

Encouraging students' self-regulated learning skills through the use of discussion boards

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The transition from secondary to tertiary education is fraught with challenges for students (Kantanis, 2000; van der Meer *et al.*, 2010). University students need to cope with changing academic expectations surrounding independent learning, time management and levels of academic challenge. Therefore, students need to re-assess the efficacy and efficiency of their learning strategies when transitioning to university, and it is imperative that the meta-cognitive skills required to evaluate learning are explicitly taught (Krause, 2005). This study evaluated the use of small group discussion boards to encourage students to share and reflect on their learning strategies. As part of their summative assessment, first year anatomy and physiology students (n=192) completed meta-learning tasks to develop their self-regulated learning skills, and to reflect on their knowledge and academic performance (Colthorpe *et al.*, 2017). Each task consisted of six open-ended questions, and was worth 3% toward their grade. As part of their meta-learning assessment, students self-allocated to small groups on blackboard (3-7 students), where they shared the answers to specific meta-learning questions about their learning strategies on a discussion board. Responses to selected meta-learning questions were subsequently analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Nota *et al.*, 2004) to identify the learning strategies that students were using, and the possible impact of the discussion boards on the adoption of new strategies. Our results show that most students identified new learning strategies from the group discussion boards, with students most frequently identifying planning and environmental structuring as strategies they considered using. Of these students, almost a quarter reported adopting new strategies for their mid-semester exam preparation. The results from this study suggest that many first year students are still refining their learning strategies as they transition to university. The meta-learning discussion boards prompted students to consider new learning strategies by providing a scaffolded, social environment for sharing strategies with each other online.

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