CREATING A 'THINKING ROUTINE' BY EXPLICITLY EMBEDDING THE RESEARCH SKILL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK [RSDF] INTO COURSEWORK

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Clinton Kempster
University of Adelaide
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INTRODUCTION - ‘Thinking routines’ have been used for some time in the education setting. They are a set of cognitive processes that can be employed to initiate, explore, discuss, document and manage one’s thinking when tasked with inquiry or problem solving (Ritchart, 2002). Establishing these early helps to guide students learning and intellectual interactions (Leinhardt & Greeno, 1986). Thinking routines can provide a powerful blueprint for training health professionals or those vocations where work outcomes are high risk.

In the primary education setting, thinking routines are often condensed into three or four step processes (e.g. see, think, wonder) to make them easily identifiable to the younger learner. Within the higher education context, it may be useful to expand these models to one that identifies a greater range of artificially separated cognitive processes.

The Research Skill Development Framework (RSDF) does just that. The RSDF (Willison & O’Reegan, 2007) is a conceptual framework for research skill development which enables the identification of the various facets of research skill that can be honed in order to generate incremental research autonomy. The aim of this action research was to assess the impact of explicitly embedding the RSDF framework into all aspects of coursework in a first year course in the B Oral Health program at The University of Adelaide.

METHOD - While the full framework is useful (seen below), it can be quite cumbersome to present as a potential ‘thinking routine’ to students. Another simplified iteration (also seen below) was trialled in a first year Bachelor of Oral Health course – embedded into aspects of; curriculum design, assessment, course activities & course evaluation (reflective practice) (Klebansky & Fraser, 2013, Willison, 2014). The framework and the intention behind the introduction of the thinking routine was then made explicit to students via online communication, written class materials and an introductory class meeting and student activity. Reminders of the intention were provided by way of assessment feedback (rubrics) and face to face content summaries.

Qualitative thematic analysis (semantic) of the impact involved the review of data provided by students in five separate focus groups in 2015 (n 24) as well as two rounds of annual Student Experience of Learning and Teaching (n 48) since 2015. A reflexivity journal was created before coding and theme extraction.

DISCUSSION - Undergraduates are often new to scholarly research, unfamiliar with more rigorous research processes, overwhelmed at times, and perceive that researchers are detached from patients (Madan & Teitge, 2013; Burgoyne et al, 2010)

But something changes when we explicitly embed a Research Skill Development Framework both vertically and horizontally through our courses and announce this to our students.

The RSD Framework would be of interest to course coordinators who wish to highlight the importance of the process over and above just content learning. When explicitly embedded into all elements of undergraduate coursework, there is potential for educators to be highly effective in training student health professionals to face the daily challenges in providing timely, competent, safe and effective patient care.

REFERENCES

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