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An illuminative evaluation of a prosthodontic curriculum.

Moipolai, Pusetso Dineo

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ABSTRACT

An illuminative evaluation of the final year prosthodontic component of the Oral Health Science curriculum (OHSC 501 Component 1) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa was conducted. This evaluation method was employed to illustrate how an evaluation strategy was used to assess classroom practices following institutional curriculum reform. The aim was to use a qualitative evaluation process to assess the impact of the curriculum change at classroom level and to evaluate how a department had reformed its' teaching and learning strategies within the hybrid problem based learning curriculum that had been implemented. Additionally, it was to evaluate how this curriculum operated in its own terms. From July through October 2007 small group teaching involving problem based learning, led by two faculty from the department of prosthodontics were observed. Six two hour long small group sessions (equivalent to twelve forty minute lessons), were observed and they revealed a variety of pedagogic strategies utilised. The plan, as outlined in the instructional system was held up against the reality through observations of what happened in the classroom. By and large the findings illustrate that much of what was planned was realised, with the more experienced staff member teaching more or less to the plan. However, from the themes that were inductively derived from analysis of the data, it was clear that integration of content knowledge and critical thinking necessary to assist in the comprehensive management of dental patients was not as robust as would be expected from the students at this level during their training. As part of the objectives of the curriculum innovation instituted, content knowledge integration and critical thinking skills are key to the success of the innovation and employing illuminative evaluation methodology afforded the opportunity to delve deeper into these. This finding illustrates the importance of using qualitative evaluation approaches as a mechanism to assess curriculum change efforts.

Keywords: Illuminative evaluation, educational evaluation, instructional system, learning milieu, prosthodontics, oral health education, health education, problem based learning, small group teaching.