Review

# Exploring outcomes and evaluation in narrative pedagogy: An integrative review

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## ABSTRACT

*Objectives:* To identify narrative pedagogy learning outcomes and evaluation methods used for pre-licensure nursing students. Recommend areas for expanding narrative pedagogy research.
*Design:* An integrative review using a modified version of Cooper's 1998 framework, as described by Whittemore and Knafl (2005).
*Data sources:* A computer-assisted search of the literature from 1995 to 2015 was performed using the search terms *narrative pedagogy* and *nursing*. Databases included the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, Academic Search Premier, Educational Resources Information Center, Educational Research Complete, Medline, PsychArticles, PsychINFO, and the Teacher Reference Center. Ancestry searches led to the inclusion of additional articles.
*Review methods:* Twenty-six texts met the criteria for full review and were evaluated for methodological rigor and relevance to the review aims. Nine articles achieved an acceptable quality score and were used for thematic analysis.
*Results:* Learning outcomes associated with narrative pedagogy were grouped into five themes: thinking, empowerment, interconnectedness, learning as a process of making meaning, and ethical/moral judgment. Multiple methods of evaluation are necessary to evaluate these learning outcomes.
*Conclusions:* Narrative pedagogy may be a beneficial philosophical approach to teaching. However, at this time, there is insufficient evidence to recommend its universal adoption. It is too broad in its approach to reliably measure its effectiveness. Future research should examine the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies to promote desired learning outcomes.

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## 1. Introduction

Narrative pedagogy is an approach to teaching in which educators and students work together to challenge assumptions of learning and practice the reflection on, as well as interpretation of, shared experiences (Ironside, 2015). Narrative pedagogy is proposed as having the potential to transform nursing education and help meet future needs (Ironside, 2015). Despite a significant amount of attention and a growing literature base, there remains a lack of clarity regarding what learning outcomes can be affected by its use and how to best evaluate its effectiveness in meeting these outcomes. This integrative review will outline learning outcomes associated with narrative pedagogy, identify how these outcomes have been evaluated in the literature, and discuss implications for nursing education and further research.

## 2. Background

Benner et al. (2010), in their large-scale ethnographic, interpretive, and evaluative study, call for a radical transformation of nursing education with the goal of improving (a) salience, (b) clinical reasoning, (c) integration of clinical and classroom learning, and (d) role formation. The findings of this study are congruent with the United States Institute of Medicine's (2011) report calling for educators to better prepare students to lead change as well as provide holistic, culturally competent, and evidence-based care in the context of our health care system. This report was the culmination of a two-year partnership between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Institute of Medicine to develop recommendations to (a) re-conceptualize the role of nursing within the current and future health care system, (b) expand nursing faculty and educational capacity for students, (c) propose

innovations in care delivery and healthcare professional education, and (d) foster retention of health care professionals in multiple settings (Institute of Medicine, 2011).

These two reports are the driving forces for change within nursing education in the United States, but are applicable to the growing global healthcare environment. As the largest group of health care professionals, nurses have been called upon to actively engage in leading change and improving care, but without adequate preparation, the ability to fulfill this need will be limited (Institute of Medicine, 2011). Narrative pedagogies are recommended by Benner and colleagues as a means to achieve these goals. It is suggested that the shared learning experience created by narrative pedagogy supports contextualization, reflection, integration and role formation (Benner et al., 2010).

### 2.1. Narrative Pedagogy

As early as 1988, some nurse scholars were calling for a de-emphasis on content and suggesting interpretative pedagogies (Diekelmann, 1988). These scholars proposed a shift away from behavioral approaches and content-focused curricula towards a pedagogy of narrative dialogue (Diekelmann, 1993). Narrative pedagogy relies upon the assumption that humans make sense of the world through narrative (Nehls, 1995). In this pedagogy, students and teachers form learning partnerships in which narratives are shared and co-interpreted to meet the needs of their community (Ironside, 2006; Nehls, 1995). Narrative pedagogy is not an exclusive approach to learning, but is meant to be integrated with other approaches to pedagogy (Diekelmann, 2001). Strategies used are site-specific and invite students and educators to co-create interpretations of shared experiences (Diekelmann, 2001).

