

The Experience of Forum Theatre in Nurse Education

Is it Transformative?

Background

The nurse's ability to communicate with care and compassion is central to the Chief Nursing Officer's Strategy for Nursing (Dept of Health 2012). Communication skills form a core component of undergraduate nursing curricula, as mandated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (2008). Yet there are known gaps in the provision of communication skills training within nurse education (Chant, 2002) and evaluation of course outcomes has been poor.

Gaps in provision include:

- Shortages in communication skills training for dealing with certain groups of patients in particular contexts (e.g. dementia care).
- Bias towards mechanistic rather than relational communication with emphasis on technical know-how over interpersonal skills.

(Chant, 2002)

The Council of Deans (2014) recognise that there is a pressing need for innovative ways of teaching communication skills to address these gaps. The use of 'Forum Theatre' (Boal, 2002) offers a unique approach to learning and teaching in the classroom, allowing participants to become more 'active' and critically aware of personal communication and power relationships. It provides opportunities to 'rehearse' alternative approaches to communication and ultimately, to be able to make changes in clinical practice. The Forum Theatre method was originally developed for use in socially disadvantaged groups to explore ways of recognising and overcoming oppressions. Its use in nurse education has to date been underexploited. Transformative learning explores how adults elaborate, learn, transform on personal knowledge and beliefs about the world. (Mezirow 2000)

Aim

To review the literature on Forum Theatre and explore its potential to have a positive impact on the learning and practice of communication among nurses.

Literature search

- Inclusion criteria: studies incorporating the use of a forum theatre method with a student nurse population in a higher education classroom setting
- Search strategy:
 - Databases searched: CINAHL, BNI, Science Direct and ERIC
 - Keywords: Theatre; Theater of the Oppressed, forum theatre, Drama, Nursing, Higher Education
- Literature appraised using Caldwell et al (2005).



Table 1 Findings of Literature Search

Study Design	Sample	Purpose and outcomes
Qualitative Qualitative interviews with students (n = not stated)	Student Nurses (n= not stated) Sweden	Use of Forum theatre to form an educational model based on the 'Lifeworld' theory Forum theatre enables student nurses to integrate experiences of care within caring theory and provides new understandings of affective as well as cognitive domains (Ekebergh, M. et al 2004)
Qualitative Review from a forum theatre session to explore stigma in mental health	Student nurses (n= all year 2) UK	Collaborative service user-lecturer initiative about stigma. Forum theatre facilitates student learning by displaying recognisable behaviour and ways the student will act differently in practice. (Wilson 2013)
Qualitative Review from a forum theatre session exploring power relationships	Student Nurses (n= 'small') USA	Forum theatre provides a supportive space in a nursing environment for students to experience reflection, envision alternatives, and enact change Forum theatre in a classroom provides a 'safe' space for novice nurses to experience positive communication and empowered thinking (Love, K. 2012)
Qualitative Pilot study using participatory action research	Student nurses (learning disability) (n= not stated) UK	Learners made more aware of the power relations Theatre/drama has universal appeal Reflection is now an established part of nurse education. Reflection must also include action and engages students learn better (McClimens, A. & Scott, R. 2007)
Qualitative Review from a forum theatre exploring communication skills	Student Nurses (n= not stated), UK	Engages students with a wide range of learning styles to think through what leads nurses to act in an anti-therapeutic way and work collaboratively to enact change (Middlewick, Y. et al 2011)

Findings:

- Searching for research in this area is hampered by the numerous uses for the word 'theatre' both in healthcare and in the theatre/drama literature
- Five qualitative studies met the inclusion criteria. Only one article discussed 'preliminary data analysis' as a result of interviews while the rest were review articles of a project/session that included forum theatre
- None of the articles adequately reported either the numbers of participants involved or how the data was collected.

Conclusions:

- The empowering and reflective component is prominent within all the articles and is valuable in promoting a transformative learning experience
- The articles highlight that forum theatre provides a participatory framework within the classroom for exploring communication and possibly transforming complex issues
- Routine student evaluation has rated it highly but robust evaluation methods remain elusive
- The opportunity to rehearse relationship-building strategies in the safety of the classroom may translate into the clinical arena

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