

A worthwhile experience for nurse educator: Conduct of systematic review on portfolio use in nursing education.

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Introduction

Reflecting on experience is an essential constituent for personal and professional growth in nursing education. It involves learning from experience to gain insights into one's own practice [1]. Reflection has been defined in different ways and by many authors. For the purpose of this paper, it is defined as a method of attaining awareness of how and why things have occurred. In reflecting on the conduct of systematic review, the principles of reflection have been a valuable addition to the knowledge, skills and practice of the author. The whole experience to pursue a systematic review on portfolio in nursing education was challenging, frustrating, and sometimes almost impossible to achieve at that time [2]. However, it also came with several benefits that need acknowledgement. In this article, it is worth sharing this experience with student nurse and faculty, starting with an overview on Portfolio, systematic review, then reflecting on the experience benefits and challenges.

Portfolio

A portfolio is defined in nursing education as a collection of evidence of both the products and the process of learning, with a critical analysis of its content that demonstrates personal and professional growth and accomplishment [3]. The use of the portfolio has increased lately in nursing education, and is being used for different purposes [4,5]. In Oman, the portfolio is used for post graduate Diploma in Critical Care in Neonatal and Pediatric Nursing students of the Higher Institute of Health Specialties (HIHS), for students' learning, and to support student's personal and professional development, as well used as an assessment tool to assess student learning in clinical. That time, in 2008, it was a new concept of interest to learn about and investigate the literature and evidence about it, and was a drive to conduct a systematic review on portfolio use in nurse education.

Systematic review

A systematic review is a scientific method of evaluating research across a particular topic. It is almost detailed type of literature review. It is used in different fields in health and social researches. It is been defined as use of systematic approach to comprehensively study and interpret that is related to a particular topic in transparent, systematic and rigorous manner. The systematic review process allows the generation

of knowledge from a broad sphere of proved researches and informed actions on the reviewed subject matter when rigorous processes are guaranteed [6]. Systematic review, also, facilitates the analysis and synthesis of research and data relevant to specific topic. The most well-known scheme for conducting a systematic review in health care is produced by the international organization (www.cochrane.org) chchane collaboration.

Experience benefits and challenges

The process of carrying out a systematic review involves a number of activities [6,2]. In the author's experience, it has not only been a complex, but a complicated process, as it was the first time to carry out such an experience. Although, the process was challenging, it also came with several rewards. As a subject area for review seemed difficult due to the broadness of the subject area and its feasibility much more in educational research than clinical. This challenge notwithstanding, the subject area was appealing to the author who happens to be a Nurse-educator. The professional relevance of this subject area is critical as it highlights recent trends in nursing education practice. The portfolio is widely used in nursing education and in higher institute of Health specialties in Oman it is used as a learning and assessment tool to assess students' clinical learning and progress in theoretical course. Hence, as nurse educators, we are accountable for the provision of high quality teaching and learning methods that facilitate student development and adaptation to professional needs [7,8]. It is for this reason that the review process is appreciated.

To demonstrate rigour, the need for the question to be as explicit as possible was the first challenge. This stage alone was time consuming. For the first time to conduct a systematic review and looking for a researchable question to start with, it implies a lot of searches and cognitive thought to reach the appropriate question in the review. Miller [9] indicated that during the process of identifying the appropriate question for the review, students should be provided sufficient time to discuss and set up the search terms and strategy. This sentiment is shared by Bryman and Aveyard [1] who accentuate that the actual requirement is for the question to be so well defined that it reflects the principles of a sound systematic review.

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In providing the needed support for the stage, my academic supervisor adopted a system of interprofessional learning to assure quality, thus involving collaboration between the teaching team and the school's librarians who combined expertise in supervising the search strategy process. In addition, systematic review search differs from non-systematic searches in that the non-systematic is broad, haphazard, biased and not always transparent [10]. The systematic adopts a very sophisticated and detailed process that allows for replication of findings. Although, it was an exhausting process that involved a lot of learning by trial and error which consumed a lot of time doing the search in comprehensive and systematic method, the benefits of the process were far exceeding as it contributed to gaining new knowledge and skills at first hand [10].

The critical roles search strategy and critical appraisals are of immense contribution to the entire process of systematic review and essential throughout the author's professional career as a Nurse-teacher for life-long learning [5]. Such contributions include the development of self-skills to access information through different resources to find specific literature to inform actions in the conduct of future research or more regularly, in the daily preparation of teaching materials. The search strategy has increased the author's awareness about the range of information sources and the variety of databases available and their limitations.

With particular reference to the stage of critical appraisal, an appreciation of this stage is necessary for the success of a systematic review [6]. When appraising the strength of evidence, decision-making skills are enhanced as the appraisal processes entailed a lot of judgments regarding the quality of studies. For this review, however, the negative experiences of the process included the short time frame which neither helped the critical appraisal nor the data extraction. Indeed, both stages happened to be the most challenging activities to be undertaken due to time restriction and deadline of assignment submission, with the fact that these two stages are very crucial part in that academic assignment.

In this perspective, searching for an appropriate appraisal tool to guide the processes, the author invested a lot of time, but unfortunately there were no tools appropriate enough for the course. Eventually, merging information from a number of available tools, a tool was created for the review's purpose. The reason for this was that the subject was in nursing education and dealing with students, considering that the origin of Evidence-Based Practice is grounded in the medical field which relies heavily on cause and effect; Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT). On the contrary, nursing seeks meanings into experiences, lived or otherwise, in support of actions to provide individual holistic quality care, there is still a challenge to retrieve RCTs' studies and application of EBP with some topics.

As a consolation for this stress, Miller [9] assurance that teachers who use evidence based practice succeed in facing up students' difficulties in conducting and critically appraising evidence is comforting, as the teacher had the experiences

and can guide students very well. Furthermore, I strongly believe that this academic exercise would have been much more beneficial if there was a better grasp of the research methodology with advanced critical appraisal skills, and this was lacking due to limited experience that time. In addition, clearer guidelines and more supportive infrastructure will definitely enable the students to accomplish the task successfully.

Conclusion

Overall, the main advantage of this experience was the fact that the whole process has deepened understanding of process of conducting and limitations of systematic reviews in general, as well as, the researched concept in particular. In addition, awareness has increased in regards to research skills and needs of learning from the experience (reflection). This realization has been supported who argued that postgraduate students have to be competent and active consumers of the available literature and evidence-based practice to inform their clinical practice. In as much as the exercise has sharpened the author's critiquing skills, the transfer of these skills into practice is of the essence as a lifelong learner.

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