

Original Article

Heutagogy: Enacting Caring Science Practices

Colleen Maykut, RN, BScN, MN, DNP

Associate Professor, MacEwan University, Department of Nursing Science, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Carol Wild, RN, BScN, MSN

Area Manager of Ponoka Hospital & Care Centre and Home Care (Alberta Health Services), Alberta, Canada

Nicole May, RN, BScN

South Health Campus – Emergency, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Correspondence: Colleen Maykut, Associate Professor, MacEwan University – Department of Nursing Science, 9-507G, 10700-104 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4S2 Email : maykutc@macewan.ca

Abstract

Nursing education, grounded in Caring Sciences, must also reflect a relational approach reflecting equity between student and teacher and a learning process which is humanized – interactive, engaging, and relevant. This relational approach creates a shared ethical and moral space that fosters an inner journey of contemplation, connection, consciousness and meaning informed by peace, power and truth, to connect simultaneously with others where all may learn and flourish. It is through engagement, a conscious connection, where learners (both teacher and student) negotiate choices, create tensions through discourse, and derive meaning of this shared experience (Hills & Watson, 2011). This engagement “leads to better persistence, learning, and achievement” (Bryson, 2016, p. 84) and ultimately the formation of a collaborative partnership for learning, creating, and evolving.

Blaschke (2012) states the following concepts are instrumental in a curriculum grounded in heutagogy: capability, self-reflection and metacognition, double-loop learning and nonlinear learning, as well as teaching processes which foster self-determined learning. A learning contract is established, followed by learning activities which foster critical thinking and creativity, and finally learning outcomes are assessed (Blaschke & Hase, 2016). Teaching is about being in relationship, recognizing that learning occurs in relationship which is transformational and empowering. Success in transformational learning creates transcendent moments where we experience “that which is beyond us” where we tap into the collective unconscious and a critical consciousness emerges (Walker, 2010).

Keywords: *caring, heutagogy, learner, nursing education, relational, student*

Introduction

Caring Sciences is grounded in the premise that loving and caring for others is the ultimate expression of our humanity; moving beyond one’s own interest (Hills and Watson, 2011). Nursing education, grounded in Caring Sciences, must also reflect a relational approach reflecting equity between student and teacher and a learning process which is humanized – interactive, engaging, and

relevant. This relational approach creates a shared ethical and moral space that fosters an inner journey of contemplation, connection, consciousness and meaning informed by peace, power and truth, to connect simultaneously with others where all may learn and flourish. It is through engagement, a conscious connection, where learners (both teacher and student) negotiate choices, create tensions through discourse, and

derive meaning of this shared experience (Hills and Watson, 2011). This engagement “leads to better persistence, learning, and achievement” (Bryson, 2016, p. 84) and ultimately the formation of a collaborative partnership for learning, creating, and evolving.

The authors, a tenured faculty member, a previous faculty member now involved in clinical nursing leadership and an alumnus, will discuss how the adoption of heutagogy influenced course design of a fourth-year baccalaureate elective in undergraduate education. Growth for all were seen through the eyes of “student as student”, “student as teacher”, “teacher as teacher”, and “teacher as student”. Heutagogy fostered learning as wisdom for all authors by the virtue of creating relationships grounded in Caring Sciences within the academic environment.

Background

Context – Heutagogy

Current nursing education with the focus on acquiring disciplinary knowledge to apply in practice (practical knowledge) is inadequate to fully prepare graduates for the immersion in healthcare. Self-determined learning is a founding principle of heutagogy; the learner “is the major agent in their own learning, which occurs because of personal experiences” (Hase and Kenyon, 2007, p. 112). Learning is not only about acquiring and accumulating knowledge, but it is also about learner as subject – metacognition and metareflection; understanding how one thinks and reflects to explore and generate new concepts (Ashton and Newman, 2006).

Thompson and Pascal (2012) discuss the difference and interrelationship between reflection and reflexivity. They emphasize that reflection is an analytical process and reflexive approaches emphasize a mirroring of practice inclusive of self-analysis (p. 320). “Reflexivity is a key part of making sure that reflective practice is *critically* reflective practice” (p. 319). Reflexivity puts the substance into reflection in a purposeful and intentional way as a key ingredient of learning and critical in heutagogical approaches and design.

Therefore, the learner governs what and how to learn the art of reflecting their best interest to

create their own knowledge (Ashton and Newman, 2006; Blaschke, 2012) while using discourse to challenge content and developing the needed criticality in their reflective practice.

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The Elective

An authentic learning experience must be created to foster learner engagement and goal accomplishment (Walker et al., 2016) within an ethical (Alvarez and Moya, 2017) and moral space. The elective, *Transforming Health through Teaching and Learning*, is a fourth-year theory course offered through the Department of Nursing Science in their Bachelor of Science in nursing program of study. The program of study is offered through MacEwan University, an undergraduate teaching intensive institution, situated in Edmonton, Canada.

