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Review

Conceptualisations and perceptions of the nurse preceptor's role: A scoping review☆

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SUMMARY

Objectives: The practice of nursing is a substantially different undertaking to supervising nursing students. A clear conceptualisation of the preceptor role reveals its scope, expectations and responsibilities. The aim of this scoping review is to investigate what is known in the pertinent literature about preceptors' experiences of their supervision practices and their perceptions of what makes a good workplace environment that enables good preceptorship and is conducive to student learning.
Design and Data Sources: The literature scoping review design by Arksey and O'Malley was adopted for this literature review study because it enables researchers to chart, gather and summarise known literature on a given topic. Databases searched included Scopus, Ebsco, Informit and VOCEDplus.
Review Method: To answer our research question *what is known about how undergraduate nursing student preceptors' supervision practices are conceptualised and perceived* we posed four analysis questions to our literature set: (1) How do the articles conceptualise preceptorship? (2) What pedagogical frameworks are used to understand preceptorship? (3) What are the messages for preceptorship practices? (4) What are the recommendations for future research?
Results: A total of 25 articles were identified as eligible for this study. The results are ordered into four sections: theoretical conceptualisations of the preceptorship role, pedagogical framework, messages about preceptoring and recommendations for further research.
Conclusion: The discourse of preceptorship is not underpinned by a strong theoretical and pedagogical base. The role of preceptors has not been expanded to include theoretical perspectives from socio-cultural practice and social learning paradigms.

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Introduction

In this article, we present our findings from a scoping review of the literature on conceptualisations and perceptions of nurse preceptors' supervision practices. Understanding how the preceptor role is conceptualised and perceived reveals assumptions of its scope and explains how nurse preceptors are supported to supervise students and what type of workplace cultures and learning environments are perceived to be conducive to aid or challenge this process. Many different definitions, roles and understandings are used for the term preceptor such as mentor, supervisor or educator (Billay and Yonge, 2004; McCarthy and Murphy, 2010). For the purpose of our review, we defined preceptors as nurses employed within a health care agency who mentor, monitor, teach, provide feedback and assess undergraduate nursing students in their workplace.

Preceptors are primarily practitioners and only secondarily educators (Yonge, 2012). Their educational role is typically seen as an add-on to their primary responsibilities for client service provision (Yorke, 2011). The practice of nursing is quite a different undertaking to supervising nursing students. The tension between being a practitioner and a preceptor can be conflated by an unsupportive workplace learning environment (Edwards, 2011; Trede et al., 2014; Yorke, 2011). Insufficient role clarity and recognition in organisations can lead to misunderstandings about what is and what can be expected from preceptors. Poor recognition of the preceptor role and its potential benefit to organisations is compounded by a perception that students are a risk to patient safety and error prevention, which can lead to unwillingness to supervise students (Luhanga, Yonge, and Myrick, 2008; Sanderson and Lea, 2012).

While we recognise that preceptoring is a personally-owned practice, we also recognise that preceptors do not conduct this role

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single-handedly. We agree with Eta et al. (2011) and Siggins Miller Consultants (2012) who assert that preceptors' supervision practices are also influenced by organisational workplace structures and unique workplace cultures, as well as managers, peers and other health care professionals. More specifically, the complex interrelationship between workplace learning environments, student supervision practices and student learning has been overlooked despite a wide acceptance that workplace learning environments shape supervision practices (Billett, 2001). There is a need to reconceptualise approaches of preceptorship in terms of moving away from a focus on individual preceptor accountability to a focus on a collective responsibility for creating conducive workplace environments for student learning. This call means moving away from a narrow definition of preceptorship as an isolated and individualised, technical, competence-focused practice, towards a definition of preceptorship as a socio-cultural practice that occurs between people and in specific workplaces (Kemmis and Trede, 2010). Adopting this conceptualisation means that good preceptorship is a reciprocal, agentic and shared responsibility which is also shaped by collective and organisational influences. Understanding how the preceptor role is conceptualised and perceived reveals the theoretical underpinnings, scope and recognition assigned to this role. The following review is limited to the nursing literature and our search design within it.

