FAMILIARITY BREEDS ENGAGEMENT

HARRIS, SCOTT
HINTON, LEONE
SCHOOL OF NURSING, MIDWIFERY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

Mr. Scott Harris
Dr. Leone Hinton
School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Sciences
Central Queensland University
Australia.

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Synopsis:

In the modern world traditional forms of distance education do not hold the attention of the students of the new millennium. To engage a distance education cohort a Mental Health unit within a 3 year bachelor of nursing degree at Central Queensland University is presenting recorded on-line lectures in a familiar and engaging way, that is, using the same format as a talk show. Concepts: talking Mental Health is a recorded talk show that presents all the information of traditional lectures.

Familiarity Breeds Engagement

Scott Harris, RN, MHN, Doctoral Candidate,GCTE, Master Mental Health Nursing

Leone Hinton, Grad DipEd(Tert), MEd(EdAdmin), DProf(Transdisc), JP
CQUniversity, Bruce Highway, Rockhampton, 4702, Queensland, Australia.

Abstract

With a student cohort situated literally at all points of the compass and covering the whole of the Australian continent and never having the luxury of any face-to-face in class time with those enrolled in the Concepts of Mental Health Nursing unit at Central Queensland University it was imperative to find a way to impart knowledge in such a way that grabs the student's attention.

As with any distance education cohort the tyranny of distance is often coupled with the students perceived lack of time to be able to study therefore it is important to get their attention from day one and to hold their attention for the entire term whilst imparting the necessary knowledge for them to successfully complete the unit of study. Gone are the days of simply printing and mailing a study guide, or even being able to upload a narrated PowerPoint presentation to a learning platform and expecting the students to read and absorb all that is required. A new dynamic yet familiar approach is required for the 21st century distance education student.

This paper will present a case study overview of just such a dynamic approach that goes beyond the narrated PowerPoint, beyond the recorded and uploaded didactic lecture and draws on a concept that is familiar to all, that is the humble talk show. It will show how utilising this familiar concept allows the educator to engage the distance student in such a way that they once again enjoy learning and look forward to weekly lectures. Student feedback demonstrated that this method was a successful gold-star learning approach.

Introduction

Correspondence, flexible learning, distance education, on-line learning these are just some of delivery modes given to off campus education in a tertiary setting. Students have highlighted that often with this delivery experience, they will simply attempt to gain the knowledge that is required to pass the unit. They will look at the assessments and only engage with the course material directly related to these; so how does one interest them in learning beyond hoop jumping?

Quality learning is made particularly more difficult in distance education because of a student's perceived or real constraints in time management. The distance factor can be perceived as a barrier to engagement. Long gone are the days where it was enough to upload a PowerPoint presentation to a learning platform and hope that the students spend their time going over the material. Engaging students in more meaningful ways where they come and spend time with the material and learn is a critical priority for educators.

This paper will explore one such attempt to engage students with distance education material via the use of a novel approach on traditional recorded and streamed lectures at a regional Australian university. A case study approach will be used. The background of the unit and the student cohort will be presented. An exploration of the novel approach and how this has affected student behavior with an examination of the pedagogical basis of this approach will follow. Evaluation and feedback from students will guide a discussion around the future implications of this approach.

Background

-The University

CQUniversity is a national university, where its heartland is Central Queensland with 22 campuses and learning sites across Australia. One of the major delivery foci is distance education to support students in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia utilizing a learning management system called Moodle. This open source system is very adaptable and has found to be versatile for such student cohorts. Over the years CQUniversity has refined and improved its delivery methods to have one of the largest distance student cohorts in Australia.

Coupled with Moodle, an in-house built student analytic system called EasiConnect makes the tracking of student work and experiences very powerful. Coupled with learning processes to manage student isolation and enhanced unit, course and university connectivity, educators are seeking ways to engage students to enhance the learning experience and embed critical content and generic attributes to optimize their work readiness.