Course Design

The course has evolved as the faculty member challenges each offering to ensure learner engagement and relevance of material for future nursing practice. One of the primary goals for the faculty was to address the socialization of nursing students. Therefore, class content progression was intentionally structured to flow from being (knowledge of the heart ~ experiential and life world) to knowing (knowledge of the head ~ facts, policy, research) to doing (knowledge of the hand ~ skills and attributes); negating the over fixation

on acquiring knowledge to “do” busy work in a biomedical paradigm.

An intentional intricate weaving in this elective focused on grounding course decisions in *Caring Sciences* as a way of being, knowing and doing for all in this community of learning.

This intentional change in design was viewed as non-traditional and non-linear. This course was focused on three distinct outcomes: conceptual (Why and how do we want to achieve?), absolute (Which strengths, and limitations, resources - can be best utilized?) and lived (Who and how the dynamics of learners can best influence and create?).

There is a shared responsibility to create classroom dynamics (transformational, collaborative, and empowering) or structures which inform the development of a community of learning which does NOT belong to the faculty. This collaborative process creates *ethos* – a spiritual manifestation of shared beliefs, values, and aspirations reflecting mutual participation to transform consciousness (hooks, 2014). This ethos works to establish equity among the classroom partnerships and allow emergence of a collective identity and knowing.

Caring Sciences knowledge, specifically Roach (2002) has been influential in the design of the course as faculty were intentional about creating an ethical and moral space where learners could engage in discourse, cultivate reflexivity, and find their voice. With these principles in mind it was recognized that many of the strategies of heutagogy had already been adopted but there was a need to push the envelope further to ensure a truly self-determined learning experience.

Course Content

Content was chosen by the faculty member; however, evaluative components were a balance of activities pre-determined by the faculty member (a group teaching presentation and a final exam written either in pairs or singularly) and by learner’s choice.

Learners chose two assignments (each worth 15% for a total of 30% of their overall grade) from a list comprising but not limited to a scholarly writing assignment, online forums, a critical autoethnography, a *Massive Open Online Course*,

workshops hosted by clinical agencies, community talks, or other ideas in consultation with the faculty. The only stipulation was that students clearly needed to expand upon how the knowledge acquired from their choice would be influential in their future nursing practice.

Methodology Used

A critical exchange of thoughts between members of the learning community was elicited to foster metareflection and thus reflexivity. Recognizing the importance of journeying with others was a key philosophical tenant as nursing’s context is relational – human beings not things. Integration of cognitive and affective domains to foster meaning was demonstrated through student choice and their intellectual and emotional contributions in this community of learning grounded in *Caring Sciences*. The next section of this manuscript will reveal the wisdom which was acquired during this journey.

Discussion: A Contemplative Journey of Discovery

Learner, as Student - Nicole

Having choice in self-determining my learning experience in this senior elective was at first intimidating, as this was the first time in my educational career my voice was considered in course design. Guidance for self-determination and rubrics for specific assignments were carefully explained and designed to foster my development as a future educational ambassador. Moreover, a heutagogical approach enriched my responsibility and permitted me, indeed asked me, to study educational material I was interested in pursuing and would be of benefit to me personally and professionally. Having the freedom to make choices fostered the relationship and mutual respect between all involved in this unique learning experience. The adjustment in having a stronger influence on my educational journey was a constructive and empowering opportunity for me and I would lobby that this would be of great benefit for future learners as scholars.

However, having freedom was not without consequences. With this educational structure shift, there were both intellectual and emotional consequences to having autonomy when governing

my own learning. Intellectually I felt an increase in responsibility related to the outcome of my studies, about grades and feedback. Idealistically I recognize that as a learner, I should always accept responsibility for course expectations and goals.

However, with lack of learner voice there is an increased likelihood of outwardly projecting blame on the project, the curriculum or the professors if the learner is not successful or receives feedback they were not expecting.

Therefore, intellectually, heutagogy reduces the ability for me as a learner to displace blame and gently forced and encouraged me to take the wheel and to set up realistic goals and outcomes for the course. Furthermore, this approach fostered my own ability to develop awareness, through critical reflection, of my strengths while also recognizing my own challenges which required further development.

Emotionally, this independence was overwhelming in the beginning. The emotional consequences had a lot to do with self-doubt, such as, questioning myself: "Am I capable of making these decisions? Will the faculty approve of these decisions? Is this a trick? What if the faculty is biased in how they think self-discovery and self-determined learning should be achieved?"

