Original research

Poetry as an engagement strategy: A novice teacher experience of its use within lectures ☆

Denise Healy [a], [*], [1], Siobhan Smyth [b], [2]

[a] Department of Nursing, Health Sciences and Disability Studies, St Angela's College, A College of the National University of Ireland, Galway, Lough Gill, Sligo, Ireland
[b] School of Nursing and Midwifery, National University Ireland, Galway Aras Moyola, Upper Newcastle Road, Galway, Ireland

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

It has been acknowledged the traditional lecture format is a familiar teaching methodology and that there is still much to be learnt from using this in class room based lectures. Whilst the first author was a postgraduate student undertaking a programme in Nurse Education at a University in the Republic of Ireland, poetry was used to challenge undergraduate nursing students' attitudes towards older persons in a large group format. The students were in Year 3 of a Bachelor of Nursing Science General and Intellectual Disability Programmes. Feedback was obtained from the students that comprised of three main themes; Aids Recall of Information; Enriched Learning Experiences, Challenges Attitudes to Person Centred Care. Thus, the paper aims to evaluate using poetry as an engaging teaching strategy within a lecture format for the first time as a novice teacher when drawing out nursing students' attitudes towards older persons with a focus on supporting them in embracing key care skills in the clinical setting. This paper should provide other student educationalists the opportunity to see the value of poetry as a teaching strategy and provide practical tips on its use within the classroom.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

As the nursing workforce are at the forefront of service delivery they are challenged to have the skills, knowledge and expertise to provide care which is evidenced based and meets the components of quality and safety in the health care arena (International Council of Nurses, 2012; World Health Organization (WHO), 2013). Nurses encounter many different and unexpected situations while delivering care on a day to day basis therefore, there needs to be flexibility in their thinking in order for critical and creative skills to be developed which contribute to decision making that enhance

patient outcomes. Chan (2013) highlighted that nurse educators have a key role in promoting creativity and critical skills within the curriculum which fosters the growth and development of student nurses.

In education it is often taken for granted that technology can 'enhance learning'. Since the 1990's, there has been a substantial increase in the use of technology within higher education (Kirkwood and Price, 2013). Incorporating teaching methods which utilise technology supports nursing students in linking theory and practice which stimulates students interest and team based learning (Crookes et al., 2013) and prepares students to be 'interactive and self-reliant professionals' (Tremel, 2004, p. 63). However, the use of technology in teaching and learning can be expensive in terms of personal investment of staff and students and also has financial costs in relation to infrastructure equipment and technical support staff (Kirkwood and Price, 2013). However, the literature acknowledges that there is still much to be learnt about using traditional methods in class room based lectures. The traditional lecture format is a familiar teaching methodology and is a way of conveying knowledge in large group (Chaudhury, 2011). Yet student's attention decreases (Hughes and Quinn, 2013) and Horgan (2003) reports that attention levels are high for the first

fifteen to twenty minutes of class however, this level decreases as the traditional lecture goes on. This type of passive learning may limit students thinking, problem solving abilities and motivation for learning. Therefore, it is vital that other novel teaching strategies referred to by Huxam (2005) as interactive windows are integrated within the lecture (Hughes and Quinn, 2013; Gilboy et al., 2015) to promote student engagement and to avoid the issue of lectures been described as 'monotonous' (Bati et al., 2012). Chaudhury in 2011 also supports this notion. The development of innovative teaching methods enhance student thinking and problem solving abilities (Jaarsma et al., 2008; Cavanagh, 2011). The development of innovative teaching methods is important for nurses to move beyond the technical aspects of care delivery and provide relational care that addresses the heart of nursing practice (Higher Education Academy, 2015 p. 3). Poetry is one such teaching method which supports student engagement and provides a forum where students and nurse educators can participate in a meaningful way when discussing key concepts in nursing knowledge (Hahessy, 2016). Hence, the aim of this paper is to discuss using poetry as an engaging teaching strategy within a lecture format for the first time as a novice teacher when drawing out nursing students' attitudes towards older persons with a focus on supporting them in embracing key care skills in the clinical setting. This is achieved by briefly reviewing the literature on poetry and providing a reflective exemplar on the use of poetry in teaching.