-The Course and Unit

The Bachelor of Nursing course is delivered across 6 campuses and through distance education delivery with residentials. Students enroll from across all states in Australia. It is a blended learning course having both internal and distance units. Within the University, it is one of the fastest growing courses with enrolments on an annual basis exceeding 15% growth for the past 5 years. Currently this course enrolls approximately 3500 students across Australia. With this growth come the challenges. With the flexibility of distance delivery, higher attrition and lower course completion rates for this student cohort highlight the need for a greater understanding of their student experience (Kahu, Stephens, Leach, & Zepke, 2013). An increasing proportion of this cohort of students is aged 25 and over, and many of these students choose to study at a distance in order to more easily combine their studies with their family and work commitments.

This case study focuses on one unit (Concepts of Mental Health Nursing) within the Bachelor of Nursing. This is a compulsory unit within the three year Bachelor of Nursing course at CQUniversity. It is delivered in an online learning environment using Moodle as the learning management system. The unit is undertaken by students in the second year. Concepts of Mental Health Nursing is an apt title in that it introduces generalist nursing students to key ideas or foundational concepts from the specialty of Mental Health nursing. The concepts are derived from the 'National Competency Standards for the Registered Nurse' (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2016). The inclusion of these standards are a mandatory educational component in the accreditation of any undergraduate nursing course in Australia and are assessed by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia to enable graduates to obtain registration as a registered nurse within Australia. The concepts are also further based around elements of the specialty area of mental health and mental health nursing that a generalist registered nurse may

be exposed to through their day-to-day practice and are fundamental in terms of development of holistic nursing care (Hungerford et al., 2015).

The unit content concepts are illustrated in the following Table 1:

Table 1: *Concepts of Mental Health Nursing*

Theme	Concept	Meaning
Therapeutic alliance	Communication	Is broadening of the concepts of professional and therapeutic communication, partnership in care, patient centred care and most of all extension of the concept of therapeutic relationships, all of which are taught in the first year of the nursing degree.
	Consumer-driven	The least restrictive practice is a complex concept protected by legislation; the Mental Health Act, used in all Australian states and Territories. This practice includes the core concepts of self-determination and patient centred care to protect the rights of those with a mental illness or disorder. It also protects the rights of those with a mental illness or disorder and is underpinned by many of the other mental health concepts that are being examined in the unit in question.
	Recovery oriented	Recovery Approach to Mental Health Care utilises the interlinkage of core concepts where it expands on personalisation of care, meaningful empowerment, and therapeutic alliance. It varies from the traditional idea of recovery inasmuch as it does not necessarily involve the absence of illness or symptomology but is deemed a journey not a destination.

	Diagnostic assessment	Mental Health Assessment as opposed to a general health assessment, this core concept relies on the nurse's observational skills and a core knowledge of mental health symptomology for example; the difference between hallucination and illusion among others.
	Diagnostic classification	Include the interaction of various symptoms, observations and interpretation of mental illness and disorders. Although this is beyond the scope of practice of a generalist registered nurse to formally diagnose a client, it is important that they understand these classifications.
	Partnership	The extension of the concept of therapeutic communication and incorporates elements of therapeutic alliance, recovery approach to mental health, and least restrictive practice. At its heart, partnerships in mental health have the understanding that all elements of the mental health care system must work together and with the consumer rather than for the consumer.

Concepts of Mental Health Nursing is a unit offered twice a year, in the second and third terms with an enrolment of between 300-400 in Term 2 (July-October) and 100-200 in Term 3 (November-February). Students are generally from all parts of Australia. Previously the unit had a compulsory 2 day residential school but this has changed and there is no compulsory face to face component. This situation has contributed to the development of the videos and makes it asynchronous distance education or arguably true distance education as defined by Markel (1999).

Concept of Talk Show

Much of the work on distance education (DE) identified in the literature has become dated because modern technology and approaches fully utilise those advancements. The face of DE and the pedagogy has changed forever. This case study is about concept of the Talk Show which uses technology and popular media approaches familiar to students within the university's online learning management system. The development of a Talk Show concept developed over a number of years and started with a simple 2 to 5 minute content overview of the week ahead which the students themselves called the "Weekly News". In later iterations it was named the "iScott news". Further development and scholarship ensued and evolved into a Talk Show as the unit format. This format allowed students to feel more comfortable as they engaged with the content. The show's format follows the building of content around 'Concepts: Talking Mental Health' where the show's outline is an introduction, 'tell them what you are going to tell them', the body or the actual content and then a conclusion that outlines what you have told them. It is all very familiar in terms of 'old style' lecture but modernised for maximum listening and entertainment value in a less formal traditional university style of teaching.

