

EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING DEVELOPMENT ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF NURSING EDUCATION

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Because nursing care in health care settings becomes more complex, nurses are called upon to work effectively with other health care providers to deliver high-quality evidence-based care. To do so in a cost effective and efficient manner requires the development of effective oral and written communication skills in nurses. One form of written communication is scholarly writing. Scholarly writing is defined by the authors as writing that is specialized in nursing, communicates original thought, includes support from a body of literature, contains formal language consistent with the discipline of nursing, and is formatted in a manner consistent with peer-review publications. Faculty who facilitate the development of these skills face inconsistencies in students' writing ability and development across programs and levels of education. Nurse educators need to understand how to develop these communication skills for students enrolled at various educational levels and to teach students how to share information in a scholarly way. (Index words: Scholarly writing development; Nursing education; Evidence-based practice) J Prof Nurs 30:341–346, 2014. © 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE OUTCOMES OF nursing education are informed by three documents from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) including *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* (2008), *The Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing* (2011), and *The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice* (2006). These *Essentials* guide curriculum developments, explicate outcomes for program graduates, and provide some insight into the development of communication and scholarly writing skills. As evidenced in the sequential nature of these documents, students progressing through increasing levels of education are expected to develop more sophisticated communication skills. The baccalaureate *Essentials* (AACN, 2008) provide a

limited discussion of communication skills needed by baccalaureate-prepared graduates and focuses primarily on dissemination and interprofessional collaboration. Building upon these skills, *The Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing* (AACN, 2011) suggest translating and integrating scholarship into practice by communicating the scholarly nature of practice decisions with health professionals. This translation of scholarship into practice requires critical analysis and thought while considering the credibility and relevance of information. Doctoral program graduates are expected to disseminate evidence-based findings and use effective communication and collaboration skills.

These documents, although helpful in identifying components of communication at the various educational levels and guiding communication skill development from a broad perspective, do not specifically address the learning activities or strategies that could be incorporated to ensure the development of the scholarly writing skills of the graduates. It is apparent that more detailed guidance would be beneficial to nursing faculty teaching at each level of nursing education. The purpose of this article is to propose an evidence-based set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) that can be used to guide the development of scholarly writing communication skills

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across the baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral levels of nursing education. Consistent use of the KSAs has the potential to prepare nursing graduates who are prepared to pursue advanced levels of education, to advance the discipline of nursing, and to safely function in today's complex health environment.

Literature Review

The literature suggests research findings and best practices for nursing faculty to incorporate into their curricula when teaching scholarly writing to nursing students. Specific recommendations for faculty teaching in each level of nursing education have been shared through a variety of articles discussing writing in nursing education. However, little research-based data are offered about methods that are most effective in each level of nursing programs. Similarly, there was a paucity of literature suggesting which strategies are needed to develop scholarly writing skills that should be employed at each level of nursing education in order to create a comprehensive program of writing development. The following review examines the nursing literature about how to teach students to write in a scholarly manner across baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral-level nursing education. Although the literature from other disciplines such as education and business was consulted, the focus of the review was to identify research and best practices in nursing education.

Baccalaureate Nursing Education

There are a number of articles that discuss writing development at the baccalaureate level. Formal, focused writing programs have been utilized and evaluated for use with undergraduate nursing students (Bickes & Schim, 2010; Cowles, Strickland, & Rodgers, 2001; Luthy, Peterson, Lassetter, & Callister, 2009; McMillen & Raines, 2011). Writing projects and programs varied in design according to length and complexity. McMillen and Raines (2011) described a single assignment given to 46 undergraduate nursing students in their quantitative, descriptive study. Their work involved multiple steps for assignment completion including utilizing the resources at the campus writing center and the library, using peer review for revision and evaluation, and completing a required tutorial. Following completion of the assignment, faculty reported that the single writing assignment incorporating multiple activities for completion was effective in improving writing skills. Students' perceptions were measured on a 4-point Likert scale, and results demonstrated that students agreed or strongly agreed that writing center support, library support, and peer review were helpful in developing writing skills and contributed to learning.

Other approaches to writing development have also been used at the baccalaureate level. To provide writing support, writing across the curriculum, writing in the disciplines, and writing to learn strategies have been used with nursing students across all courses in undergraduate nursing programs (Cowles et al., 2001; Luthy et al.,

2009). Strategies included student writing workshops, use of peer review, use of structured checklists for writing goal attainment, and use of discipline-specific writing practices such as use of American Psychological Association (APA) formatting. These multifaceted and complex programs were up to 2 years in length, involved collaboration with other disciplines, and were reported by the authors to be challenging yet effective in improving writing at the undergraduate level. Focused, shorter term writing programs using workshops have also been used to develop student writing skills. These workshops included use of peer review, faculty feedback, and evaluation rubrics, which clearly articulate writing expectations (Bickes & Schim, 2010). Similar to what has been described in other articles discussing strategies used to develop nursing student writing, Troxler, Vann, and Oermann (2011) identified five strategies in their integrative review of the literature that were found to be effective in writing development. These strategies, found in nine articles which met the inclusion criteria for their search, included short writing assignments, sequential assignments, use of peer and faculty review, faculty workshops, and sharing of clear examples and subsequent discussion of scholarly work and assignment rubrics. As evident from the literature, faculty have tried various strategies for developing undergraduate writing skills. However, the strategies have not been consistently implemented and evaluated across programs.

In one of the few qualitative studies specific to writing development in undergraduate students, Whitehead (2002) found that there was little facilitation of writing skills for 10 preregistration nursing students in the United Kingdom. Students struggled to recognize the connection between scholarly writing and writing seen in clinical practice. Whitehead suggested that nurse educators reexamine teaching methods used to develop writing skills and reform past methods. Specific recommendations for faculty were not offered. The study findings demonstrated that there was a need for greater focus and support for writing throughout the various levels of nursing education and that strategies for writing development need to be a focused effort in order to be recognized and effective. Both quantitative and qualitative study findings support the need for writing support for undergraduate nursing students.

Master's Nursing Education

Structured, formal approaches to teach writing have also been used for nursing students in master's programs. In two examples, the authors described best practices that involved breaking writing into pieces and parts (Cone & Dover, 2012; Diehl, 2009). A one-credit course was created for graduate students, initially offered to 30 students in a traditional classroom setting and then eventually in an on-line delivery format, and addressed the writing process, priorities, styles, and strategies needed for effective writing. Some specific strategies that were reported to be effective by students included writing a critique of the literature and narrowing a topic

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