Although these questions elicited an emotional response, which was stressful, they also provoked self-discovery and independence – which is invaluable for my future profession as a registered nurse (RN). Believing in the process was easy but trusting it was a challenge. I have been raised in an educational society, which believes and honours the assumption that teachers are the wiser, and know best, and that a student's role is to obey, follow guidelines and specifically designed curriculum, and not to ask questions. Trusting the process was not the issue, trusting myself in this learning experience was ultimately frightening because I had never taken on this amount of ownership for my learning.

Taking proprietorship of my education is extremely important. However, it took completing this elective to show me how vital my own voice is in the creation of a meaningful learning experience. As a student I always took pride in my education and this fostered my desire for

achievement and excellence. Naturally when receiving feedback in the elective, I was more personally, invested in that feedback as I had increased ownership of my learning. With more choice and opportunity, I felt encouraged to become more autonomous setting my own learning goals, while utilizing and discovering alternative methods in achieving my intended outcomes.

The most remarkable outcome I witnessed with the use of this philosophical educational approach was the chance to see my peers/colleagues show off their personality and individualism through their expression of teaching techniques demonstrated in their education/presentations. For example, we had the opportunity to choose any approach when presenting projects and topics based on what we felt would be the most effective method after careful consideration of appropriate and applicable literature to support those choices. With this in mind some learners chose the classical way of presenting, in which they speak to the class in a lecture/PowerPoint presentation.

However, there were some of my peers who chose to present topics through art and films, while others opted for hands on learning experiences and the use of games. I believe the choice of how knowledge was shared in the presentations enabled learners to work to their strengths while addressing areas for potential growth.

Finding likeminded people is an advantage in heutagogy as self-reflection empowered me as a learner to discover my own educational language in terms of my receptiveness to alternative methods of learning and teaching. For those learners who require strict structure, rules, guidelines and clear expectations heutagogy would be difficult for them to embrace and to thrive from.

On the flip side, being nudged outside of your comfort zone is an exceptional way to invoke interpersonal development. In my opinion, learning about yourself as a teacher/learner is the most influential overall outcome of the elective I experienced. This course design challenged me to consider the depths of my educational capacity and capability. The skillset I acquired enabled me to feel confident in making decisions without a written guideline and fostering critical thinking and self-awareness through critical reflection.

Although, this alternative approach to education may initially be met with resistance, ultimately learners are empowered while embodying self-confidence, assertiveness, and individualism.

Learner, as Teacher - Nicole.

I am now a Registered Nurse, and as I reflect on this learning experience as I transition from undergraduate learner to professional, I have come to appreciate heutagogy. The transition to independent nursing practice is extremely challenging as I have left behind the daily direction and guidance to become autonomous. Although there are mentors in practice when you graduate, the amount of time they invest in you personally is minimized in comparison to when you're a student. Therefore, my accountability for my own practice has dramatically increased from this experience.

As a new graduate I must recognize my strengths and weaknesses and my gaps in knowledge which enables me to identify the necessary resources to facilitate competency. Heutagogy provided me not only with knowledge but relational skills to identify people's learning preferences and approaches to building collaborative and meaningful learning experiences. This skill set will enable me to engage in learning experiences for future learners - undergraduate nursing students, peers, and clients. Most importantly, this course highlighted the importance of engaging the learner in developing learning experiences which build on strengths, fostering capability and capacity. As a RN, I am responsible for educating clients to foster health by improving their health literacy. It may be a daunting task, but I feel more confident and competent in my ability after this elective.

Learner, as Teacher - Faculty

The role of the faculty is truly to create a culture of curiosity and an ethical and moral space to learn (Hase and Kenyon, 2001) moving away from authoritarian to privilege space honouring all contributions. As faculty there were three key questions which guided further reflection: (1) What is true learning?; (2) Does learning only occur within the confines of a course/classroom?; and (3) Do we need definitive structures, for example evaluative components, to justify that learning has been achieved or can and should learning be fluid?

As faculty in a privileged position it was critical to recognize that the choice of course design, including evaluative strategies, can determine the engagement or disengagement of the learner. Scholarly teaching is a driver in the pursuit of excellence in one's practice. Reflecting on one's practice is paramount to ensure credibility, relevance, and professional growth; fostering capacity and capability. Added to this privileged position is the moral responsibility to engage in relationships that foster the best in others' humanity.

