Enriching Caring Pedagogy Through Faculty-Librarian Partnerships

Bethany Correlli, MSN, RN, *Notre Dame of Maryland University*; Rosie Hanneke, MLS, *University of Illinois at Chicago*

Abstract

Nursing faculty at Notre Dame of Maryland University and librarians at Loyola/Notre Dame Library have partnered to strengthen the caring science curriculum through the incorporation of information literacy instruction in the RN-to-BSN program. In this article, the authors explain how partnering to teach information literacy empowers students toward autonomy as they become active participants in the learning process. The authors' reflections align with Hills and Watson's (2011) 3 major elements of caring relationships—collaboration, power/empowerment, and participation—which are used as a framework to demonstrate this partnership.

Keywords: caring science curriculum, information literacy, academic libraries, educational theory, active learning, collaborative learning, power/empowerment, participation

Introduction

The School of Nursing at Notre Dame of Maryland University (NDMU) is an academic community of faculty, staff, undergraduate, and graduate students that strives to strengthen the foundation of the nursing profession beyond the technical paradigm. Grounded by caring science theory, faculty and students work together toward transformation of their profession, their communities, and the world. Just as the ultimate goal of nurse clinicians is to provide care for patients, the goal of caring educators remains the same—to develop deep, trusting relationships with students so that caring presence can manifest. Nursing faculty also encourage students to connect with supporters along the journey. A key relationship has been developed and nurtured among the nursing faculty and the university librarians. This paper will explain ways this collaborative partnership has strengthened the curriculum and furthered the mission of transformation at the university.

Institutional Description

NDMU is a university inspired and led by the mission of the School Sisters of Notre Dame to educate persons to transform the world. Located in Baltimore, Maryland, the university serves approximately 3,000 students in a variety of degree and certificate programs. Nearly one third of these students are enrolled in the School of Nursing, which offers Master of Science and Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees. Congruent with the university mission of educating leaders to transform the world, the School of Nursing prepares leaders to transform patients, students, colleagues, and the discipline of nursing (Notre Dame of Maryland University, 2011, para. 2).

The Loyola/Notre Dame Library (LNDL) is an academic library serving two adjacent universities, NDMU and Loyola University Maryland, ultimately reaching a population of nearly 9,000 students. Librarians in the Research

& Instruction Department at LNDL work to advance the information literacy skills of students at both universities. Information literacy, the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association, Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989, para. 3), forms a foundation for students to become lifelong learners and independent thinkers, and is therefore a pivotal element of LNDL's mission. Librarians teach approximately 300 information literacy instruction sessions a year toward this goal. In reflection, the authors view these classes as opportunities to model a caring partnership while being with students in teaching and learning around information literacy.

Faculty-Librarian Partnership: Inspiring Students to Care

A vital aspect of teaching and learning is the practice of reflection. In nursing, it is helpful to pause and reflect to bring a particular caring experience into focus. It allows individuals to examine personal beliefs, values, and experiences to allow for a deeper awareness of self and the patients they care for (Barbour, 2013). The essence of caring is captured within the relationship between two or more people. The word *care* is derived from the Old English word *caru*, meaning "mental suffering, sorrow, grief, trouble" ("Care," 2013). One who cares is one who seeks to be with another and relieve negative feelings—whether they be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual—in a troubled time.

Nursing educators similarly seek to listen and dialogue with students as they reflect on personal feelings, including stress caused by the demands of academics, fear of failure, feeling "lost," and questions students encounter in practice (Bowden, 2008). After class discussions, students have reported feeling "understood" and "relieved," and emerge with the sense that they "can do this." As nursing students experience this caring environment, they learn experientially how to form caring relationships with their patients (Beck, 2001). Simmons & Cavanaugh (2000) found that a caring educational environment is a strong predictor of an individual's later capacity

for professional caring. In her 2011 dissertation, Johnson gives an excellent review of the literature regarding the framework of the caring science curriculum, as well as the fundamental relationship between empowerment as imbued by the nursing curriculum and future clinical decision-making abilities.

Working from this perspective, the School of Nursing philosophy statement guides faculty to understand that "nursing is imagined and known through caring authentic presence...and boldly entering questions of meaning" with students (Notre Dame of Maryland University, 2011, para. 2). By modeling caring relationships with nursing students at Notre Dame, faculty and librarians are building the relationships necessary to improve nurse-patient relationships and caring practice.

Caring stems not only from the relationship between teacher and student but is also encouraged with students as they relate to one another. Throughout their programs, nursing students are wholly present together in classroom and clinical settings as they ask questions, discover possibilities, and connect nursing research to their practice. For undergraduate students, this is accomplished by authentically weaving liberal arts, nursing theory, and caring pedagogy throughout the program. This is another avenue for students to develop intentionally caring relationships with each other as future nursing colleagues.

