections discussed. Participants will share their brief interventions and a list will be created.

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