

Supporting students we may never meet: challenges and strategies

Learning can be both rewarding and challenging but many students also face personal issues such as illness or bereavement which may impact negatively on their ability or capacity to learn. Educators have a duty of care to provide emotional and practical advice and support to students (ENU 2012). Whilst a variety of academic and personal support is available, there are inherent challenges in supporting students who undertake a course of study that involves on-line teaching and learning. For example, identifying potential students at risk may be easier to do in face to face teaching. This poster will explore strategies that educators can adopt to overcome some of these challenges.



Challenges

Strategies

Isolation of students

Variety of geographical locations
Asynchronous learning
The emotive nature of some topics

Balancing work, life and study

Students as individuals
Experienced practitioners but new to study
Mature students with other commitments
Demands of workloads in practice

Technological challenges

New to on-line learning
Fear of misinterpretation of 'postings'
'Silent' students – their right and our responsibilities



Establish early contact to facilitate engagement
Create small groups for discussions
Encourage informal peer support
Provide study day with face to face interactions
Teach with emotional intelligence (Mortiboys 2013)

Respond, demonstrating empathy
Offer support –Pastoral/Academic Learning Advisors
Harness motivation - Adults as self-directed learners
(Knowles et al 2005)

Begin discussions with 'safe' topics
E-mail a contribution to lecturer for formative feedback
Active facilitation of discussions by lecturers
Vary experiential learning opportunities
(Fleming and College 2008)

Conclusion

Student learning in an on-line environment raises particular challenges for educators. However, offering an early, personalised response may encourage engagement and both peer support and small group discussions can help to overcome isolation. Though experienced in practice, many may be new to studying at Masters level and learning in a virtual environment and are often juggling various demands on their time. Additional support offered in a sensitive manner may be required. Utilising broader support within ENU can also be helpful. Opportunities for experiential learning that are varied can enable students to participate, aided by active and sensitive facilitation by lecturers. Adopting strategies such as these can enhance engagement, as well as the overall student experience.

ENU Student Charter (2012) [accessed on 17/05/14]

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Knowles, M. S., Holton, E.F. & Swanson, R.A. (2005) *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*. 5th Edition. Elsevier. London

Mortiboys, A. (2013) *Teaching with Emotional Intelligence*. 2nd Edition. Routledge. London