2. Review of the literature

Robert Frost an American poet in a letter to Louis Untermeyer expressed how poetry can be so powerful: '*A poem begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness …. It finds the thoughts and the thought finds the words*' (Untermeyer, 1963, p.22). This excerpt highlighted two important things as regards poetry, it begins as a genuine experience that finally finds words, and poetry comes from the emotional part of us. According to Curzon (2004, p. 324) carefully prepared, well timed and skilfully delivered lectures presented with a 'touch of colour and a hint of wonder' can be a powerful and a stimulating mode of communication and instruction. In other words, poetry can be seen as a tool of learning and exploring within the lecture format.

Serious engagement with the art such as poetry in the classroom setting provides meaningful opportunities for nursing students to broaden their thinking (Roberts, 2010), enhance their motivation, stimulate creativity and support the development of critical analytical thinking (Raingruber, 2009). Poetry has shown to kindle and stimulate students interest as opposed to them left thinking that learning is passive with the expectation that "*information will be handed on a plate*" (Hughes and Quinn, 2013). In addition, Hunter (2002) suggested that poetry can enhance the nurse patient relationship by having a better understanding of the patient's and the nurse's lived experience. As a result, this enables a greater student awareness by promoting memory and associations with and feelings about patients' experiences of care. This supports Fox (1995: xv) that describes how the use of poems can become 'containers' of feelings and when this happens, these feelings can be experienced at a more conscious level. This is important for student nurses as when they begin to be more conscious of their feelings, they experience a better understanding of feelings of others. Moreover, poetry in the class room strengthens a nursing student's ability to be compassionate as well as developing problem solving skills (Pardue, 2004; Smith, 1996) thus, providing a means in developing empathy for another person (Speare and Henshall, 2014; Jack, 2015).

Threlfall (2013) explored the use of poems with students enrolled on a Foundation Degree in Sports Coaching as a way to reflect on prior learning. Students (n = 48) were given 48 h to create poems which denoted their action plans in a different way. At the end of a four week period, the poems were collected and the students were interviewed within a focus group format. As a result of this experience, participants reported that they found the use of poetry empowering in that they had control of their learning, and that they enjoyed using poetry as a way to reflect and learn. Consequently, they asked for more creative strategies in future classes. Similarly, another study by Speare and Henshall (2014) used six published poems with further education student teachers (n = 7) registered on a Post Graduate Certificate in Education Programme as a foundation for discussion. These sessions were tape recorded and each participant participated in an interview after the group session. The findings found that reading poetry can enhance reflection as participants were allowed to step back from practice and see it from a different perspective. They also found the activity of integrating poetry therapeutic and motivational.

According to Curtis (2013), poetry has the power to influence hearts and minds. Student's social skills and networks are enhanced when working within groups exposed to poetry (Hunter, 2002) and group work is known to supports students in understanding the poem and interpreting its meaning (Nica, 2011). The classroom dialogue provides a venue to reason, build new knowledge (Seethamraju and Borman, 2009; Hammer Chiriac, 2014) and challenge students own thinking in a problem solving manner thus scaffolding learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and developing critical thinking. The evidence also suggests that nurse educators have embraced creativity such as poetry which is an essential skill for finding solutions, developing new ideas (Chan, 2013), increasing confidence and self awareness (Mohammadian et al., 2011) that are key requirements in meeting the needs of clinical practice. Implementing an artistic activity in the nursing curriculum engages the student in learning, supports the enhancement of students' cognitive ability and logical reasoning (Darbyshire and Fleming, 2008; Romeo, 2010). Hence, the novice teacher believed that using poetry as a teaching strategy would draw student's attention to their attitudes towards older persons and support them in embracing the key caring skills in the clinical setting.

3. Background and context

The European Union Standards for Nursing and Midwifery (WHO, 2009) and the American Nurses Association (2010) require students to have both clinical and theoretical instruction during nurse education training in numerous areas including care of the older person. Nursing students are acquired to possess the professional knowledge and skills necessary for the planning, implementation and evaluation of health care. These requirements are necessary in preparing nurses to be competent and fit for purpose in health care environments both nationally and internationally (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

In Ireland nursing students have to achieve competence in a number of domains (Appendix 1) during practice placements in order to fulfil the requirements and standards for nurse registration education programmes (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI), 2016).

Furthermore, the Irish nursing regulatory board have devised professional practice guidelines for registered nurses working with older persons in the health care setting (NMBI, 2015). These standards aim to guide evidence-based nursing practice for older persons. They provide a framework and outline the essential elements and competencies required by nurses who care for older people in all healthcare settings (NMBI, 2015).Therefore, it is pertinent that nursing students are presented with theory and concepts which they can apply when delivering care in an ever demanding practice