



CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

Beginning explorations of the connectedness between patient-centred care, practice development and advanced nursing competencies to promote professional development

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Submitted for publication: 30th November 2016

Accepted for publication: 30th April 2017

Published: 15th November 2017

<https://doi.org/10.19043/ipdj.72.008>

Abstract

Background: As novice practice developers who have attended several enhancing practice conferences and a practice development school, we have been experimenting with the core concepts of person-centred nursing practice and practice development within our masters of nursing programme at Ryerson University, Toronto. Through the process of revising course syllabi, seminar outlines and activities to align with these concepts, we have collated our reflections on the connections between person-centred nursing practice, practice development and advanced nursing practice competencies. A brief description of the Canadian context is provided, along with key elements of course activities, to help situate our conceptualisations.

Aim: To share our emerging ideas about connectedness and its usefulness as a metaphor that captures the critical interconnection between person-centred care, practice development and postgraduate nursing education.

Conclusions: Connectedness is a relevant and important metaphor to articulate our theoretical understanding of how person-centred care, practice development and the development of advanced nursing competencies are intimately connected. We propose that explicit connections are necessary and essential if postgraduate nursing students are to embrace and sustain person-centred practices as advanced nursing practitioners who are required to transform cultures of practice within varied and complex healthcare settings.

Implications for practice:

- Critical companionship is an important role for faculty within postgraduate nursing education
- Connectedness is an important metaphor for describing the integral nature of person-centred care and practice development within academic settings

Keywords: Person-centred nursing practice, practice development, advanced nursing practice, education, professional development, critical companionship

Introduction

We hold the belief that locating practice development within a postgraduate nursing programme is an innovative and exciting pedagogical endeavour. We have been experimenting creatively with practice development since early 2013, and in the process of delving into what we were doing and how we were doing it, we began to see an important connection between person-centred nursing practice, practice development and advanced nursing practice professional development. This article is an opportunity for us to share with a broader practice development community our reflective thoughts about how we have integrated these concepts into course design and delivery within a graduate nursing course, and more specifically how we have applied them in the classroom. Here we will share our emerging ideas about connectedness and its usefulness as a metaphor to capture our reflections on the relationship between person-centred care, practice development and advanced nursing practice in the context of postgraduate nursing education. We will offer our thoughts about building professional development capacity for person-centred nursing practice in postgraduate advanced nursing practitioners to facilitate the transformation of cultures of practice.

First, we will describe the setting in which our ideas have arisen, sharing a little of our practice development journey and offering a brief overview of advanced nursing practice within a Canadian context. Through specific details of our masters of nursing programme and professional advancement of nursing courses at Ryerson University, we will critically examine and reflect on the notion of connectedness and its utility in postgraduate nursing education. In addition, key seminar activities, discussions and faculty reflections will be used to showcase the relevance and importance of this notion as we begin to articulate our collective theoretical understanding of how person-centred nursing practice, practice development and advanced nursing practice competencies are intimately connected. We will then explore how the metaphor of connectedness is instrumental to relational educational practices against this background.

Personal journey

Our journey began with the opportunity to attend an enhancing practice conference in 2012 (SE) and a practice development school the following year (KL). Reflection after the events revealed a keen interest in person-centred practice and practice development within an educational context. We wanted to experiment in the classroom with the ideas we had learned; we believed the application of innovative and transformative teaching practices within graduate nursing programmes could be instrumental in providing practising nurses with the opportunities and supportive environments to learn from personal experience while acquiring advanced practice competencies. As we were co-teaching the capstone courses of the graduate nursing programme, we thought this offered a unique opportunity to do something different and be creative.

