
Increasing student retention: a 'study buddy support' scheme

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Abstract

This study aimed, firstly, to determine whether participation in a peer support scheme called Study Buddy Support (SBS) improves both retention and pass rates of 'at risk' students and, secondly, to examine the advantages of this model over hierarchical models, where senior students tutor junior years. If 'at risk' students withdraw from their studies, this is a loss to the University and to society especially considering there is both a national and worldwide shortage of nurses. It can also be a devastating loss to the students themselves.

Bachelor of Nursing and Midwifery students in a first year Bioscience course completed an assessment early in the semester. Based on their performance, 'at risk' students (Buddies) and high achievers (Buddy Leaders) were identified to participate in this scheme, either on campus (internal) or via Virtual Classrooms (VC) (external). Quantitative percentage failure rates for those 'not at risk', and those 'at risk' utilising and not utilising SBS were compared. Qualitative comments were examined.

Of those in the SBS scheme 72% passed, while only 49% of those not participating passed. Buddies identified the reassurance of not being alone, as well as a friendly, non-intimidating learning environment, as SBS positives. For Buddy Leaders, consolidation of learning, developing networks, improved team and leadership skills were positives. The current SBS scheme increased both retention and percentage pass rates and Buddies and Buddy Leaders alike suggested personal benefits for the initiative.

The networks developed in this SBS scheme can progress throughout the entire degree, but are lost in a hierarchical model as senior mentors graduate. This suggests that advantages are not just in improved retention and pass rates in first year, but may persist, further strengthening retention in later years.
