

REVIEW ARTICLE

UTILIZING POETRY TO ENHANCE STUDENT NURSES' REFLECTIVE SKILLS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Article Info:

Received: 10 October 2018

Revised: 8 November 2018

Accepted: 5 December 2018

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.631>

Abstract

The notion of reflective practice has been considered important in healthcare professionals' practice. In nursing, particularly in developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, it has been set as a required competence for registration. Some action has been taken to support the achievement of competent and reflective practitioners, including embedding reflection in the nursing pre-registration education curriculum. In the past twenty years, there has been focus on using art-based initiatives to help student nurses to reflect on their clinical experience. Amongst the art forms, poetry has been used as a reflective tool. Many studies found that poetry could be helpful for developing students' reflective skills. This literature review was conducted to identify the feasibility and promising benefit of using poetry to increase student nurses' reflective skills. A comprehensive search of the literature and integrative review were undertaken for reviewing and discussing the evidence-based literature that supports the using of poetry as a reflective tool. A critical and narrative approach was undertaken for 16 relevant literature related to the importance of reflection in practice, the promising potential to enhance students' reflective skills during academic education, and how poetry might promote students' reflective skills. The literature review showed that using poetry in education have been carried out, and have yielded positive results. It is promising to note that the development of reflective practice, as required to be an attribute of a registered nurse, could be stimulated and achieved by the employment of poetry as a reflective tool in clinical education. The literature review also demonstrated that using poetry as a reflective tool in nursing education is both feasible and worthwhile. Therefore, it is proven that using poetry as a means of reflection in an education setting is beneficial and valuable.

KEYWORDS

poetry; reflective skills; nursing education

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ISSN: 2477-4073

INTRODUCTION

Education has been considered as an important activity for humankind. It aims to unleash and promote an individual's potential ([Dewey, 1970a, 1970b](#); [Quay & Seaman, 2013](#); [Wringe, 1988](#)) as well as bring about and preserve society ([Wringe, 1988](#)). As the time passed by, there was a shifting belief that education was not merely based in, and was identical with, classrooms and books as traditionally perceived, but that education was a progressive process which involved any event by any means to achieve its aims ([Dewey, 1970b](#); [Quay & Seaman, 2013](#)). Therefore, someone needs to reflect on, evaluate, and gain ability to recreate his/her experience, in order

to grow. Dewey ([1970](#)) divided experience into two types: primary and secondary. The former refers to the starting and end point of inquiry, whereas the latter refers to the inquiry itself, the process of knowledge-yielding which is critical and reflective ([Dewey, 1970a](#)). Therefore, reflection should be an indispensable condition for experiential learning and education in general.

By means of reflection, a learner could become reflective as he/she starts to be able to identify the problem or a new thing, relates it with a context or situation(s), and tries to formulate an

idea, by reconstituting and testing possible ideas (hypothesis) for solving the problems. Therefore, in reflecting, the individual may need to think and inquire throughout the process by exploring and using existing materials, or even constructing new ones to resolve the problem within its context. For this reason, reflection is neither merely a descriptive nor explanatory process, but a transformative process. This nature of reflection must be in accordance with the ultimate aim of education, which has been mentioned above. Therefore, reflection would be a key to the success of experiential learning ([Moon, 2004](#); [Quay & Seaman, 2013](#)).

Reflection has also been considered and used in both nursing practice and education ([Clarke, James, & Kelly, 1996](#); [Clouder, 2000](#); [Duffy, 2009](#); [Gustafsson & Fagerberg, 2004](#); [Hargreaves, 2004](#); [James & Clarke, 1994](#); [Johns, 1995](#); [Lindahl, Dagborn, & Nilsson, 2009](#); [McBrien, 2007](#)). In nursing, the use of 'reflection' is strongly related to the term 'reflective practice' and often the two terms/concepts are used interchangeably in the nursing literature ([McBrien, 2007](#)). Reflective practice is considered as an important process in nursing; it is considered as a compulsory competence in order to be a registered nurse in several countries; for instance Australia, Canada, the United States (US), and the United Kingdom (UK) ([Burton, 2000](#); [Epp, 2008](#); [Nelson & Purkis, 2004](#)). In the UK the ability to reflect is stated clearly in the Code for Nurses ([Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2015](#)) and Standards for Pre-registration Nursing Education ([Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2010](#)), showing how the UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) considers reflection to be part of a registered nurses independent competence. In the Code, reflection is stated in the preamble of the domain 'Practice Effectively', whereas it is consistently stated in the domains of 'Professional Values', 'Nursing Practice and Decision Making', and 'Leadership, Management, and Team Working' for all fields of pre-registration nursing education. These examples, therefore, may indicate that reflection, or being a reflective practitioner, has not only been considered as important in practice, but also should be developed even when nurses are still students ([Burton, 2000](#); [Lindahl et al., 2009](#)).