It was hoped that the less formal presentation of the Show would assist with helping and supporting the off-campus learner understand the content and result in being less overwhelmed. It becomes a guide to assist in demonstrating a starting point within the content where they can hear and understand this knowledge and fill their identified learning gaps (over and over if they choose). This process is one of the goals of self-direct learning. As Conradie (2014) noted self-directed learning implies a shift of responsibility for learning planning from the educator to the learner, with the learner controlling the learning process. The Talk Show concept allows the learner to revisit the Show to shape their learning again and again in simple less formal presentational ways by using less formal language and narrative. This type of content presentation can reduce learner anxiety as opposed to the traditional ways. The format is informed by the theory on Andragogy by Knowles (1975) that allows for greater engagement and deep levels of understanding of the education material by providing the information in a familiar way the students are more likely to find it useful and stimulating. The format of the Show is a form of edutainment (Walldén & Soronen, 2004, which is discussed later).

The Show follow a standard structure of five segments, these are:

- o Introduction
- o HouseKeeping
- o Talking Assessment
- o Discussion around educational content
- o A sign off.

Each show is presented by the Unit coordinator and at least one Mental Health Nurse Lecturer with occasional special guests like the Head of Program or a generalist nursing lecturer. For these guests, there are no formal scripts as such but there was a weekly outline of the topics to be covered and they are given some pre-reading and a copy of the outline. The idea was to make the show as 'organic', natural and informal as possible (like Talk Show formats). This process allowed for the demonstration of social constructivist pedagogy even though viewed remotely the shows demonstrated Vygotsky's key proposition that knowledge is social constructed via interactions (Vygotsky, 1929).

As nurse educators, we believe it is important that the student gain knowledge over and above what is required to pass the unit of study because this may in fact have significant impact on the lives of those the student cares for in the future. In teaching our students in this way we are using the information technologies available today to educate and help them become critical thinkers and problem solvers so that they acquire skills that will optimize their success.(Kivunja, 2014). To further understand why this concept of Talk Show worked, a discussion the pedagogy and theory of approach is required.

Pedagogy and Theory of Approach

Online education began in the 1990s when the Internet became widely utilized (Ribsaman, 2000). Ribsaman (2000) implies that there is a difference between distance education and online education, and this difference lies in transmission and interaction. Distance education promotes the autonomy of learners, but online education actually involves students in active participation, socialization, and interaction (Ribsaman, 2000, Reese, 2015)

The term distance education became attached to this form of instruction as the availability and reliability of videoconferencing and interactive television began to emerge in the mid-1980s (Bernard et al., 2004). The premise, however, remains the same: two or more classes in different locations connected via some form of telecommunication technology and directed by one or more teachers. According to Mottet (1998) and Ostendorf (1997), this form of "emulated traditional classroom instruction" is the fastest growing form of DE.

Contrasted with this "group-based" form of instruction is "individually based" DE, in which students in remote locations work independently or in asynchronous groups, usually with the support of an instructor or tutor. We call this asynchronous because DE students are not synchronized with classroom students (Bernard et al., 2004). This is what is being done within Concepts of Mental Health Nursing. This also highlights some of the thought processes behind using a different approach to presented material.

Connectivist learning focuses on building and maintaining networked connections that are current and flexible enough to be applied to existing and emergent problems. Connectivism also assumes that information is plentiful and that the learner's role is not to memorize or even understand everything, but to have the capacity to find and apply knowledge when and where it is needed.

Kanuka and Anderson (1999) argued that in constructivist modes of distance education, "the educator is a guide, helper, and partner where the content is secondary to the learning process; the source of knowledge lies primarily in experiences (p.25)." Given this critical role, one can see the importance of teaching presence within constructivist models. Teaching presence extends beyond facilitation of learning to choosing and constructing educational interventions and to providing direct instruction when required (Anderson & Dron, 2011). As in constructivist learning, teaching presence is created by the building of learning paths and by design and support of interactions, such that learners make connections with existing and new knowledge resources. Unlike earlier pedagogies, the teacher is not solely responsible for defining, generating, or

assigning content. Rather, learners and teacher collaborate to create the content of study, and in the process re-create that content for future use by others (Anderson & Dron, 2011).