While the narrative pedagogy literature base spans more than 25 years, its use is highly variable. It incorporates a large number of teaching strategies and has been used as a primary pedagogy or as an adjunct to more traditional pedagogies. A predominant focus of the literature is to describe learning activities used and experiences of enacting narrative pedagogy. The diversity in approaches in the narrative pedagogy literature presents a challenge for evaluation of the practice. Integrated synthesis of the literature is needed to determine which learning outcomes can be expected and how to best evaluate the effectiveness of this dynamic and site-specific pedagogy.

## 3. Purpose

The purpose of this integrative review is to identify expected outcomes of narrative pedagogy, describe how its effectiveness has been measured, and recommend directions for future research. Specific guiding questions for this review include (a) what learning outcomes have been found when using narrative pedagogy with undergraduate pre-licensure nursing students? and (b) how has the effectiveness of narrative pedagogy been evaluated?

## 4. Method

This integrative review followed the modified version of Cooper's 1998 framework described by Whittemore and Knafl (2005). It was conducted in several stages, beginning with problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, and data analysis. The problem is a need for the synthesis of learning outcomes and evaluation strategies of this pedagogical strategy. This problem and the questions developed above guided each stage of this review.

### 4.1. Search Strategy

A computer-assisted search of the literature from 1995 to 2015 was performed using the key terms *narrative pedagogy* and *nursing*. These two search terms were used to ensure that articles were pertinent to the conceptualization of narrative pedagogy described above. Specific

databases included are listed in Fig. 1. Ancestry searches led to the inclusion of four additional articles.

As empirical literature on narrative pedagogy is limited, anecdotal literature, qualitative studies, quantitative studies, and dissertations were included. The literature was screened for relevance according to the guiding questions. Criteria for inclusion required that the article: (a) was a primary source from a peer-reviewed journal or dissertation, (b) was written in English, (c) described learning outcomes, (d) used narrative pedagogy within the context of undergraduate nursing students, and (e) described how narrative pedagogy was evaluated. Conference papers were excluded, as those found were not available in full text through interlibrary loan or organizational websites. A total of 26 texts met inclusion criteria and were included for analysis. The majority of articles were from the United States (n = 20), but four were from Australia, one from Hong Kong, and one article that included multiple countries (Canada, USA, and New Zealand).

### 4.2. Data Evaluation and Analysis

Each text was read and evaluated for quality. An article's quality was assessed in terms of its methodological rigor according to a tool developed by Hawker et al. (2002) chosen for its applicability to both qualitative and quantitative studies. It was used to grade the articles from good to very poor on several criteria: (a) abstract and title, (b) introduction and aims, (c) method and data, (d) sampling, (e) data analysis, (f) ethics and bias, (g) findings and results, (h) transferability and generalizability, and (i) implications and usefulness. A point value was assigned to each article from very poor (1), to good (4), based on the mean of all criterion scores. The average quality score was 2.63 and ranged from 1.44 to 3.89. Nine articles achieved at least a fair score (3), and were used for the development of themes. The remaining articles were used to support the themes identified. Low scores were often related to lack of sample or methods detail. A literature matrix was created to organize findings, quality ratings, and descriptions of variables of interest (Table 1). Results of this analysis of the literature are discussed below according to the research questions.

## 5. Learning Outcomes

Several learning outcomes were reported in the nine articles used for theme development. These outcomes were organized into five themes: thinking, empowerment, interconnectedness, learning as a process of making meaning, and ethical and moral judgment. Each theme had additional support from articles that did not meet the minimum quality rating for inclusion in theme development. These themes are discussed in order of frequency.

### 5.1. Thinking: Challenging Assumptions and Considering Multiple Perspectives

Seven of the nine articles used for theme development included a discussion of how the adoption of narrative pedagogy results in a different way of thinking (Davidson, 2004; Ironside, 2006; Riley-Giomariso, 1998; Santo, 2011; Stoltzfus, 2012). In narrative pedagogy, students learn to challenge their own assumptions and consider multiple perspectives. Ironside (2006) reports that students, guided by faculty, consider other perspectives, question pre-existing assumptions, and through this process, interpret their experiences in different ways. Discussion and interpretation of narratives can assist students in examining and challenging their own and others' values (Davidson, 2004). Santo (2011) found that nurse educators who use narrative pedagogy believe this approach supports the development of different types of thinking, assists students in uncovering hidden assumptions, and helps keep students open to multiple perspectives when solving problems. In one study in which the faculty used narrative pedagogy, students began to