Use of the Unfolding Case Study in Teaching Nurse Educator Master of Science in Nursing Students

Currently, in nursing education, the use of interactive and transferable strategies to narrow the gap between nursing education and practice is imperative (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010). Day (2011) described one such strategy as the use of unfolding case studies in a subject-centered classroom, which provides students with a case that slowly unfolds as the faculty provides additional information, rather than giving all of the information at once, as is often done with traditional case studies (Palmer, 2007). Unfolding case studies provide students with a set of data that evolves over time, requiring them to commit to actions based on the information they have at a given time (Porter-Wenzlaffs, 2013). This type of teaching promotes connected inquiry among students and teachers. The unfolding story must be believable, credible, and relevant to what the class is to accomplish (Day, 2011). Day (2011) described four main steps in developing an unfolding case study, based upon the following questions:

- What is the goal of the class, and who are the learners?
- What are the content areas I want to visit during the class?
- What do I want the case to do?
- Who should the patient be?

In the online Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) nursing education concentration at the author’s school, students complete two practicum courses in the last two semesters of their program of study, in which they engage in classroom, laboratory, clinical, and online teaching and other activities related to the role of the nurse educator. In the first practicum course, students read the Carnegie Foundation’s advancement of teaching study on nursing education (Benner et al., 2010). Four online discussion boards were set up for the semester center on the implications for nursing education.

In the second practicum course, four online discussion boards revolve around an unfolding case study, which was developed to address the four questions presented by Day (2011) and adapted to the course. The goal is to prepare students to enter the role of the nurse educator during a time of radical transformation in nursing education. The content areas covered provide a type of capstone experience and deal with real-life issues and scenarios related to the role of the nurse educator, which come from the experiences of the faculty member and other nurse educators. The four discussion boards provide scenarios related to identifying faculty mentors and moving into the role of the nurse educator, incivility and unprofessional behavior by a student in the clinical setting, test analysis, and academic integrity. The purposes of using this strategy are twofold: to provide an example of an unfolding case study for students, and to place students in a real-life situation related to the roles of the nurse educator and engage them in discussion about roles and issues. The faculty wrote the case study and questions to guide the discussion board posts. Students respond to the guided questions regarding each scenario and discuss issues related to the scenario with their peers. The faculty member provides a summary response to the scenario after all students have responded and asks additional questions to encourage further discussion and reflection on the issues presented.

Students are initially provided an overview and scenario of the case. The scenario states that they are novice nurse educators with 7 years of practice experience in an inpatient setting, who have completed their MSN degree, with a concentration in nursing education, within the past year. They have just begun in a university faculty position. They are given their teaching assignment, expectations for attending faculty meetings, office hours, and other faculty responsibilities. This scenario sets the stage for the four discussion boards.

At the time of this writing, this assignment has been used for four semesters with approximately 30 students. The unfolding case study discussion boards have received positive feedback from students, who range from novice nurse educators to those with years of experience in nursing education. Their dialogue is at a high level, and they support their posts with current literature. Students reflect on what they experience in their role as nurse educators, and those without experience in the role are seeing the issues discussed within their practicum settings.

At the conclusion of the course, voluntary, anonymous student feedback was requested to determine whether students felt the assignment had been beneficial in preparing them for their role as nurse educators. The feedback was positive, and students felt the assignment had opened their eyes to issues of which they were unaware.

Over the past years, the focus of nursing education has moved from teacher centered to student centered. With this change in focus, teaching strategies have evolved to be more interactive and more closely link theory and practice, and they promote active student involvement and interaction (West, Usher, & Delaney, 2012). The unfolding case study allows for applied learning that is dynamic and engaging and replicates real-life scenarios that face nurse educators (Porter-Wenzlaffs, 2013). Although unfolding case studies are excellent strategies to use to promote clinical imagination, nursing education students must understand this strategy as they enter the nurse faculty role. Students in this course have now had experience in learning through an unfolding case study; therefore, they may be more willing to use this strategy as educators.

References


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