Background: advanced nursing practice in Canada

Theoretical frameworks to guide advanced nursing practice have been around since the early 1990s but their development and use in the Canadian context did not begin until at least a decade later (Staples et al., 2016). Although there are many situation-specific local frameworks, the Canadian Nurses Association developed a national framework for advanced nursing practice (Canadian Nurses Association, 2008) with the goal of promoting a common understanding of the role in order to increase consistency of definition, curricula and competency development. According to the framework, the term 'advanced nursing practice' describes a level of clinical nursing that maximises the use of graduate educational preparation, in-depth nursing knowledge and expertise in meeting the health needs of individuals, families, groups, communities and populations. The framework divides competencies into four categories: clinical, research, leadership, and consultation and collaboration, saying it is the effective and simultaneous interaction, blending and execution of knowledge, skills, judgement and personal attributes in a wide variety of practice environments that characterises advanced nursing practice.

Masters of nursing programme at Ryerson University

Our masters programme is one of three programmes at the Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing, the largest nursing school in Canada. The course offers specialty streams and thesis options in the areas of ‘Leadership in healthcare policy and education’ and ‘Health and illness of individuals and communities’. These offer a unique learning experience that prepares nurses to advance nursing in healthcare leadership, practice and research contexts (Ryerson University, 2016a). Embedded within the programme are opportunities for nurses to acquire advanced competencies through intense, challenging practicums that include the development of leadership competencies at an advanced nursing practice level.

Seminars and practicum courses in the professional advancement of nursing

Students in the seminar and practicum capstone courses focus on the synthesis and application of knowledge at an advanced level within their chosen field of study by engaging in a combination of classroom discussions and practicum activities (Ryerson University, 2016b; Table 1).

Table 1: Course description and objectives

Course description	Students will analyse theoretical perspectives of advanced nursing practice from a variety of philosophical and critical standpoints, and critique the multiple domains of advanced nursing practice. Using case studies and examples from their practicums, students will examine and synthesise linkages between theory, research, advanced practice, and their field of study. Students will therefore be expected to promote and facilitate change, contribute to knowledge development and advance practice
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare and contrast theoretical perspectives relevant to advanced nursing practice using a variety of philosophical and critical standpoints 2. Analyse, synthesise and apply current literature to advanced nursing practice 3. Critique the multiple domains of advanced nursing practice for the nursing profession in general and in relation to roles in clinical, leadership, policy, education and research 4. Establish beginning level competencies in advanced practice as defined in <i>Advanced Nursing Practice: a National Framework</i> (Canadian Nurses Association, 2008) and/or other relevant frameworks 5. Work collaboratively to plan, coordinate, implement and evaluate programmes to meet client needs 6. Demonstrate ability to influence practice and facilitate change

The objectives set out in Table 1 are addressed by students at weekly in-class seminars. This work relates to the students’ practicum and requires advanced competencies of critical thinking and scholarship. Alongside these seminars students complete a practicum over 12 weeks that involves 192 hours in a practice setting with an advanced nursing practitioner preceptor. During their practicum experience students will apply theoretical and empirical knowledge gained from the seminar course. Overall, students are expected to promote change and demonstrate innovation by extending the boundaries of nursing practice inherent in their practicum setting through contributing to knowledge development and the advancement of the profession.

Seminar activities

Given that postgraduate nursing graduates are expected to facilitate change and influence advanced practice in specialised settings, we strategically set out to incorporate the concept of person-centredness into course readings and discussions, and explore its relevance to the context of advanced nursing practice within our complex and dynamic healthcare system. We also intentionally used practice development methodology – values clarification, critical reflection and active learning – to establish formal links between the existence of person-centred practices and cultures and the development of domains of advanced nursing practice, such as clinical practice, education, research, and leadership.

At the beginning of the each seminar we invited students to participate with us in a values clarification exercise (Warfield and Manley, 1990) about advanced nursing practice or nurses in positions to advance the practice of nursing. We asked students to capture their responses on a piece of paper in relation to the following questions:

- I believe the ultimate purpose of the advanced nursing practitioner is...
- I believe this purpose can be achieved by...

