Using group work to transition mature aged tertiary preparation students into university study: A review of a two-year study of students’ experience of group work within their pre-nursing program

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The University of Newcastle offers a tertiary preparation program that enables mature aged students to gain access to higher education. One of the largest intakes is into the pre-nursing program. This paper will share the findings of a two-year study of tertiary preparation students undertaking group work within their pre-nursing program. For many mature-aged students returning to study, it requires the development and transition of their identity from that of an adult role to that of a student role. The aim of this study was to examine how group work can help support mature aged students in their transition to a student identity. The premise was to enable students to develop skills for success in their undergraduate nursing studies, whilst fostering social connectiveness and a sense of belonging in the university.

We identified that an essential aspect of nursing is being able to work collaboratively with other nurses and within allied health teams. Keeping this in mind, we developed and delivered an approach that introduced group work in Week 3 of the students’ program to enable them to effectively integrate curricula and co-curricular learning experiences. Using an online assessment tool called SPARK, students were asked to self-reflect upon their individual role and their role within the group according to specific criteria that promoted positive group work behaviours and fostered social connectiveness. It was hoped that by providing students with resources and evaluation tools they would develop group work and self-reflection skills to succeed in their studies and future profession.

Learning outcomes
- Provide an overview of a two-year study into tertiary preparation students’ perception of integrating group work skills and an online self-reflection assessment tool into their group work experience.
- To share different strategies to support mature aged students returning to study transition into nursing/midwifery undergraduate degrees.
- Build upon current evidence-based approaches to developing group work skills within nursing programs.

Presenters
Deanna McCall, University of Newcastle

Deanna McCall is working in a clinical capacity as a student Counsellor at the University of Newcastle, whilst enrolled in a Higher Degree by Research at Monash University. Deanna has recently published four conference papers on challenges that students encounter. Deanna’s interest is in developing strategies to assist students to develop their emotional and psychological wellbeing to enable them to fulfil their academic aspirations.

Dr Bronwyn Relf, University of Newcastle

Dr Bronwyn Relf is employed at The University of Newcastle and is responsible for coordinating and teaching the ‘Science for Nursing and Midwifery’ courses in the Open Foundation Program. Bronwyn's research interests include curriculum design and equity in access to higher education for mature aged students in regional and remote areas. She recently lead a Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program grant investigating the role of tertiary preparation programs in increasing access to university for mature aged students in regional and remote areas and an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching grant investigating curriculum design principles in enabling programs. Prior to her employment at the University of Newcastle, Bronwyn worked at The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Western Sydney University, The University of Sydney and CSIRO.