Aligning with Zhu's (2010) suggestion that along with active learning, new roles for teachers and students are necessary for the successful adaptation of online learning it was decided to trial a new approach using the Talk Show concept. This new approach draws on pedagogical influences including connectivism, social constructivism with elements of Andragogy and discovery learning built in, with the goal of increasing student engagement. This is widely considered a predictor of retention and success in tertiary education particularly (Kuh, 2009b).

As Concepts of Mental Health Nursing is a second-year unit, all the students come with a base level of knowledge, which suggests that an andragogical approach would be useful to be built on, therefore the Talk Show is built around taking these already learned elements and showing how they interact or relate to mental health nursing. It is also used to show students concepts they don't know. The idea suggested by Conradie (2014) that the online informal learning environment is a new frontier of learning which has resulted from an amalgamation of constructivism and cognitivism and has fundamentally changed the way learners interact and learn. This idea further supports the idea there is difference in distance and online education, as Ribsaman (2000) highlighted this difference where online education actively involves student participation and interaction.

Using Anderson & Dron's (2011) outline of a social constructivist pedagogy of distance education the Talk Show concepts started to take shape by

- building new knowledge as building upon the foundation of previous learning,
- building context in shaping learners' knowledge development,
- viewing learning as an active rather than passive process,
- using language and other social tools in constructing knowledge,

- developing metacognition and evaluation to develop learners' capacity to assess their own learning,

- developing the learning environment as learner-centred and stressing the importance of multiple perspectives, and

- ensuring knowledge that needed to be subject to social discussion, validation, and application in real world contexts (from Honebein, 1996; Jonassen, 1991; Kanuka & Anderson, 1999, Anderson & Dron, 2011).

The final thought surrounding the approach and pedagogy of the concept of Talk Show is about 'edutainment'. Walldén and Soronen (2004) describe in their discussion paper the concept of being entertained and learning at the same time. When reviewing this concept of edutainment, it became clear that the concept of a Talk Show fitted the idea of edutaining students who are familiar with like television programs. There is a fear amongst many academics that there is a shift from deep learning to surface learning utilizing the concept of edutainment. Given that Walldén and Soronen (2004) view learning as linear, we believe that our students' lives are so fragmented with multiple tensions and needs that the breaking down content into a Talk Show reflects the way learning is currently perceived. Interesting information (not necessarily funny) crafted together in a form that supplies bite size pieces of information is more palatable than many online units which use 'shovel ware' – traditional lecture, tutorial information 'shoveled' up into an online unit. It is interesting that informal learning is as powerful as formal learning. The Talk Show concept is entertaining, interesting and which utilizes a new form of pedagogy/andragogy - a digital social constructivist edutainment perspective!

Student Behavior and Engagement

Some research suggests that teacher perspectives and perceptions are also linked to values and culture, and that this could influence the way they view their roles. Cultural connections that are most compatible with online learning -are individualist cultures and constructivist learning theories (Zhu, 2010, p. 148 in (Reese, 2015). This thinking is consistent with Walldén and Soronen (2004) where students want informal learner-centric content to engage in. This informal approach can be viewed over and over until the student feels comfortable with the content. It has

been shown that the more often a student engages or spends time with presented course material such as the number of times they visit the online learning platform the greater the rate of student success so the question is how do you encourage the students to visit the Moodle site or even simply look at the presented material (Kivunja 2014).

Evaluation

The evaluation of the effectiveness or otherwise of presenting this information in a Talk Show format is very preliminary in nature. The evaluation of the unit from the traditional approach to the current Talk Show concept illustrates early success with the format and coverage. Student feedback is in several forms, the analytics of access to the unit site and the narrative feedback of satisfaction. An explanation of the evaluation is necessary.

