



Narrative Writing in Nursing Education

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INTRODUCTION

“Observation tells us the fact, reflection the meaning of the fact” (Florence Nightingale, 1860). Reflection allows nurses to process their experience, explore their understanding of what they are doing, why they are doing it and the impact it has on themselves and others (Boud, 1999). One method to facilitate reflective practice is through a nursing narrative. A nursing narrative is a brief account of an actual situation or episode in clinical practice that is significant because it results in new learning and/or new understanding (Levitt-Jones & Bourgeois, 2007). A reflective narrative provides the means to understand personal connections between the patient and nurse making them more effective communicators and comprehensive and compassionate providers. Nurses write in nontechnical language, helping them to uncover and understand their feeling toward and knowledge of their patients (Charon, 2004). By listening to patient’s stories and articulating their actions it helps to empower both the nurse and the patient, and the focus becomes treating the patient and not just the disease.

Narratives can be a creative and powerful tool in nursing. They encourage nurses to listen, reflect and create therapeutic interventions for their patients. Writing and sharing these stories are a valuable means for communicating a special kind of knowledge that is important for providing patient centered care. Narrative writing creates the bridge between the science and art of nursing, and allows nurses to take responsibility for how they want to practice nursing.

Benefits of Narrative Writing

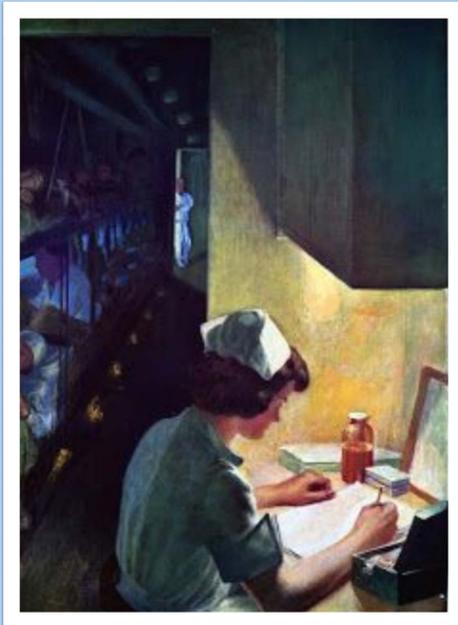
Some of our most profound experiences such as witnessing a birth, suffering with a loved one or comforting someone who is dying can’t be expressed through scientific writing.

Narrative writing provides important opportunities for uncovering nursing practices that often go un-noticed, and a new appreciation of the knowledge and skills of clinical practice (Benner, 1984).

It increases a student’s mastery and appreciation of their own work and ability to better care for patients

Reading student’s narratives provides an active encounter between the teacher and the student.

Reflective Narratives involves the human, interpersonal and caring process of education



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Therapeutic Uses of Narrative Writing

Patient Experience

“As we listen to someone’s story, we are drawn into the unique reality of that individual” (Van Manen, 1991)

Listening to the patients and their families helps the students have a new understanding of their patients and sense of empowering others. It helps to create a shared world between the nursing student, their patients and the patients’ families.

Helps with not only understanding the patient but the disease as well and in turn allows the nurse to structure a specific plan of care for the patient..

Enables the clinician to practice with empathy, reflection, professionalism and trustworthiness (Charon, 2001).

Self Reflection

Narratives help students to identify and interpret their own emotional responses to patients and make sense of their own life journey.

Students can learn from these painful, difficult or uncomfortable experiences and then explore, question and grow as a result of these experiences.

Clinical Event or Situation

It can be a positive or negative experience

Quick questions to ask oneself about event

1. What was going on (context)
2. What happened (situation)
3. Why was it important
4. What were your concerns
5. What were your feeling during and after the event
6. What did you learn from the event



Narrative Writing Assignment

A clinical narrative is a first person “story” written by a clinician that describes a specific clinical event or situation. This story serves as an opportunity for reflection. Some of our most profound experiences such as witnessing a birth, suffering with a loved one or comforting someone who is dying, cannot be adequately expressed through scientific writing. Narrative writing can allow the power of these events to emerge. The clinician is empowered by writing what she/he had done and helps them to become more effective communicators and compassionate providers.

Some examples include:

A clinical experience with a patient or family that illustrates how your intervention made a difference in patient outcomes

A clinical experience that was particularly demanding

A clinical event or situation that you think captures the essence of your discipline

A clinical situation that you commonly confront in your practice and that gave you new insight into your role as a professional nurse.

Elements to include in your narrative

Information that allows the reader to put the situation in context such as a description of where the event took place, the time of day and shift on which it occurred, a description of special conditions on the unit, and details about the patient’s background.

A detailed description about the situation.

Descriptions of your thoughts and feelings during and after the situation.

Important conversations you had with the patient, family, members of the health care team, or other relevant parties.

Reflections on why this clinical situation was important to you and how this experience may impact your nursing care.

Remember to present your story as a first person account. Change the patient’s name and any other identifying information in order to protect confidentiality.

Reading Narratives in the Classroom

Powerful learning experience and is therapeutic for the listener as well as the storyteller.

The focus is on the story and message it conveys.

Helps capture insights that are important for the students in planning therapeutic interventions with their patients.

Creates intimacy in the classroom, which can be upsetting to the students.

Safe learning environment where they feel secure in disclosing personal feelings and information.

Excerpts from Student's Narratives

“I am sucked into his world. Daniel grabs the disposable bedside stethoscope and we transition to playing “doctor and patient”. He listens to my heart and asks me questions: “How old are you? How are things at home? Who is the boss in your house?” Then he looks imploringly: “Do you take all of your medications?” I say yes and he prods: “Are you lying to me?” And I can’t help but think that this has come from somewhere.”

“The girl’s eyes vacillated, hypnotized by the movement of the ball. And then she wanted in. So we threw the ball in a triangle. Instant Friendship. The ball flew back and forth, back and forth and she cried with glee. She wasn’t able to go outside and play, but she would enjoy herself. *Because this is her reality.* She should be learning English in school, but instead she is learning it in this hospital rom. She will learn the word “digestion” before she learns the word “playground.” *Because this is her reality.*”

“Donning the green gown and sterile gloves, I couldn’t help but ponder the irony of going to such great lengths to protect myself when I knew that neither I nor anyone ultimately could protect this child from what would eventually claim his mere twelve years of life”

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