Storytelling as Learning: in Specialist Community Public Health Nursing Education

Overview: The integration of person-centred concepts and professional storytelling as learning in a post-registration Masters level Specialist Community Public Health Nursing curriculum based within the Division of Nursing at Queen Margaret University (QMU), Edinburgh, Scotland. Exploring the potential to illuminate core practices of public health nurses and their influence on the lives of children and their families.

Storytelling: Public health nursing students on the Post Graduate Diploma: Person-centred Practice programme are transitioning to a new professional role and identity, with a health and wellbeing perspective. This includes the complexity of holistic assessment and judgement of risk and safeguarding, centred on the child from a wellbeing perspective (NMC 2004; Malone et al 2016; Scottish Government 2015). Communities of learners examine the connections between practice theory, through reflective conversations; a communicative space (Titchen, Cardiff & Biong 2017). A creative element of this is storytelling as a means of facilitating learning to:
• develop a shared understanding of person-centredness;
• become part of a healthful culture of practice;
• build on strengths and competence, recognising vulnerability;
• give a voice to evolving personal and professional development;
• acknowledge a sense of ‘self’.

Embedded in this approach is a philosophy of personhood and person-centred ways of working underpinned by McCance & McCormack’s Person-centred Framework (McCance & McCormack 2017).

Evaluation: Connecting with others and building resilience in response to the judgements and decisions made in practice has been a key outcome when preparing to move into a new professional role:
• being ‘professionally competent’;
• having ‘developed interpersonal skills’;
• with ‘commitment to the job’;
• with ‘clarity of beliefs and values’; and
• ‘knowing self’. (McCance & McCormack 2017)

To demonstrate this, we have collected evaluative and creative commentaries of learning over the last three years. My linked doctoral research study is building on this method, exploring the role of storytelling as learning for public health nursing students.

Conclusion: As an educator, my interest lies in understanding how knowledge and skills are creatively developed regarding complex assessment and professional practices when working with children and their families. Creative storytelling is one method that can emphasise the relationship between praxis and reflectivity. It becomes a place of authenticity, vulnerability, reflectivity and interconnectedness as the person, as storyteller, transitions to a new professional role and identity. I have come to appreciate the uniqueness of the approach we adopt that provides the scaffolding for practitioners to reflect and evaluate their practice in a safe space.