Digital storytelling in clinical replacement studies: Nursing students' experiences

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A B S T R A C T

Background: Reflection through shared storytelling is an established and well-documented way of learning in clinical placement studies in nursing education. Digital development has provided storytelling activities with increased possibilities.

Aim: The aim of this study was to explore nursing students' experiences with student-created digital storytelling as a tool for reflection during clinical placement studies.

Methods: The study employed an explorative qualitative design. Five semi-structured focus group interviews with students (=37) from two different nursing education institutions in Norway were conducted during fall 2016 and spring 2017.

Findings: The findings showed that the use of the student-created digital storytelling was a trigger for engagement, promoted feelings of ownership of the reflection, and resulted in a deeper understanding. However, the study also revealed that the storyteller might be placed in a vulnerable position.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice: Student-created digital storytelling seems to be valuable for processes of reflection in clinical placement studies in nursing education. However, one should be aware of aspects concerning the vulnerable role of the storyteller as sharing multimedia technology messages with peer students seems to make students feel more exposed.

1. Introduction

Reflection is an established and well-documented educational strategy for learning through practice (Andrews, 1996; Asselin and Fain, 2013; Asselin et al., 2013; Boud et al., 1985; Kim, 1999; Perry, 2000; Schön, 1987). In particular, it is an important learning approach in clinical placement studies in nursing which can be experienced as challenging due to the complexity in learning situations (Andrews et al., 2006; Arieli, 2013; Farkhondeh and Masoumi, 2005; McGarry et al., 2009). An important goal in reflective thinking is bringing focus to an indeterminate situation by gaining clarity and more fully experiencing what has happened (Dewey, 1997).

Storytelling has been shown to promote deep learning by encouraging reflection on practice; it is widely recognized in the literature as a powerful educational tool in higher education (Haigh and Hardy, 2011; Kirk and Pitches, 2013; McDrury and Alterio, 2002). However, digital development and the availability of digital devices have provided storytelling with new possibilities and have been increasingly reported

in higher education (Kearney, 2011; Matthews, 2014; Ohler, 2006; Stacey and Hardy, 2011; Tendero, 2006) Digital storytelling is the idea of telling a story, often with strong emotional content, by using a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio, music, video, and the voice of the narrator (Kearney, 2011). An important reported benefit of digital storytelling is the way it can provide authentic learning experiences, thereby enhancing professional identity development and critical thinking (Kearney, 2011; Ohler, 2006; Tendero, 2006).

According to Christiansen (2011) and Stacey and Hardy (2011), digital stories made for educational purposes are highly valued among nursing students. Christiansen (2011) pointed out the way digital patient stories can enhance transformational learning whereas Stacey and Hardy (2011) found that digital stories made by recently graduated nurses provided nursing students with valuable insights into what to expect when entering clinical practice. In a recent study by Wood and Paliadelis (2016), the students made the digital stories themselves to promote reflections in clinical placement studies. Although the analysis

of story content showed highly relevant educational aspects, such as the complexity of clinical situations (Wood and Paliadelis, 2016), little is known about nursing students experiences with the digital storytelling, as research in this area is scarce. Student-created digital storytelling might be accompanied by pedagogical challenges as the storytelling tasks are typically open-ended and ill defined, thereby making them challenging for students who may be familiar with more traditional written tasks (Kearney, 2011).

In order to develop and implement student-created digital storytelling in strategies of learning in the best pedagogical manner, more knowledge is needed regarding nursing students' experiences. Hence, the aim of this study was to explore students' experiences with student-created digital storytelling in relation to reflection activities during nursing educational clinical placement studies.

2. Study Context

The theoretical perspective in this study is social-cultural learning, which contains a basic assumption that learning and cognitive development knowledge are constructed through interaction among participants in social practices—namely, by sharing reflections in clinical placement (Vygotsky and Kozulin, 1986). The student-created digital storytelling tool was used in the context of a clinical placement reflection program for first- and third-year students in two nursing bachelor's degree programs in Norway. The program was part of the scheduled learning activities during the placement periods. However, the students had the opportunity to use traditional written reflection tasks, if preferred.

