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Introducing learning workshops into the biosciences: A student-staff partnership

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The biosciences can be difficult for nursing and midwifery students and embedding study skills into the curriculum may help overcome this challenge (McVicar, Andrew & Kemble, 2015). This project aimed to evaluate students' perceptions of 'learning workshops' in a first-year anatomy and physiology course.

Two one-hour learning workshops were co-designed and co-facilitated by past students and teaching staff through a student-staff partnership in 2022. The first workshop was held before the mid-semester exam and focussed on effective learning strategies. Students shared learning strategies through a Padlet site and reflected on strategies that were new to them. The second workshop was held at the end of semester. Students gained insight into short answer question marking, gave and received peer feedback on a short answer response, and learnt exam preparation tips. Each learning workshop was assessed through a pass-fail worksheet submitted at the end of class. To evaluate the effectiveness of the workshops, students were asked an open-ended question about whether they found the workshops useful or not and to explain why this was the case. Consenting students' (n=165) responses were coded using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Students' exam scores were compared between 2021 (no intervention) and 2022 (intervention).

All students participated in at least one workshop, with 88% participating in both. Most students (80%) found the workshops useful, citing their value for learning study tips and new strategies (57%) and gaining insights into examination marking (42%). The workshops were also useful for learning from past students (14%) and facilitating a sense of connection with peers (13%). Of the students who did not find the workshops useful, many stated already knowing effective learning strategies (39%). A two-way mixed ANOVA showed a significant interaction between the year students completed the course and their exam performance. The 2022 students had significantly lower mid-semester exam results ($59\% \pm 1.7$) compared to students enrolled in 2021 ($65\% \pm 1.4$). However, the students enrolled in 2022 significantly improved on the end of semester exam ($66\% \pm 1.4$), whereas 2021 students did not ($64\% \pm 1.2$).

Learning workshops are low-stakes activities that can be easily embedded within the curriculum.

By focusing on how to learn, these workshops may reduce inequality between students with different levels of academic preparedness.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

McVicar, A., Andrew, S. & Kemble, R. (2015). The 'bioscience problem' for nursing students: An integrative review of published evaluations of Year 1 bioscience, and proposed directions for curriculum development, *Nurse Education Today, 35,* 500-509.