

SHIFTING THE FOCUS: INCREASING ENGAGEMENT AND IMPROVING PERFORMANCE OF NURSING STUDENTS IN SCIENCE SUBJECTS USING FACE-TO-FACE WORKSHOPS TO REDUCE ANXIETY

Jennifer L. Cox^a, James W. Crane^b

Presenting author: Jennifer Cox (jcox@csu.edu.au)

^aFaculty of Science, Charles Sturt University, Orange NSW 2800, Australia

^bSchool of Biomedical Science, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst NSW 2795, Australia

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ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted that, as a group, undergraduate nursing students struggle with science subjects and this is often attributed to deficiencies in their background knowledge. However, nursing students also report feeling anxious about science subjects and this “science anxiety” could also influence student performance. In an attempt to deal with student’s science anxiety, for the past 2 years we have conducted voluntary, two-day “pre-science workshops” for nursing students. These face-to-face sessions are run 1-2 weeks before the first science subject and are aimed at reducing anxiety, increasing self-efficacy, and encouraging mastery-approach goals. When science content is presented it is to stimulate discussions about its relevance to the student’s chosen career, rather than to address deficiencies in their science knowledge. To date, 186 students have attended the workshops. In follow-up interviews students report that the sessions reduced their anxiety and enhanced their engagement with science subjects. In addition, the final grades of attendees, and their progression through the nursing course, were found to be significantly higher than non-attendees. These outcomes demonstrate that programs targeted towards reducing anxiety and increasing engagement with science can improve nursing students’ engagement with and performance in bioscience subjects.

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