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School of Nursing

Meaningful and Engaging Teaching in Nursing Education

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ABSTRACT

In practice disciplines such as nursing it is relatively common for students to complain about curriculum content not being directly applicable to what the student perceives to be the reality of practice (Diekelmann, 2004).

A systematic literature search showed scant reference to ‘meaningful and/or engaging teaching’ in nursing education and there is no agreed terminology used to express these concepts or to facilitate finding material on them. However, there is an international interest in the need for educators to move away from the more traditional passive, didactic approaches to teaching.

An exploratory qualitative study was undertaken with the aim of establishing ‘how nurse educators seek to make their teaching meaningful and engaging for students’. Thirteen nurse educators were interviewed. Having reached a common understanding of terminology, they were then asked to talk about how they, as nurse educators, seek to make their teaching meaningful and engaging, and why they do it. Finally, they were asked to identify how they know that such techniques work.

Data was collected via audio-recording of the interviews. Common terminology was identified and techniques seen to be effective for maximising the meaningfulness and engagement of teaching/learning, for students, were categorised thematically *post facto*.

The key findings of the research identified by the participants in the study reported a clear difference between the two terms ‘meaningful teaching’ and ‘engaging teaching’. The former was perceived as an attempt to make teaching relevant and the latter an attempt to capture student interest and curiosity. This clarity of distinction was not articulated in the literature sourced and leads to an identified need for clearer definitions of ‘meaningful’ and ‘engaging’ teaching.

Participants clearly attempted to make their teaching meaningful through the use of a variety of teaching strategies, including the use of clinical simulation, and by being clinically credible. Participants also employed a variety of teaching techniques, including the use of games and art as well as classroom management techniques, in an attempt to engage students.

The findings from this study regarding nurse educators' attempts to make content relevant and interesting are mirrored in the literature, in that typically papers are mostly poorly evaluated, small-scale projects, undertaken in apparent ignorance of other work that has been done in the area. Little has also been done in relation to examining the views of students on their experiences of being taught. This exposes a significant gap in our knowledge about what kind of teaching students prefer and, perhaps more importantly, what approaches to teaching are actually 'effective'. Thus, further work needs to be done regarding the evidence-base for nurse education in terms of ascertaining 'what actually works?' from the nursing students' perspective.

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‘How do you seek to make your teaching meaningful and engaging to nursing students?’

It is important that any ‘tricks of the trade’ to be subsequently shared with others, are actually evidence-based. There was thus an imperative to ascertain the basis upon which the nurse educators predicated their practices and how they knew them to be effective, hence interviewees were not only asked, ‘What do you do?’ but also, ‘How do you know you are effective?’

1.3 Significance of the study

I intend to replicate this approach to exploring ‘tricks of the trade’ in other areas of educational practice once this project is ended. Over time, I would like to be at the heart of the generation of some sort of database of ‘effective approaches to teaching in nursing’ somewhat akin to the ‘clinical effectiveness’ databases which exist in various health disciplines. This will only be possible if teachers expose their practices to rigorous scrutiny and evaluation. The present study can thus be seen as the first step on that journey. This project therefore has the attributes of a significant study in its own right (in establishing the ways in which a group of nurse educators approach making their teaching meaningful and/or engaging for students and whether such approaches are effective); as well as potentially being an important step within a longer journey towards ‘evidence-based teaching in nurse education’.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is approached in two parts the first part considers an earlier analysis of the literature followed by a more contemporary analysis later in the chapter.

Nurse educators share the view that many students are often only really willing to engage with learning about topics if they can see the implications of and/or the application to their practice and this is only achieved if nurse educators teach content in ways that link theory to practice. This literature review is aimed at identifying what is already known about the most effective ways to teach nursing students in meaningful and engaging ways. As a precursor to further study, it is part of a longer term plan to attempt to access the store of knowledge and expertise held by experienced nurse educators before they retire and it is lost forever so that insights can be shared, perhaps in an educational format, for less experienced nurse educators.

2.2 Search strategy

The ERIC (educational content), PROQUEST (multi-disciplinary content) and CINAHL (nursing/health content) databases were interrogated using the following search terms—meaning*, AND/OR engag*, AND nurs* student*. Truncation was applied to meaning* to capture ‘meaning’ and ‘meaningful’. It was also applied to engag* to capture ‘engaging’ and ‘engagement’ and it was applied to nurs* to capture ‘nursing’, ‘nurse’ and ‘nurses’. The initial search yielded 1798 papers; this was limited to 205 by applying review or scholarly articles only, published within the last ten years (2002-2012). Further simple elimination took place based on skim reading the abstracts to see which were germane to the topic in hand. Several articles focused on teaching postgraduate students, clinically-based education, assessment or interdisciplinary education. These were eliminated as they were not about undergraduate nurse education per se. There were many others in which the term ‘meaningful’ or ‘engaging’ appeared in the abstract but not in ways relevant to the topic on reading the paper. This process allowed the capture of relevant papers that

- Transcripts were compared with notes made during the interviews and with the summaries written immediately after the interviews to compare whether the notes and summaries reflected patterns of data identified through reading the transcripts several times.
- The transcripts were then individually analysed using a Reading Frame tool created by Moss and Walsh (2004) which is outlined below in Table 1. Such a Reading Frame helps give structure to the qualitative researchers' analysis by eliciting information/asking a series of questions. These questions/this information includes a consideration of: what the researcher's general impressions of the interview are; what was gained in the interview in relation to the research; a summary of the annotation of the transcript and what the transcript reveals; what information was gained in relation to the questions posed; and identification of non-conforming perspectives within the interview. It thus assisted in the formal identification of broad themes and subthemes by encouraging the researcher to approach the data systematically and consistently. The identification of these broad themes and subthemes and a consideration of possible relationships between them was an iterative process which was constantly reviewed by the researcher and overseen by the supervisors (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This input also provided an important element of enhancing data reliability. Thus, refinement of the themes and the interpretation of the data were activities overseen by third parties—the supervisors.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D