Students' responses to these key questions were shared and explored. In the light of their collective responses we began identifying and reviewing the domains of practice and competencies of advanced nursing practice according to the Canadian Nurses Association (2008) framework. This discussion dovetailed into an exploration of their individual practicum clinical projects and key competencies and expectations related to transforming practice cultures in their places of work.

The concepts of person-centred care and practice development (McCormack et al., 2009) were then introduced and explored to discuss their relevance to advanced nursing practitioners and their future role as facilitators of change and knowledge translation brokers.

At the end of the discussion, each student identified one concept from the nine practice development principles (McCormack et al., 2013) to incorporate into the learning plan for their practicum placement. The group then collectively chose the three concepts that interested them most and were perceived to be applicable to their learning plans. The three concepts chosen were:

- Person-centred cultures
- Blending personal qualities and creative imagination with practice skills and practice wisdom
- Active learning (McCormack et al., 2009).

These were incorporated by the faculty into weekly seminars. Key practice development methods were used to support clinical practicum debriefings about the use of these concepts in advanced nursing practice work.

Table 2 describes the key concepts of person-centred care, practice development and advanced nursing practice critically analysed in this article.

Table 2: Key elements of person-centred care, practice development and advanced nursing practice

	Definition	Elements	Interfaces	Outcomes
<p>Person-centred care McCormack et al. (2015)</p> <p><i>Framework:</i> Person-centred nursing framework (McCormack and McCance, 2016)</p>	<p>'An approach to practice established through the formation and fostering of healthful relationships between all care providers, service users and others significant to them in their lives. It is underpinned by values of respect for persons, individual right to self-determination, mutual respect and understanding. It is enabled by cultures of empowerment that foster continuous approaches to practice development' (McCormack and McCance, 2016, p 3)</p>	<p><i>Key constructs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prerequisites • The care environment • Person-centred processes • Outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client/family • Unit/organisational • Professional (education/policy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good care experience • Involvement with care • Feeling of wellbeing • Existence of a healthful culture
<p>Practice development McCormack et al. (2009)</p> <p><i>Framework:</i> Conceptual framework for practice development (McCormack et al., 1999; 2009)</p>	<p>'A continuous process of developing person-centred cultures. It is enabled by facilitators who authentically engage with individuals and teams to blend personal qualities and creative imagination with practice skills and practice wisdom. The learning that occurs brings about transformations of individual and team practices' (Manley et al., 2008, p 9)</p>	<p><i>Key concepts:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable person-centred cultures • Enabling facilitation • Authentic engagement; blending personal qualities and creative imagination with practice skills and practice wisdom • Active learning • Transformation of individual and team practices and corporate strategy (sustainability, feasibility, acceptability) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client/family • Organisational • Strategic (education/policy) 	<p><i>Practitioners who:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume leadership and advocacy roles • Engage with stakeholders in the exchange of information to inform practice • Apply advanced knowledge to diverse health issues
<p>Advanced nursing practice Canadian Nurses Association (2008).</p> <p><i>Framework:</i> Framework for Advance Nursing Practice (Canadian Nurses Association, 2008)</p>	<p>'An umbrella term describing an advanced level of clinical nursing practice that maximises the use of graduate educational preparation, in-depth nursing knowledge and expertise in meeting the health needs of individuals, families, groups, and communities and populations. It involves analysing and synthesising knowledge; understanding, interpreting and applying nursing theory and research; and developing and advancing nursing knowledge and the profession as a whole' (Canadian Nurses Association, 2008, p 10)</p>	<p><i>Key domains of practice:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical practice • Research • Leadership • Consultation and collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client/family • Unit/organisational • Professional (education/policy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person-centred care • Person-centred cultures

Beginning exploration of our conceptual ideas

Based on our teaching and learning experiences in a graduate classroom using person-centred care concepts and practice development methods, we explored our reflective thoughts about the connection between those concepts and advanced nursing practice education, with the ultimate goal of promoting professional development for postgraduate nursing students.