In recognizing the value of information literacy skills and the need to walk beside students in their development as caring practitioners, a unique relationship has been birthed among nursing faculty and librarians at NDMU. This partnership grew from the faculty's desire to help students understand the library services available and the best ways to access nursing literature through the library website. Librarians were initially invited to visit the RN-to-BSN students in their first course of the program, Transition to Professional Nursing Practice, to demonstrate these services and reinforce information literacy concepts. As the information session evolved and the relationship grew, the faculty and librarians began to see a direct connection between library resources and caring for students. Specific examples from the curriculum will be presented to explain this connection and demonstrate ways the integration of librarians and library services into the program has contributed to building caring relationships with students through the key elements of caring relationships—collaboration, power/empowerment, and participation (Hills & Watson, 2011)—and how these relationships have a direct impact on students' ability to provide competent professional patient care.

Collaboration: Dwelling Together

Collaborators are committed to, care about and trust in each other. They recognize that, despite their differences, each has unique and valuable knowledge, perspectives and experiences to contribute to the collaboration. (Hills & Watson, 2011, p. 71)

Developing collaborative relationships, in which all persons involved in the education process relate on an equal person-to-person level, is key to this holistic partnership. A caring pedagogy is inclined toward shared information and experiences. Students and faculty respectfully engage around a subject matter, seeking to know it, understand it, question it, relate with it, and live it. As Palmer (1993) offers, "learning the truth requires that we enter into personal relationship with what the words reveal. To know truth, we must follow it with our lives" (p. 43). Students who follow after what they have discovered together and learned to be true reveal authentic transformation.

Traditionally, the university library tends to be fixed in many faculty minds primarily as a gateway for accessing resources (Housewright, Schonfeld, & Wulfson, 2013). However, in the authors' experience, faculty and librarians together shepherd students in the process of building students' information literacy skills to better equip them to research and engage with nursing literature and scholarship. Information literacy instruction has played a part in the work of many college and university libraries in the United States since the 1960s (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2009). At the heart of this work is faculty-librarian collaboration; partnerships between academic librarians and faculty "have been a salient component of...information literacy programs for the past several decades" (Rockman, 2004, p. 4) and form a solid foundation for successful integration of information literacy into the curriculum (Curzon, 2004).

More important, however, is the possibility of collaboration between librarian and student. Beyond simple database training, a research & instruction librarian can help students by offering reassurance and individualized feedback at multiple steps throughout the research process. Cultivating caring relationships between these two parties is a natural progression of the collaboration that sometimes occurs between teacher and student. At NDMU, nursing students are encouraged to make personal connections between theory and practice to help them come to make meaning of the concepts and imagine new ways of bringing them into their own way of being.

Although nursing faculty can guide students in making these connections, librarians help students through the information-gathering

process by assuaging the negative and often overwhelming concerns that many students associate with online research. Known to academic librarians as "library anxiety," this uneasiness around libraries, research, and the related technology has been an observed phenomenon for decades (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2009). These pervasive student concerns commonly include the following:

- Hesitation with computer technology, especially for those nontraditional students returning to school after several years or even decades in the workforce;
- Frustration at being made to use scholarly databases when Google is familiar and easier to use;
- Uncertainty in forming a research question and how to predict if it will be successful;
- Feeling overwhelmed in searching the database and unfamiliar with the ways to effectively achieve quality search results.

The student with one or more of the above concerns benefits from being guided through this process by a research librarian, who not only instructs on technical aspects but also listens and responds to the individual's fears and struggles. This collaborative relationship serves to better the student's understanding of the meaning behind the information accessed through the library's resources.

Power/Empowerment: Information Literacy

Nurse educators must develop teaching strategies that are empowering of students so that they in turn can empower their clients. Students can't empower others, if they don't experience empowerment themselves. (Hills & Watson, 2011, p. 77)

Students' successful transition from passive consumers of information to active creators of knowledge requires that they become literate in information skills. These competencies—recognizing an information need and being able to locate, access, and evaluate the information—are key to building the student's sense of empowerment. It has been demonstrated that a strong focus on information literacy in the curriculum helps to cultivate confident, motivated learners with a strong sense of self-efficacy (Craig & Corral, 2007). Building a certain level of confidence is critical for student success (Wilkes & Wallis, 1998). As students experience caring in the educational environment, self-confidence and self-actualization grow, leading to personal and professional growth (Beck, 2001). It is therefore crucial for educators to ensure that students are empowered to locate, access, and use information successfully on their own.