The faculty designed a learning experience which fostered capability – application of knowledge, especially considering the complexity and ambiguity of the healthcare system, to critically and creatively anticipate and rectify changes. Letting go of “*What is learning?*” and “*When do we know it has occurred?*” has been a freeing process. Being open to possibilities has allowed the freedom for spontaneous, creative, and emancipatory learning to occur for faculty members or as we characterized it - “teacher as student”. Recognizing that learning does not only occur in the moment and the principle that we “plant seeds for life-long learning” was more paramount than insisting on measuring prescriptive learning moments. As authors reflecting together on these three questions we were to ask a forth question. *What is it that we must bring to the learning space that we can call the “h” factor that made a difference in the learning experience for “teacher as teacher” and “teacher as student” and consequently for “student as student” and “student as teacher”?* When we trust in the learner's capacity and capability and believe in shared meaningful learning experiences, we must adopt the “h” factor to embody Caring Sciences.

Reflecting together created our space for critical consciousness to challenge the why, the vision, and the intentionality of adopting heutagogically designed outcomes. Reflection does not need to be and should not be a solitary experience, indeed it increasingly is an organizational mandate (Sherwood and Horton Deutsch, 2014), especially if we need to and can share our transcendent moments in and for our learning. It is the embodiment of Caring Sciences, expressed as love and compassion, in the relational space by the

teacher with students in all roles that enabled the success of the elective.

One of the hardest struggles of “letting go” was the belief that for learning to occur it must be measured quantitatively. The process of “letting go” truly embodied our own *Caring Science* practices. There must be a balance between mastery of course content and the pursuit of an inner journey of truth and knowledge acquisition to foster curiosity for future practice. Bridging the learning divide required a paradigm shift; recognizing that learning had been achieved when the student said it had. Our commitment to the struggle of learning is not providing the answers but creating experiences where struggle for the student is apparent to foster growth and to help them tap into their own potential. The answers do not matter – how we challenge our thinking is what is invaluable and necessary.

Learner, as Student -Faculty.

Understanding the importance of embodiment in nursing is critical to our understanding and consciousness of Caring Sciences. Mason (2014) philosophically makes a distinction between holism and embodiment in nursing practice that clarified this importance. If we consider that the student is an embodied person transforming as the design of the course creates opportunities and the teacher simultaneously responds by being present in the teaching learning space, then the teacher’s caring presence becomes part of the student’s person during these interactions and remains as part of the lived learning experience. The teacher is an embodied person transforming as well in the presence of the student. Recognizing the adoption of heutagogy as critical for the embodiment of Caring Sciences for faculty will become increasingly important as nursing education moves from measured outcomes, linearity, teacher as expert, to dialogue and discourse of the learning experience and the acknowledgment of why and how learning is best described as a lived experience between teacher and student. Intentional embodiment by the primary author of Caring Sciences led to enabled engagement in the learning partnership allowing for the authentic expression of humanity as *love* actualized in the lived experience of the course.

Implications - Innovation and Revolution

Teachers, as learners, engaged in scholarship of teaching and learning view their profession as a practice setting which requires ongoing reflection of learning (learner as subject), to ensure relevancy and credibility. This reflection of the learning experience supported by literature reflects scholarly teaching (Allen and Field, 2005). A successful learning experience requires understanding of the learner, teacher, content, and context to foster engagement. Recognizing all learning is contextual supports the belief that heutagogy must ground nursing curricula. Teachers have the responsibility to be accountable to the learner’s needs; helping them establish goals and provide resources for their own exploration.

The purpose of the learning relationship is the shared discovery of meaning; especially from the undergraduate nursing student’s perspective gaining and sharing knowledge. One of the key roles of faculty is to create an ethical moral space to learn, while addressing power, connection, and curiosity. Embodying a teaching philosophy reflective of Caring Sciences will promote caring attributes in nursing students which in turn may influence their future professionalism and interaction with clients (Labrague et al., 2015). Learners who trust and feel safe in initiating discourse with their teachers may engage in knowledge translation and application in practice (Hutchinson and Goodin, 2012). Respectful discourse fosters evolution of thoughts through intellectual stimulation and moral imagination. A teacher who embraces Caring Sciences as foundational for nursing education, “... exposes his/her pedagogical actions according to the interests, concerns, and needs of the student, values a scrupulous respect for the student’s autonomy, and has an interest in meeting and connecting with the student’s experience” (Alvarez and Moya, 2017, p. 2).

Conclusion

Course design grounded in heutagogy and Caring Sciences as described in the authors’ experience created the space for true ethical and moral engagement for learning. Through deliberate “letting go” of old paradigms and honouring the roles of “student as student”, “student as teacher”

“teacher as teacher” and “teacher as student” engagement of learning to meet the demands of higher education and prepare baccalaureate nursing students to meet the challenges of health care in the 21st century was possible. The privilege within the learning relationship, embodied as dual learners, nurtures and fosters an environment for all to flourish which cannot nor should not be underemphasized today. Expression of our teaching and learning humanity, in love and care, becomes a shared relational process among learners in community to foster emancipatory practices in nursing education and thus embody Caring Sciences.

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