To facilitate the process, we used EVOKE cards to help us capture the ideas that our reflections revealed to us. We both chose a number of images and through further dialogue and reflection we settled on the image shown below. These cards are designed to be used in many creative ways; they can be used to evoke a range of emotions, memories and ideas and to reflect on an experience, feeling or idea (www.evoke.com). We feel the use of the cards was a fruitful way to facilitate our reflections and discussions.

Figure 1: EVOKE card



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The EVOKE card image above reflected for us the actual process that took place as a result of using practice development methodology to facilitate active learning processes in the classroom, in particular, the notion of *'being intertwined, linked, non-linear and messy, needing to explore, forging many paths, being persistent, becoming resilient, and finding and making connections'* (LeGrow and Espin, personal reflections, 2016).

Role of faculty

We believe faculty's role in supporting person-centred nursing practice in an educational context is to be purposeful, intentional, strategic and relational. Achieving this included creating a safe and supportive space for challenging conversations. Strategies used to support our role as critical companions include authentic engagement with students, paying attention to establishing and nurturing relationships, creating terms of engagement, asking critically reflective questions and providing time and space for them to be shared with self and others. These were key elements of practice in the physical and virtual classroom spaces.

Critical companionship as a key role of faculty

Our ideas and beliefs about the role of faculty in professional development are synonymous with critical companionship. This is described as a helping relationship where an experienced facilitator accompanies another on an experiential learning journey within the realms of a trusting relationship. Its overall purpose is to enable person-centred, evidence-informed practice by combining expressive, intuitive and creative processes with rational analysis, critique and evaluation of practice and its evidence base (Titchen, 2003a). Strategies used by critical companions to achieve this purpose include role modelling, sharing expertise and helping nurses reflect critically on their practice (Titchen, 2003a; McCormack and Titchen, 2006). Critical companionship first appeared in the context of clinical practice environments (Titchen, 2003a; 2003b). Its foray into the realm of academia in Canada is still in its infancy so we are proposing that critical companionship is an important key role subsumed by faculty to promote the acquisition and development of advanced nursing practice professional competencies by postgraduate nursing students.

Connectedness

Our conceptual reflections regarding the interrelationship between person-centred care, practice development and advanced nursing practice education lead us to emphasise the notion of connectedness:

– as process

- between persons, such as students and faculty with clients and staff in clinical practicum placements
- between classroom and clinical experiential learning activities that integrate research, practice, and theory
- between diverse contexts in which these learning activities occur such as academia, clinical organisations/agencies, and community settings