The fundamental pedagogical approaches that "liberate, emancipate, and empower future nurses" (Hills & Watson, 2011, p. 55) cannot be achieved if students believe that their instructor

alone holds the key to the necessary information. Students who rely solely on information provided by someone in a position of authority over them (such as a professor or librarian) will not be able to see themselves as "active participants in the teaching/learning process" (MacNeil & Evans, 2005, p. 46). Additionally, if students develop the capacity to find evidence and use it to support their coursework, they can also apply this ability in their professional practice. Therefore, it does not behoove the instructor to act as an access point for information—for example, posting course readings to a learning management system rather than requiring students to access them independently. If information literacy skills are gradually integrated into the curriculum so that students learn to access quality information sources on their own, this will reinforce information literacy skills, encourage confidence in doing so, and ultimately impact care in the practice setting.

Empowering students through caring and guidance produces confident learners who are self-motivated to find and retrieve information, not only in coursework but in the work environment as well. In learning to proficiently navigate the literature, students discover the research behind nursing policies and standards. Students draw from real examples of challenges and questions from their practice as they come to understand nursing in a deeper way. This encourages nurses to increase the standard of care, feel better prepared to participate in critical decisions that impact patient care, and personalize their care based on their deeper understandings.

Participation

Participation is very different than merely being involved. Participation requires commitment. It is a conscious decision to devote time, energy, and resources to teaching/learning. Participation demands engagement. (Hills & Watson, 2011, p. 80)

In a culture where online learning opportunities exist around every corner, Notre Dame's face-to-face nursing programs continue to thrive. This success can be at least partially explained by the faculty's commitment to participation. As Hills and Watson (2011) define it, *participation* is an egalitarian framework in which teacher and learner are responsible and accountable for the teaching and learning process. Students and faculty are equal players in the learning environment; each person's input is shared and respected as part of the process toward consensus. Usually, this is a new experience for students as they may not be accustomed to this from classroom experiences. For example, when a student offers questions about a particular concept or topic of discussion, a teacher who welcomes participation would

allow the concerns to be voiced, discussed, and agreed upon to allow all participants to come to a deeper understanding together.

Palmer (1993) describes the participatory learning environment with three characteristics: openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality. Educators should devote their time and energy to create a place of honest openness. Decision-making processes should be transparent—easily seen and known to all persons. The environment should be a safe and welcoming place to ask questions, explore possibilities, and work toward answers. No one should feel isolated; all views should be welcomed and respected. At the same time, it is essential that all persons agree to common ethical boundaries and be treated as valued participants in learning.

Librarians similarly strive to incorporate active learning techniques into library instruction sessions whenever possible in order to encourage connection between each participant and the class material. For example, rather than lecturing from PowerPoint® slides while students take notes, the librarian leads a live demonstration of the CINAHL database while each student follows along on his or her own computer. Prior to meeting, students must create a research question based on an issue from their own everyday nursing practice; this is the topic that they will use to practice database searching. By connecting learning outcomes to the students' lived experiences, they are more easily drawn into the learning process as active participants.

At Notre Dame, respect and unity are part of the core tenets of the university philosophy, so participation has not been difficult to achieve. Once students are exposed to this way of being, they quickly come to know and appreciate it. They welcome the benefits of a participatory environment—respect of individuality and freedom are two of these. For new students, transforming into a responsible participant can take time and energy. Yet when they are reminded and nurtured in this way, a transformative learning environment and process can emerge.

Patient Care: Making the Connection

The research assignment created for *Transition to Professional Practice*, which guides students through their first major encounter with the research process, clearly demonstrates the concepts outlined above. As partners, the librarians and nursing faculty have carefully created an orientation to CINAHL and other health-related databases that empowers the students to access and use current research independently. In this assignment, the students in the *Transition* course construct a researchable practice question, develop and manipulate a search strategy, retrieve and evaluate pertinent research on the topic, and then reflect on their learning from the process. Rather than following

a traditional model for library instruction, in which a librarian would present an initial orientation to the databases and then leave students to apply these skills on their own, faculty and librarians working with these courses have contact with students at numerous points throughout the process. Students are encouraged to draw on examples from their everyday practice and assume an active role in the learning process.

All three parties—faculty, librarian, and student—begin a conversation online as the student proposes a research question on the Learning Management System and the faculty and librarian offer feedback to strengthen the question. Once the student researches the question through CINAHL and the project is submitted, the librarians and nursing faculty again dialogue with individual students to provide constructive feedback. This is another example of caring science pedagogy as applied to the curriculum. The librarians provide constructive guidance on ways to use the library resources and databases to yield relevant literature from their search. From their expertise, the librarians can clue the students in on reliable search terms, research questions, and search strategies. The nursing faculty focuses on providing feedback that fosters deeper thinking and theory-practice connections. Once students can visualize the process by which research and practice inform each other, students are in a sense freed to create and develop their own theoretical and practice beliefs.