The program was based on principles of social cultural learning and reflective thinking and was inspired by the model from the Story Centre in Berkeley, California (Lambert, 2013) and experiences from other Norwegian educational fields (Holte and Jamissen, 2015). At the start of the clinical placement period, the students were asked to think about and select an experience from their first weeks in practice that they perceived to be valuable for further reflection. Approximately 2 to 3 weeks into their placement period, the students shared their preliminary stories with 4 to 10 peer students in a story-circle during a workshop. The aim of the story-circle was to support and provide new perspectives for framing the experience into a story. Peer students were responsible for the feedback. The supervisor facilitated the session while also providing an overall ethical standard responsibility for the stories so that the content would not be of harm to any of the involved participants. The next step was a technical session including aspects concerning the production of the digital story as well as key points such as copyright and ethical aspects.

At the end of the clinical placement period, students gathered for reflection sessions in groups of 4 to 10 peer students, together with their clinical supervisor. In these sessions, the finished digital stories were shared and reflected upon. Fig. 1 shows the overview of the program structure.

3. Methodology

An explorative qualitative design was chosen to capture the rich descriptions of the students' experiences (Polit and Beck, 2012). Five semi-structured focus group interviews with students from the two different nursing education institutions in Norway constituted the source of data. An interview guide was developed based on a non-participant observation from a pilot digital story reflection session conducted prior to the study. The data were collected over two periods, fall 2016 and spring 2017, at the end of students' placement period. As the researchers were working in the institutions, we reduced the risk of mixing our roles as teachers and researchers by allowing interviews to be conducted only when researchers were not involved in students' clinical placement studies.

3.1. Participants

Students at four different wards were invited by their supervisor to participate in the study prior to their placement period. A total of 37 nursing students agreed to participate. Seventeen of the nursing students were first-year students in clinical placement studies in the elderly home care setting, and 20 were third-year nurse students in their surgical or medical clinical placement at a Norwegian university hospital.

4. Ethical Considerations

According to Norwegian law, approval from an ethics committee was not required for this study. Approval to carry out the study was obtained from the head of both institutions. All participants were informed about anonymity, confidentiality, publication, audiotaping of the focus group interviews, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. No personal identifiable data were collected. Both written and verbal information was provided. All participants signed letters of consent prior to the study. Students were assured that their stories would not be shared outside the reflection group.

5. Data Collection

Five focus group interviews were conducted after the students finished their clinical placement periods. The focus groups included from four to nine students. Two researchers conducted each focus group interview and moderated the discussions by means of the semi-structured interview guide. In focus group interviews, it is essential that two people moderate the discussions (Polit and Beck, 2012).

The focus group interviews started with a brief introduction of the scope of the study before all participants were introduced. The researchers also provided an oral explanation of the purpose of the study, practicalities, and confidentiality, meaning that no information would
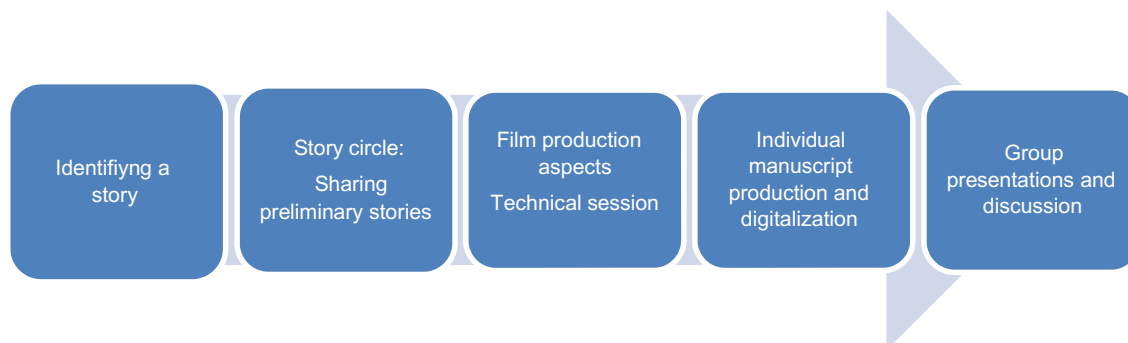

| Identifiyng a story | Story circle: Sharing preliminary stories | Film production aspects Technical session | Individual manuscript production and digitalization | Group presentations and discussion |

Fig. 1. Overview of the structure of the program.