Knowledge Acquisition and
Information Literacy in Nursing

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Abstract

"The learner in contemporary society has to understand the self as well as interpret and understand the changing environment which he or she practices in order to perform in and add value to it" (Duncan et al., 2006, p. 60). Disciplinary themes of nursing competencies, based on evidenced-based-practice and technological and evidenced-based curricula approaches, do not necessarily consider that nurses, like the individuals and communities they care for, are complex. Expanding professional foci to include the individual nature of committed knowledge acquisition offers insight into the constraints that inhibit nurses from obtaining advanced information literacy skills.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Evidenced-based Practice, Nursing Competency, Knowledge Acquisition, Evidenced-based Curricula

Introduction

Today's nurse needs to be a flexible, innovative, and information literate professional who, utilizing the best available evidence, can solve complex client and community problems (Bernard, Nash, & O'Brien, 2005). Consider the perspective that learning is a reformulation of the meaning of experiences that leads to change in attitudes, feelings, and responses. This article suggests that integrating the nature of knowledge acquisition within the disciplinary themes of nursing competencies, evidenced-based-practice and technological and evidenced-based curricula approaches, will not only enhance information literacy but also support lifelong learning that "…can be initiated, extended, and sustained through abilities that may use technologies but are independent of them" (Bernard et al., 2005, p. 506).

The Wider Context

The International Technology Education Association (ITEA) documents that "[f]rom a global perspective, in order to be a technologically literate citizen, a person should understand what technology is, how it works, how it shapes society and in turn how society shapes it" (ITEA, 2000/2002, *Why the Study of Technology Should Be Mandatory*, ¶ 1). Multidisciplinary efforts towards achieving the vision of global information literacy are emerging in the literature. Lauer and Yodani (2004) contribute to achieving global and scientific literacy through the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)**,** where "[s]tudents are encouraged to think beyond their own society" (Conclusion, ¶ 1). Against the backdrop of collaborative multidisciplinary efforts to meet recommendations to further define and develop informational literacy models that support individuals, and educators, in achieving life-long information literacy (Information Literacy: Final Report, *Background to the Report,* 1989, ¶ 1). Cambridge's (2007) view on knowledge acquisition, accompanied by Duncan, Alperstein,

Mayers, Olckers and Gibbs's (2006) identification of the encouraging phenomena of inter-professional and multi-professional education and collaboration (p. 60), offers innovative informational literacy strategies worthy of professional and scholarly consideration.

Nursing and Information Literacy

As with other disciplines, interest in information literacy by nursing governing bodies, agencies, and interest groups, has grown exponentially. Though the constructs associated with nursing informatics are fluidly evolving, Staggers and Thompson (2002) suggest nursing information literacy "[i]ntegrates nursing science, computer science, and information science to manage and communicate data, information, and knowledge…to support clients, nurses, and other providers in their decision-making in all roles and settings" (p. 262). Ultimately, the goal of nursing informatics remains to improve the health of populations, communities, families, and individuals by optimizing information management and communication (Canadian Nurses Association, 2006, Position Statement). To further this goal, associations, such as the Canadian Nursing Informatics Association (CNIA, n.d.) assist Canadian nurses "…to learn, share, research, and create informatics-related projects and experiences that can help to boost the competencies, theory, and practice of informatics on a national level".

Despite escalating responsibilities and enhanced roles for nurses, and an increasing emphasis to become more knowledgeable about health information concepts and technology (Canadian Nursing Association, 2006), Courney, Benson-Soros, Deemer and Zeller (2006) assert, "[t]he continued and ongoing development of evidence based nursing practice is crucial for nursings' recognition as a distinct profession" (p. 320). Bernard et al. (2005) acknowledge that emerging scholarly interest among nurse educators has primarily emphasized evidence-based practice and practice competencies, however the question of whether information literacy has necessarily led to the promotion of evidence-based nursing practice may require further consideration (Courney et al., 2006). It would be difficult to argue

with Vehrey that despite the established advancements in nursing literature "…it is of no value unless it is read and applied" (as cited in Courney et al., 2006, p. 322).

Acquisition of Knowledge

Supporting Courney's et al. (2006) assertions, Cambridge (2007) suggests the acquisition of knowledge "…entails the knower's understanding and some degree of commitment" (p. 5). Given the current trend of revising nursing curriculum to prepare nurses for the 21st century practice (Bernard et al., 2005; Courney et al., 2006; Duncan, Alperstein, Mayers, Olckers & Gibbs, 2006), and focused efforts of professional nursing licensing agencies, associations, and organizations, Cambridge's (2007) recommendation that the future lies in "…a shift toward people, including what they know, how they come to know it, and how they differ" (p. 5) is worthy of consideration.

Scholarship and Evidenced-based Practice

There is no shortage of nurse researchers who articulate the importance of lifelong learning for professional nurses (Bernard et al., 2005; Estabrooks, O'Leary, & Ricker, 2007; Courney et al., 2006). Similarly, there is emerging nursing literature regarding the structural, system, and attitudinal barriers nurses face in acquiring information literacy (Courney et al., 2006). Attitudinal changes toward basing professional nursing practice on current research will be a challenge, and further constrain nurses from achieving information literacy proficiencies until the profession finds creative solutions to overcome barriers such as negative students' attitudes, limited exposure to actual evidence-based nursing practice, and inconsistent role modeling of evidenced-based practice by RNs (Courney et al., 2006, p. 321). Vehrey highlights "[t]he ongoing application of new research-based information to professional nursing practice is a vital component of maintaining competence over the lifetime of a career" (as cited by Courney et al., 2006, p. 252). Recognizing that "changing practice requires changing learning

approaches" (Duncan et al., 2006, p. 63), the achievement of this lifelong learning approach necessitates appreciating that information must be filtered through individual experiences and applied to personal and professional lives in order to be meaningful and become knowledge.

"The learner in contemporary society has to understand the self as well as interpret and understand the changing environment which he or she practices in order to perform in and add value to it" (Duncan et al., 2006, p. 60). The disciplinary themes of competencies, based on evidenced-based-practice, are laudable but technological and evidenced-based curricula approaches do not necessarily consider that nurses, like the individuals and communities they care for, are complex. Without this consideration, the individual nature of committed knowledge acquisition that Cambridge (2007) espouses, may be lost in favor of an overwhelming reliance on tools and methods of practice. Courney et al. (2006) validate that information literacy supports people in becoming independent, reflective, critical thinkers and experts in all dimensions of life. Conversely, reducing information literacy to what can be measured, observed and quantified may erode the possibilities of nurses developing a confident approach to creative inquiry a core concept of lifelong learning.

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