The Review

Aim

The aim of this scoping review was to investigate what is known in the pertinent literature about preceptors' experiences of their supervision practices and their perceptions of what makes a good workplace environment that enables good preceptorship and is conducive to student learning.

Review Question

Arksey and O'Malley (2005, p. 23) suggest that a generalist question and key terms are imperative to "generate breadth of coverage". As the aim of this review was to portray an extensive scope of literature pertaining to the perceptions of preceptors of nursing students, the following research question guided this review: What is known about how undergraduate nursing student preceptors' supervision practices are conceptualised and perceived from the perspective of the preceptor and the scholar who research preceptorship? We came to ask this key review question based on our expansive combined scholarly practice in workplace learning where we found limited focus on preceptors' own perceptions of their supervision practices.

Design

Scoping reviews enable researchers to chart, gather and summarise known literature on a given topic. While systematic reviews tend to focus on assessing the quality of research (O'Malley and Croucher, 2005), scoping reviews, in comparison, aim to identify existing literature on a topic (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). This includes different types of study designs. We adopted Arksey and O'Malley's methodological framework and utilised their five stage approach for this study: (1) isolating the research question; (2) designing identification of applicable studies; (3) developing a search method to select studies; (4) mapping the data; and (5) gathering, summarising and reporting results. Stages one to three are discussed in this section and stages four and five in the results section.

Search Methods

When conducting a scoping review it is important for researchers to balance thoroughness with time and cost feasibilities. If clear criteria are established, these act as controlling and limiting factors and allow for this balance to be achieved (Kenny et al., 2013). In this study, key search terms were identified and the following Boolean search strings developed: supervisor* AND student* (nurs*); educator* AND student* (nurs*); preceptor* AND student* (nurs*). The use of truncated words and wild cards (in this instance *) allowed an expansion of the search to include all terms with the same root word.

An initial search of Google Scholar was conducted to establish the probable size and applicability of key terms. However, due to this search strategy not being replicable the results were not included in our findings (Giustini and Boulos, 2013). A search of the Cochrane Library indicated no registered Cochrane reviews. Databases searched included Scopus, Ebsco, Informit and VOCEDplus.

All potentially relevant studies were scrutinised against prespecified inclusion and exclusion criteria to confirm eligibility in and contribution to our study, see Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Search Outcomes

Initially a total of 71 articles were identified using the above mentioned search design and criteria. The title, abstract and keywords of these articles were scrutinised against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, with all three researchers agreeing and confirming the elimination of irrelevant studies. This process left a total 65 articles, which were divided amongst the researchers. Each researcher read their assigned articles and, for each article, completed a scoping table with information relevant to the overarching research questions. Following this, the researchers had three meetings to discuss all of the articles and their relevance to the research questions and to meeting the inclusion criteria. As a result of critical discussions amongst the three researchers 40 further articles were excluded from the review. Close reading revealed that the study focus and/or type of preceptor did not meet our inclusion criteria. For example, Lindquist et al. (2012) were excluded as the clinical educators in the study were employed by the university, while Zahner (2006) was excluded as the study focused on a programme evaluation and included no information about the supervisors' perception of their own practices. Overall, 25 studies met all inclusion criteria and included research pertaining to nursing preceptorship in countries as varied as Australia, Botswana, Cameroon, Canada, Finland, Honduras, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States, see Table 2 Overview of Included Research Articles. A number of articles were written by the same authors, reducing research of nursing

Table 1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time period	January 2004 and August 2014	Before January 2004 and after August 2014
Type of article	Original research article published in a peer reviewed journal	Any publication that was not original research, peer-reviewed, journal article and/or unpublished. For example, PhD theses, books, book chapters and reports
Study focus	Preceptorship of nursing students involved in undergraduate professional education for a registered nursing qualification Preceptors' experiences and perceptions of their supervision practices	No reference was made to nursing, professional entry level or the research article described a needs assessment or a programme evaluation
Type of preceptor	Employed within the healthcare system	Employed by universities

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