Innovative Short Group Writing Assignments to Enhance Scholarly Writing Skills

Typically, scholarly writing is not a skill taught in graduate schools of nursing, even though there are many writing assignments. Scholarly writing is an extension of critically thinking about a clinical problem by using reflective writing as a learning framework to advance nursing practice (Smith, 2011). According to the Essentials of Master’s Education in Nursing, scholarly writing is an important competency (Essential IV) (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2011) as part of the curriculum. This Syllabus Selection article describes an innovative strategy to integrate five short group writing assignments into a graduate nursing curriculum.

Method

Past experience with writing assignments and limited experience with writing at their place of employment increase students’ anxiety about scholarly writing. The main writing assignment for a graduate nursing research course is an 8- to 10-page translation of evidence to practice group paper, which consists of the group reviewing current evidence based on a clinical problem.

Even as a group assignment, most students are overwhelmed with writing an 8- to 10-page paper. In addition, a lack of confidence in scholarly writing often results in many groups requesting the professor to review a draft of the paper before it is due. Thus, five short group writing assignments were built into a graduate-level nursing research course to develop competency in scholarly writing.

Initially, students self-selected into groups of two to five students based on similar clinical backgrounds as the writing assignments are developed via groups because clinical practice is not performed in isolation. The first assignment consists of each group identifying a clinical problem and reviewing 10 current research articles using a table of evidence worksheet. Based on their having completed a table of evidence, the second short writing assignment is a 1- or 2-page bulleted summary sheet to identify succinctly what is known and not known about their clinical problem.

The remaining three assignments are half-page papers on developing education initiatives and mentoring roles as advance practice nurses, sustaining an evidence-based practice culture in the workplace, and identifying three ethical principles important to their population of interest based on the review of evidence. Written feedback is given to the group for each of the five short group writing assignments to support the connection between critical thinking about a clinical problem and writing about it in a scholarly manner. This supports the course objectives of critically appraising and synthesizing evidence from the review of nursing literature and advancing critical thinking, writing, and analytic skills (Essential IV).

Results and Conclusion

Throughout the semester, the five short group writing assignments help students gain confidence in their critical, analytical, and scholarly writing skills, key components of the reflective framework (Regmi & Naidoo, 2013). It also helps reduce students’ anxiety when they submit the final version for a grade. To hold students accountable for their scholarly writing responsibilities and revision of feedback, a peer evaluation is completed by each student in the group. Student comments from course evaluation included:

- I was so overwhelmed when I knew I had to write a big paper but breaking it down into small, short assignments made writing the paper almost fun.
- Doing a practice writing and then turning in the final assignment was very helpful to actually understand how to write, not just do an assignment and be done with it.
- I honestly enjoyed this course. It really helped to understand key concepts of writing and research that led to enjoyment in the class. I look forward to taking what I learned and applying it currently in my career as well as my future career.

Overall, five short group writing assignments increased scholarly writing competency and could be easily incorporated into the graduate curriculum of schools of nursing.

References


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