



Issues for debate

Discussion paper: Conceptual comparison of student and therapeutic engagement



Robyn Bowcock^{*}, Kath Peters¹

Western Sydney University Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Nurses as faculty teaching undergraduate students, require a diversity of skills to ensure that students engage in achieving the desired qualification. While it is anticipated that students have a degree of motivation to reach this goal, their varied backgrounds often mean they require additional support to assist them to engage with the learning process. It is anticipated that the tertiary institution or learning environment will have strategies to support the student from a broader perspective, but much of the engagement relies on the skill and knowledge of the nurse faculty.

This discussion paper aims to promote an understanding of student engagement and argues that using aspects of therapeutic engagement can support nurse faculty to enhance the students' learning experience. Key concepts from both student and therapeutic engagement will be reviewed to provide implications, particularly for novice nurse faculty.

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Introduction

Nursing faculty teaching undergraduate courses are often drawn from clinical areas (Peters et al., 2011; Cleary et al., 2011). Novice nursing faculty provide clinical currency to support students' learning (Peters et al., 2011) but may have difficulty navigating a new work environment, where challenges in teaching student nurses extend beyond relevant clinical knowledge and currency (Cleary et al., 2011). Faculty require skills in facilitating students' engagement in knowledge acquisition to be safe practitioners. Engagement from a student perspective pertains to formal or informal processes. These processes also apply to therapeutic engagement and are seen as collaborative interactions that are based on a trusting connection and shared understanding (Cleary and Horsfall, 2010). Novice faculty can draw on clinical skills and dimensions of self to enhance the qualities and attributes required for student engagement (Oldland, 2011).

Student engagement is defined as "students' cognitive investment in active participation in an emotional commitment to their learning" (Chapman, 2003, as cited by Zepke and Leach, 2010, p. 168). The benefits of understanding engagement principles from

both student and therapeutic perspectives provide nursing faculty the opportunity to clarify skills that support undergraduate nursing students to maximise their learning experience. Students who engage in their learning successfully link theory to their future practice as nurses (Seib et al., 2011). Effective engagement fosters preparedness for practice by reducing anxiety experienced by new graduates (Seib et al., 2011). This positively influences outcomes for consumers receiving care. Therapeutic engagement uses empathy, active listening and other skills to connect to people receiving care. A therapeutic alliance is formed, creating a collaborative approach to care provision (Bright et al., 2015).

This paper utilises current literature to present a discussion on student engagement and explore key ideas associated with student engagement. It will further discuss how aspects of therapeutic engagement may support nursing faculty in facilitating student engagement. The discussion aims to provide implications and strategies for undergraduate nursing faculty and their practice.

Background

'Student engagement', is a term used to identify key behaviours of students such as commitment to task and participating in activities (Beer et al., 2010). Tertiary teaching focuses on three levels that facilitate student engagement, including: engagement between student and teacher; students' connection with their learning; and students linking to their learning institution (Errey

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 2 96859819.
E-mail addresses: r.bowcock@westernsydney.edu.au (R. Bowcock),
k.peters@westernsydney.edu.au (K. Peters).

¹ Tel.: +61 2 46203567.

and Wood, 2011; Zepke, 2013) or environment (Beer et al., 2010). Student engagement transcends the classroom. Active learning incorporates classroom activities and open-ended questioning to enrich experiences that students can apply to real-world scenarios (Errey and Wood, 2011). Student engagement refers to time and effort invested by the student (Trowler and Trowler, 2010). It encompasses commitment and resources provided by the learning institution to optimise and enhance the students' development and academic accomplishments (Trowler and Trowler, 2010). Student engagement requires the students' voluntary participation in their learning. This is evidenced by commitment to required tasks, participation in educational activities and motivation to achieving the desired outcomes (Beer et al., 2010). Student engagement is quantified by students' academic connection and achievements (Beer et al., 2010).

Therapeutic engagement incorporates a collaborative partnership inherent to mental health care that is dependent on a humanistic approach (Cutcliffe and Happell, 2009; Zugai et al., 2015). It is familiar across generalist and specialist areas of nursing and generally taught in the first year of undergraduate nursing curriculum. Student nurses are taught that a therapeutic relationship is between a nurse and a consumer (who is a person accessing healthcare services) (Lee, 2015; Rycroft-Malone et al., 2001). The nurse uses communication skills such as active listening and empathy to facilitate an alliance (Bright et al., 2015). Nurses who are personally authentic, are committed to facilitating optimum care, promote trust and connectedness (Pullman et al., 2013).

