Building supportive communities by promoting student-led transition teams

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Overview

• The TRANSIT tool – David Hope
  • background
  • application in practice

• Next steps: after identification – Avril Dewar
  • a systematic literature review
  • our own attempts at an intervention

• Promoting student-led transition teams – Chiara Ventre
  • their role
  • creating a sustainable intervention
The TRANSIT tool

David Hope
A University of Edinburgh project

• We would like to thank colleagues from:
  • Maths (Toby Bailey and Pamela Docherty)
  • Veterinary Sciences (Susan Rhind and Jessie Paterson)
  • Institute for Academic Development
  • Principal’s Teaching Award Scheme
Supporting students BEFORE they fail

• Indicators of being “at-risk” are present very early on in university life

• We identified a series of important markers in maths, medicine and veterinary sciences to support at-risk students before their first summative diet

• These included:
  • Is the student attending classes and tutorials?
  • Have they engaged with formative assessment?
  • Are they doing the necessary admin work?
  • Do they take several attempts to complete mandatory activities (hand washing, mini-tests)?
TRANSIT

• A tool to identify at-risk students
• Takes these measures and combines them into an “engagement score”
• Interventions for those at-risk can then be targeted
Guiding philosophy

• ONLY measures reasonable experts consider important are used (attendance/formative performance/professionalism)

• The model does not run blindly: staff are expected to view the output and where appropriate examine what is already being done for at-risk students

• Follow-up interventions must be sensitive and based on educational practice
Recent TRANSIT performance

• Average of all students = c.200
• Average of “at-risk” = c.151
• A majority of those who performed poorly at the first summative diet were identified ahead of time
TRANSIT and you

• TRANSIT is open-source and built in R
• We are looking to collaborate with other schools to promote early identification of at-risk students
• Email david.hope@ed.ac.uk for more information
• Or come along to our bring-and-brag stall later
Next steps: after identification

Avril Dewar
Knowing and doing

• Early identification of these students is an excellent first step

• BUT what do we do about it?
Systematic Review

• Previous systematic review of effectiveness of learning skills intervention on exam performance (Hattie et. al, 1996)
• Over 1500 articles searched, 789 relevant to remedial interventions
• 66 articles met the inclusion/exclusion criteria
• Quality of the studies is generally poor
  • Less than half had well performed analyses
  • Approximately 1/3 had unjustified conclusions
• Effect sizes are generally very small
Thematic Review

• Participants: the interventions target three main
  • disadvantaged students (social/cultural)
  • academically 'at-risk' and
  • failing/probationary students

• Measures of effect/success:
  • persistence/attrition rates
  • academic performance and
  • application of metacognitive skills following the intervention

• Type of intervention:
  • Academic
  • Pastoral
  • Metacognitive
Our interventions

• Running for two years across three schools
  • Mathematics (1\textsuperscript{st} year only)
  • Veterinary medicine
  • Medicine

• Content is designed with and delivered by near-peers

• Two to three hour session with no staff present

• Focus on application of metacognitive skills to course content

• New this year: threshold concepts
Results

• All students found the workshop enjoyable and many changed their study habits as a result of attending
• Attendees felt the project had been helpful and were not distressed by being identified as ‘at-risk’
• No significant differences were observed in immediate summative performance of attendees vs. non-attendees
• Subsequent analysis of later exam performance suggests no long-term improvement, however several of the students who failed the first diet of exams have withdrawn from their courses
Practical issues

• Timing of the workshop

• What content to include

• Training near-peer tutors

• Recruiting near-peers tutors
Take-home messages

• Identifying students who are ‘at-risk’ can be done sensitively
• Addressing metacognitive skill development alone does not seem to have significantly improved performance
• There is still work to be done to identify ‘at-risk’ students’ needs and how to address them
• The workshop and training materials/guidance notes will be available on a free-to-use basis at http://sefce.net/en-gb/page/transit
• Practical issues and aspects of near-peer tutors need to be addressed
Promoting Student-Led Transition Teams

Chiara Ventre
Student Perceptions of Transitioning

- Students had difficulty with knowing:
  - What to learn?
  - What depth to learn to?
  - What approach to take?

- There is a tendency to look to older students or peers for guidance and support, particularly during the revision period.

- With hindsight, many felt they would have approached that first semester differently.
The Role of a Student-Led Transition Team

• The concept of peer tutoring is well-established within the university with respect to learning course content

• Peer teachers can
  • deliver material in a more accessible form
  • are equipped to give practical advice based on recent experience

• A student-led transition team may be better equipped to anticipate difficulties faced by new students and guide them in developing effective strategies in time for their first set of exams
Practical Aspects

• **Aim:** to assist new students in the acquisition of the skills to be effective, independent learners

• **Target:** students identified as at risk of failure

• **Intervention:** session(s) targeted at study skills, revision tactics and other key issues common amongst new students

• **Tutors:** year 3-5 students, ideally with a range of transition experiences and learning styles
Addressing Pitfalls

• Peer tutors may fall into the trap of simply telling students what they “should” learn

• We would aim to avoid this by:
  • Making our aim clear – to facilitate effective independent learning
  • Training materials focussing on learning techniques
  • Pairing new teachers with experienced role models
Creating a Sustainable Intervention

• Previous interventions have failed as the interested students graduated

• Sustainability requires
  • Continuous recruitment of year 3 (and 4) students
  • Training over several years
  • 5th year students to pass on experience to new peer teachers

• Incentive
  • Appeal to those interested in peer support and education
  • Long-term: competitive programme with teaching accreditation awarded on completion
Helping Everyone

• Even those students not identified as at risk of failure may appreciate some help

• Resources prevent delivery of in-depth interventions to every new student

• A poster with general advice from more experienced students might help point students in the right direction