
Developing graduate attributes in an open online course

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Abstract

In an increasingly connected world where solving complex problems is not possible by solitary experts, educators and learners need opportunities to develop ways of thinking that allow them to engage with the dynamic and complex situations that arise in the world. The development of graduate attributes has been suggested as one way in which students can be prepared as active agents of social good. However, there are significant challenges with respect to developing these graduate attributes. This paper argues that the use of authentic learning in the design of open online courses may provide a structure for educators to develop generic graduate attributes.

The use of collaborative technologies that are informed by authentic learning enables new forms of communication that allow students to fully engage with the academic process in ways that are difficult to achieve with traditional, classroom-based teaching methods. This study made use of a blogging platform to create a collaborative open online course using principles of authentic task design in order to develop graduate attributes in undergraduate physiotherapy students.

The study used an interpretive, qualitative design that gathered data via focus group discussions. Transcripts were analysed inductively in order to determine categories, which were then analysed in relation to the graduate attributes of the institution in which the study took place. Student discussions suggested that they had developed at least some components of generic graduate attributes, including an approach to learning that was personal and internally motivated, the ability to consider alternative points of view and acknowledge different perspectives, the confidence to challenge knowledge and authority, and skills as empathic communicators.

Background

Higher education institutions from around the world are emphasising that their graduates must do more than simply reproduce the discipline-specific knowledge and skills that form the core of most university courses (Barrie, 2007). Higher education must encourage students to do more than simply accumulate facts and should aim to fulfill a need in society for spaces that encourage a deep and critical investigation into

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