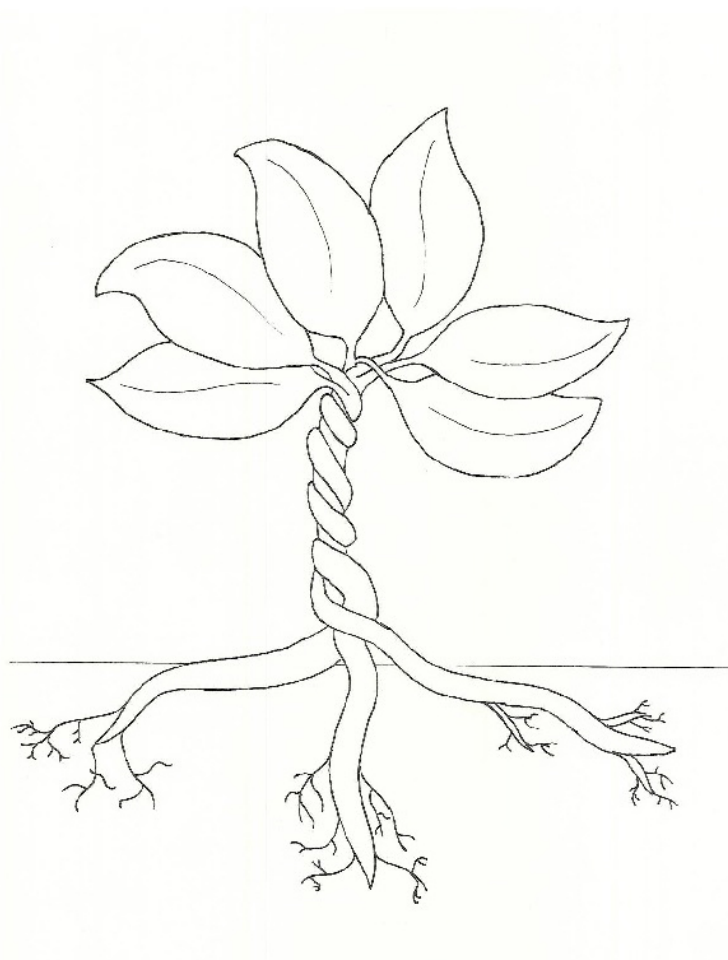
– and as outcome

- where graduate students have a unique understanding of the advanced nursing practice role and have acquired beginning level competencies as advanced nursing practitioners

Person-centred care is brought together with advanced nursing practice competencies by faculty enacting the role of critical companion within the context of practice development methodology.

This interrelationship is reflected in the image below, wherein roots become intertwined to support and strengthen each other in reaching their collective goal, that of allowing a living organism to bloom and flourish (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Connectedness (person-centredness/practice development/advanced nursing practice)



Ryan Yan

Figure 2 represents for us connectedness – that is, a coming together of key elements that allow person-centred practices to flourish within a graduate nursing education programme. We ground our ideas within nature because enacting person-centred cultures in academia has been an organic process for us. The illustration shows our perspective of the essential elements that need to be in place for person-centred cultures to thrive in academic settings. The elements depicted include the creation of a solid base ('roots' such as person-centredness, practice development and advanced nursing practice competencies), ongoing support and growth ('stalks' coming together, such as practice development and critical companionship) providing an environment for flourishing to occur (budding/blossoming of 'leaves' such as advanced competencies, research, education, collaboration, consultation, and leadership). Faculty's role as critical companion can be represented by the soil, with 'nutrients' that support student learning and growth, and by the wind, sun and rain, which encourage continued growth and development towards a blossoming of capacities and the act of flourishing.

We see Figure 2 as embodying these elements, connected in an organic and dynamic manner to offer the setting and support needed for person-centred cultures to thrive and flourish in the unique environment of academia.

Summary

We believe that the critically reflective conversations postgraduate students have with peers and critical companions (faculty) are essential in providing a means for the students to connect their reflections and learnings in classroom seminars with those in the practicum practice setting. Our

idea of connectedness aligns with ‘circles of connection’ – one of the methodological principles for helping persons to flourish (McCormack et al., 2013). Circles of connection are defined as the creation of meaningful, critically reflective conversations that lead to support for, and engagement with, the changes that a team initiates as a result of active learning (McCormack et al., 2013). Therefore, faculty’s role in facilitating critical reflection, creativity and active learning, while using the conceptual and theoretical ideas underpinning person-centred care and practice development, is crucial to the development of the advanced nursing practice professional competencies needed to transform cultures of practice.

Next steps

We are continually striving to develop ourselves as practice developers from academic and educational perspectives and are committed to solidifying the incorporation of person-centred care, practice development and advanced nursing practice into the graduate nursing courses that we teach. We are also seeking opportunities to incorporate these ideas into other nursing graduate courses at our university.

We are excited about furthering the conceptual exploration we have begun in this critical reflection and believe the ideas shared here have implications for practice-based graduate nursing education and other practice-based education programmes. We are therefore actively and intentionally seeking opportunities formally to explore the pedagogy of teaching within the context of advanced nursing practice and seeking future education and research collaborations.

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