Over the course of a term and as previously identified there is EasiConnect – a student analytic system. It is an algorithm built by the university to check on students as they access the learning management system (vis a vis the unit). At the commencement of term as the student enrolls in the unit this system pulls from student records, their number of attempts at the unit, their enrolment pattern, their Grade Point Average and ranks them according to level of risk of success and colour codes each student. As the student accesses the unit, the system logs the number of hits for each week and what they viewed. This type of analytic helps the teacher understand at a glance whether the student is engaging in the unit and how often. It does not measure the student's quality of the engagement process. The system also allows the teacher to 'nudge' them with merged emails to shepherd them on through the content. Research by the architects of this system found that if students did not engage within the first three weeks of term, the likelihood of success in this unit diminished with each week thereafter (Beer & Lawson 2016).

The authors found from the analytics from the past years of this unit that the students accessed the unit site on Moodle only those weeks where they were required to attend to their assessment.

Thus, the higher hits on the unit site were the two weeks leading up to the assessment submission. It demonstrated fragmented hits around those other weeks regarding the content. So, there was no consistent visitation by the students in the formal unit before the Talk Show concept was developed. Hence the weeks of most access were commencement Week 1 (to obtain assessment details), Weeks 5-7 and Weeks 11-12. Other weeks were skimmed or not accessed at all. Failure rate of students in this traditional unit of presentation was at 37%. Student numbers is this unit were 320 over two years. Student written feedback mirrored much of the course's many other units' assessment, difficulties of the content of the unit, format was dull, unengaging and uninteresting.

From 2016 term 2 to present day, the development of the Talk Show concept has emerged. It was developed over the past two years and has proven to not only deal with the negative feedback but also draw the student into the content through the Talk Show format. It presented a reality of life and learning that met the student's needs. It is acknowledged that the data is far from conclusive as there are a few variables yet to be fully researched and this data simply shows the number of times that the recording in question was clicked on for any purpose and it does not show or demonstrate actual full engagement with recording. However, it does suggest a significant trend in engagement with recordings, so much so that in 2016 for over half of the term a 100% of the student cohort clicked on the Talk Show demonstrating engagement higher than in the previous years. Below is Table 2 illustrating the week, the percentage number of accesses to each week's material.

Table 2: % of Student access per week.

Week	% of 2016 Cohort N= 358 – Talk Show access	% of 2014-2016 Cohort N=320 – Lectures only
1	243%	0
2	197%	0
3	210%	52%
4	140%	50%
5	105%	35%
6	90%	33%
7	109%	0
8	88%	21%
9	52%	0

10	41%	5%
12	37%	0

Figure 1 illustrates the accessibility (as watched or viewed) with the Talk Show and the original unit of lectures only. As seen the numbers of students watching and re-watching was observably higher than previous years.

Figure 1: Averaged watched between 2014 – 2016.
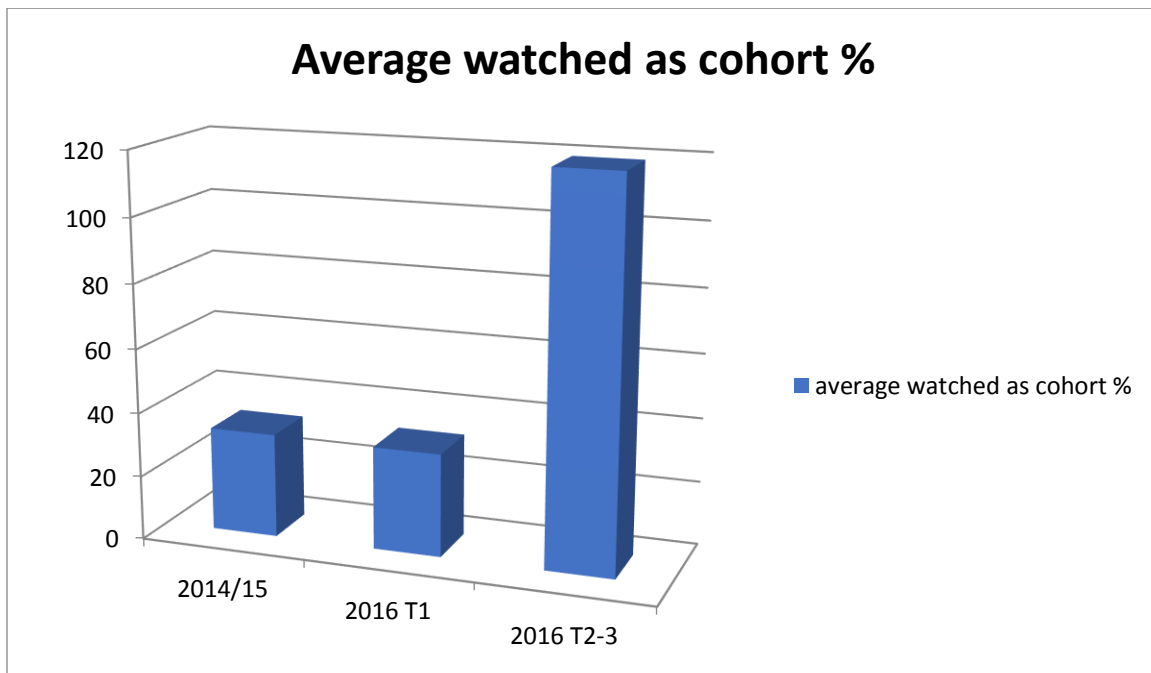
What was found with the new concept was less students failing (down 25%) and therefore less students repeating the unit. The other area of improvement was the students' responses to the new format. Table 3 is a sample of student responses about the Talk Show and what they enjoyed.

