

Exploring how students' reflections on their mistakes facilitates learning in a second year kinesiology class

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ABSTRACT: “Failure is not mere failure. It is instructive. The person who really thinks learns quite as much from his failures as from his successes” (Dewey 1933).

Kinesiology is a skills based discipline and regular practice is essential to gaining understanding of using kinesiology. Making mistakes is inevitable in this process and students must learn to navigate these issues by developing grit (Hoerr 2013). In this six month study during 2016/2017 I explored how creating a classroom culture and a student mindset of embracing mistakes in case study practice facilitated student learning and understanding. Using an inquiry model advocated by Bass (1999) students presented one problematic case study orally in class each month and viewed mistakes as problems to be investigated rather than errors. These problems were analysed as either fallibility of self or fallibility of the system (Gawande 2012). Participants were adult, part-time, second year students in the Wellness Kinesiology Stress Release classes.

I used an action research methodology, collecting qualitative data from audio taped oral presentations, classroom assessment techniques and teacher reflective notes. The findings revealed that students found the monthly presentations beneficial in improving their understanding of kinesiology but most found they learned more from the peer presentations than from their own report. It started a conversation, which over time developed into deeper levels of inquiry, as the students explored beyond their mistakes to key purpose questions. The teacher noted that students' behaviour changed both individually and as a group, from avoiding mistakes to owning and investigating problems, which improved the understanding of the entire class.

A limitation of the study is that the feedback gathered refers to reflection on action and future studies could identify ways of capturing reflection in action (Schön 1995). Another limitation is the small class size but the learning potential of mistakes could be investigated for larger classes during tutorial sessions.

The study concluded that embracing mistakes by reflecting on them, making them visible and open to peer review, highlighted the student voice and improved student engagement in their own learning.

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