The Literature Table as a Prompt for Careful Appraisal

Students in our Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program struggled with providing a clear synthesis of the literature on their topic of interest. A faculty workgroup determined that students were not adequately assessing the literature and, therefore, were not able to synthesize evidence. For example, previous students neglected to assess the study setting to determine whether results were applicable to their practice sites. In addition, students were not using appraisal tools, such as PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; Liberati et al., 2009) and AGREE II (Brouwers et al., 2010), in their evaluation of sources. To meet the DNP Essentials, students must be able “to critically appraise existing literature and other evidence to determine
and implement best evidence for practice” (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2006, p. 12). The authors assessed published literature tables and found none linking the study design with an appraisal tool and only one that included a quality assessment. Using the theory of constructivism, the literature table prompts learning by articulating expected components. Conducting literature reviews can be difficult and, consistent with constructivism, students need feedback to master this skill.

Development and Implementation of an Expanded Literature Table

With this in mind, the authors created a table with essential components of a thorough literature assessment (Table A; in the online version of this article). We integrated the table into an evidence appraisal course offered once per year in a distance format with 60 to 70 students and eight to 10 faculty. Prior to this revision, the three major course assignments involved individual assessment of selected research studies using the PRISMA and CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials; Moher et al., 2015) checklists, and clinical practice guidelines using the AGREE II tool, followed by group collaboration, to reach consensus. Although this approach allowed students to use appraisal tools and receive feedback, it did not require students to assess literature in their topic area. As part of this minor course revision, we eliminated one group project and added a two-stage completion of the literature appraisal table.

In the first stage, students completed the table (with the exception of the assessment column) using five peer-reviewed or expert panel sources related to their clinical question. Because students can struggle to find content within articles, students highlighted information in each source to correlate with like-colored table columns using tools in Adobe® Acrobat®. Highlighting facilitated grading and produced annotated sources for students’ future reference. To grade the table, faculty randomly selected a row, verified accuracy using the highlighted article, provided feedback for improvement, and used a rubric to score the assignment.

For the second submission of the table, students incorporated prior feedback and appraised each source using an appropriate tool. Faculty graded a different row and provided additional feedback. The table provided students with an opportunity to develop literature assessment knowledge and skills with faculty supervision. Following the course, students applied their skills and knowledge of literature appraisal to assess additional sources. Later courses guided students to look down the columns of the table to synthesize the literature to support the project.

Results

The literature table was well received by students and faculty. Course evaluations about the assignment were extremely positive; students commented on the clear link between the assignment, their project, and their later role in determining which evidence should be applied in practice. Faculty in other courses began to request the table for use in other courses; PhD-level faculty provided the table in their literature assessment course, and a faculty member used the table to organize her own practice-related literature review. This expanded literature table effectively prompted students to note all key aspects of evidence and then use an established tool to assess the article for quality. Our comprehensive table better meets the needs of nursing doctoral students assessing evidence.

References


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<th>Topic Area</th>
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<th>Publication</th>
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### Column Descriptions:
- **Target Population**
- **Sample**
- **Geographic Location**
- **Facility Type**
- **Providers of Care**
- **Measure Type**
- **Reliability**
- **Validity**
- **Overall Findings**
- **Statistical Tests & Significance**