Table 3: Sample of Student Responses T2-3, 2016

Talk Show Format	
I enjoyed the way the units were displayed in a type of talk show getting different points of view from each speaker as they complimented each other but grew on each others point of view giving me the student not just one persons feedback but a range of information	I loved the whole course especially the "talk show" setting for a lecture. This kept me interested and was not boring at all.

The concepts series was an interesting way of presenting the course information	The course presentation captured my interest as it was different to other lecture presentations.
The concepts talks were a good idea.	
Constructing Knowledge	
I liked the talk show style videos each week and the Johnathon videos	I think the lectures that *the teacher* made. He was so chill yet serious and meaningful. I believe he got through to me in this way. He made it easy to understand in his lectures and his added humour only contributed to an enjoyable lecture.
I thought the videos were great and were a useful learning tool	I also like the TV type talk shows, they were easy to watch and I found it interesting that you had discussions with guests rather than a lecturer staring at the screen reading from notes
Supports the Principles of Andragogy	
I would love to thank *the Teacher* for such a well presented course, I very much enjoyed the videos and felt the way the course was conducted made me want to keep watching and wanting more. loved the whole presentation of the entire course, the support received was exceptional.	He is very engaging and I really enjoyed the talk back series with *Teacher 2* and *Teacher 3's* contributions
This is by far the best course yet! It is structured in a fun way that makes us want to listen and learn. Other subjects would benefit a lot if they engaged the students as *the Teacher* has done here. Thank you :)	I felt that the lecture videos were fantastic and really got me engaged in the content. It made the information interesting and I can honestly say that I enjoyed watching them
"I thoroughly enjoyed the format of the lectures, they were not only educational but also engaging and entertaining, making watching and learning an enjoyable experience	

Interestingly the qualitative data reflects the goals that were set that is consistent with the theoretical pedagogical approach when deciding to utilize the Talk Show approach, especially regarding elements such as engagement, construction of knowledge and andragogy.

Where to from Here?

From this case study, it can be shown that the initial concept of a Talk Show format in an online learning environment presents an interesting shift from the traditional 'chalk and talk' teaching of face to face to a dynamic concept that is both entertaining and enhances student learning. Students in the 21st Century have many competing tensions in their lives especially when they undertake studies in the distance education format. They want ready-made, easily understood learning formats that can give them understanding and can be revisited again and again. Using a digital social constructivist model of pedagogy/andragogy that is entertaining has been found to be highly successful and will continue within this Bachelor of Nursing course for years to come. Further work is needed on the evaluation and a thorough analysis of this type of learning-teaching approach. As a case study we merely wanted to illustrate the concept of the Talk Show and what the students had said was good about it. Our principal aim is to have well prepared students upon graduation who are workplace ready and safe health practitioners for the future. It is our hope that our students will, in the future as Registered Nurses, reflect on this unit and see it as useful in their professional lives.

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