When the three parties meet in person, initial contact has already been made; by opening the dialogue online, the basis for a caring relationship has been formed. The in-person orientation begins as a demonstration of library resources, in which information is transferred from librarian to student. However, key to this meeting is one-on-one interaction; after demonstration, the librarian and faculty circulate among the students, offering advice and guidance to each student as she searches CINAHL on her own computer. This caring presence and guidance through hands-on experience allows the student to make meaning of the demonstrated information.

In learning to proficiently navigate the literature, students discover the research behind nursing techniques, practices, and policies. Students draw from real examples of challenges and questions from their practice to form their search questions for the *Transition* research assignment. They can make immediate connections between research and practice, which encourages them to challenge standards in their own practice in order to participate in critical decisions that positively impact patient care. Empowering students through caring and guidance is therefore crucial to producing confident learners who are self-motivated to find

and retrieve information, not only in coursework but in the work environment as well.

Information literacy skills that connect nurses to current research can also be used to help bridge the gap between caring theory and nursing practice for students. As observed by Tonges, McCann, and Strickler (2014), translating theory into practice is often an unachieved ideal rather than a fully realized goal in many organizations. However, nurses who locate theories relevant to their circumstances and translate them into practice may find explanation for patient phenomena or new solutions for common problems. The aforementioned authors noted measurable improvements in patient throughput and increased, more detailed survey returns after developing and implementing a model that translated Swanson caring theory into theory-driven practice (Tonges, McCann, & Strickler, 2014).

The iterative process of relating practice to theory and vice versa means that students must recognize the two as interrelated and inseparable. Noel (2010) notes that considering the tenets of caring theory and the *caritas* processes "in the light of practice allows the nurse to revisit the theory through practice reflections" (p. 24). For these reasons, supporting the development of students' information literacy skills is a critical step in ensuring that, as future professionals, they will be able to continue the reflective, circular process of applying research and theory literature to practice. Further, they will know how to revisit the same literature that they read as students through the lens of practice at a later date. Familiarity with this iterative process is a necessary competency for nurses to provide the highest level of patient care possible.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

Continuous evaluation and reflection have been integral components of this development from the first step. Because the relationship among the librarians, faculty members, and students has been founded on caring, open communication has been a necessary part of its development. All parties embraced a truly collaborative approach, so that no one person or party led alone. Keeping the students' needs as the focus, faculty-librarian partners have achieved so much more than initially imagined. As Jean Watson inspires, they opened the classroom to miracles, mystery, and unknown (Hills & Watson, 2011).

All three parties involved express feelings of growth and learning as a result of the partnership. Nursing faculty members verbalize gratitude for the sense of support they feel from the librarians. They readily acknowledge that they are not experts in searching the databases; they appreciate the collaborative approach in building the students' independence and

confidence as they access nursing literature. The librarians appreciate the respect and collegiality offered from the faculty; they value the opportunity to become active partners in education, witnessing students as they learn. In written reflections, students consistently report a high level of self-satisfaction in their ability to obtain nursing information independently (a direct result of the partnering relationship). They indicate feelings of empowerment as they access current best practice research and bring it forward in their own institutions. Nurses who are empowered can further the autonomy of the nursing profession as a whole.

In looking forward to the next phase of this partnering relationship with the library, nursing faculty hope to increase the students' and faculty members' interactions with librarians in more of the nursing courses throughout the program. To further understand the success and implications of the caring relationships discussed in this paper, the authors suggest a future qualitative study of student reflections on their experiences with the faculty-librarian partnership.

It is the authors' belief that if students work with librarians on a more regular basis, they will keep their information literacy skills fresh and will be able to access quality literature more easily, resulting in improved patient care.

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Author Note

Bethany Correlli, MSN, RN, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, Notre Dame of Maryland University, Baltimore, MD. Rosie Hanneke, MLS, Assistant Professor and Assistant Information Services/Liaison Librarian, University of Illinois at Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences, Chicago, IL. Between August 2011 and May 2014, Rosie Hanneke was Research & Instruction Librarian at Loyola/Notre Dame Library, Baltimore, MD USA.

The authors would like to thank librarians Joanne Hélovry, Julie Nanavati, and the late Susan Cooperstein for their work in developing the information literacy program at LNDL and many of the activities described in this article. They also offer gratitude to Dr. Mary Packard and the entire School of Nursing faculty, whose vision for caring science in nursing practice and education make partnering relationships possible.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Bethany Correlli, 4701 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21210 USA. Electronic mail may be sent via Internet to bcorrelli@gmail.com