Therapeutic engagement facilitates connectedness with the consumer. Billow (2010a, p.56) identified four modes to achieve this: diplomacy, integrity, sincerity and authenticity. These communication or relational skills improve and evolve engagement through the development of trust. Relational skills also include rapport and empathy (Billow, 2010a,b). The nurse draws on empathic skills to facilitate rapport with the consumer. This engagement is based on the consumer's needs (Norfolk et al., 2007) and targets a positive outcome. These therapeutic relational skills would equally apply to student engagement. Both student and therapeutic engagement aim to support the student or consumer to attain their goals. The nurse aims to facilitate the consumer to reach their health goals, whereas faculty support the student to attain their academic and future career goals. Application of relational skills can be seen where faculty draw on authenticity to facilitate learning opportunities for their students (Newton et al., 2009.)

Effective curriculum development engages students by focusing on the students' perspective and need (Exeter et al., 2010). The focus of this discussion targets the connection between the student and teacher, linking aspects of therapeutic engagement to enhance this connection.

Discussion

Student engagement has a clear identifiable framework. Zepke and Leach (2010) provide an insight into what improves student learning by enhancing their experiences and optimising their success. They identified four perspectives underpinning student engagement: motivation and agency, student and teacher engagement, an institutional environment conducive to promoting learning, and active citizenship. These perspectives facilitate self-belief; ability to reach personal objectives through autonomy; development of supportive relationships; recognising the teachers are core to engagement; embracing diversity; adaptation to student expectation and need; and the promotion of citizenship (Zepke and Leach, 2010). Student engagement is facilitated by institutional activities as well as the faculty. Their motivation to achieve and the faculty's support to address challenges during their study, builds

resilience. Learning can be identified as a tool to achieve professional development and satisfaction.

There is limited discussion in the literature surrounding a possible framework for clinical or therapeutic engagement, with existing literature focussing on the clinician/consumer relationship or consumer compliance with treatment (Pullman et al., 2013). Billow (2010a) provides a therapeutic framework that offers an overview of characteristics that facilitate engagement. An alternative framework was developed by Young et al. (2012), which is specific for lecturers in clinical Mental Health nursing roles. Titled the Practice Engagement Framework (PEF), it provides a structure for research activities, improvements for service delivery and clinical areas such as supervision, and aims to assist nurse faculty by identifying the parameters of their engagement. Specific clinical frameworks may provide a format that can be expanded to engagement with the students.

The review of multiple clinical and student engagement frameworks (Pullman et al., 2013; Bright et al., 2015; Norfolk et al., 2007; Zepke and Leach, 2010; Seib et al., 2011) assisted in the identification of three key themes. These themes provide a format for faculty to draw on to enhance student engagement. This framework includes: collaboration, relationships/person-centred approaches and outcomes or purpose.

Collaboration

Teaching undergraduate nursing students requires faculty to actively collaborate with students to promote enriching experiences that engage them. Collaborative learning is associated with active learning approaches (Errey and Wood, 2011), often occurring within a workshop setting, with group activities perceived as enjoyable and interesting. The learning materials within this context enhance the students' comprehension and engagement (Seib et al., 2011). Effective collaboration with the students via these methods promotes engagement to learning (Harris, 2010). This complements nurses working collaboratively with consumers to support them to identify achievable goals and promote optimum outcomes (Brown et al., 2013).

Commitment to students, integrity and valuing the students' individuality and feedback, promote learning priorities (Anderson, 2010). Student individuality is reflected in the diversity of cultural backgrounds, gender, age and life experiences (Oldland, 2011). Effective communication skills allow the nurse to engage with consumers to optimise an exchange of information, identify goals and promote the achievement of collaborative outcomes (Hungerford et al., 2012). Collaboration is beneficial to both forms of engagement. Therapeutic engagement supports the consumer to identify goals; whereas student engagement, targets more of a group perspective. However, at times faculty may need to facilitate individual relationship with students to further their engagement with learning.

Students are able to blend collaborative and autonomous learning (Zepke and Leach, 2010). Autonomy is facilitated by assignments and access to additional learning opportunities available on-line which may suit the lifestyle of older students who are balancing work, family commitments and study (Beer et al., 2010). It is important for the curriculum to provide various learning opportunities to address social – cultural diversity within the student co-hort (Newton et al., 2010). Collaborative learning is associated with active learning approaches (Errey and Wood, 2011) such as workshops with group and interactive activities that improve the students' comprehension and engagement with the learning materials provided (Seib et al., 2011). Active learning is achieved through effective communication between students, peers and

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