Poetry has been considered and developed as a pedagogical tool in professional education, possibly because its nature seems relevant to humanities, which are placed at the core of social science ([Coleman & Willis, 2015](#); [Hahessy, 2016](#); [Jack, 2015](#); [Raingruber, 2009](#)). Poetry may be considered positively because of its capacity to achieve and foster several aspects, which are apparently essential to the humanities. Several recent studies have investigated the benefits of using poetry in professional education: enhance learners' emotional intelligence towards themselves, colleagues, and patients; enhance learners' professional communication; be an effective educational approach to reveal the relevance of studies to humanities; enhance memory and broadening learner's paradigm and experience of education and its approach; increase understanding of subject; and reduce learners' stress, anxiety, and depression ([Clancy & Jack, 2016](#); [Foster & Freeman, 2008](#); [Jack, 2015](#); [Mohammadian et al., 2011](#); [Wright, 2006](#)). All these benefits of using poetry in education seem in

accordance with the advantages of doing reflection, which has been discussed above. Therefore, poetry might be used effectively to help students in developing their reflective abilities.

METHODS

The literature review is a set of resources, comprises textbooks, academic articles, legal documents, which have been collected and reviewed to gain a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the research topic ([Merriam, 2009](#)). For this reason, a set of references, which refer to the most up-to-date and salient materials, are not merely read and summarized, but importantly are analyzed and criticized ([Parahoo, 2014](#)). Through reviewing the literature, the existing research evidence about using poetry in nursing education will be presented. The review will establish a rationale for the importance of exploring poetry's capacity to improve student nurses' reflective skills; therefore, it will contribute to justify the proposed study, which will be elaborated in the following chapter. Inclusion criteria of this study were related to the importance of reflective skills in professional education settings, focused on the utilization of poetry in education settings, published between 2006 – 2016, written in English. Exclusion criteria were literature which discussed about reflective skills but not in education settings, using poetry not in professional education settings, and non-published work.

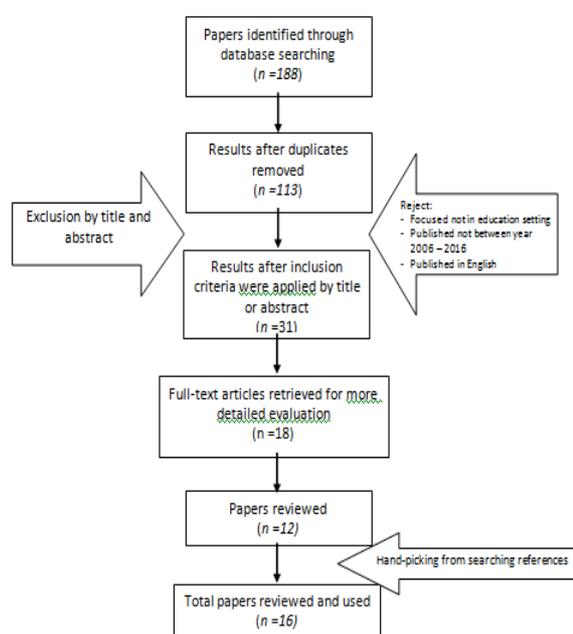


FIGURE 1 Search strategy

This review was conducted in 2016 and reviewed by the author. The author analysed the reviewed studies and extracted to assess whether: (1) enhancing student nurses' reflective skills must be important and feasible to be achieved during academic education and (2) utilizing poetry as reflective tool could be implemented and beneficial for enhancing student nurses' reflective skills. These procedures allowed the author to

synthesis the idea that using poetry as a reflective tool in nursing education is both feasible and worthwhile. A summary of data extraction is illustrated in **Figure 1**. Several search strategies have been undertaken to attain the robust body of literature for supporting this study. The main search strategies were using the electronic databases: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), MEDLINE, Science Direct, MAG Online Library, COCHRANE Lib, EBSCO, PubMed, and PsychINFO. The following single or combined terms were used to retrieve salient papers: “reflection” or “reflective practice” or “reflective thinking”, “art-based pedagogy” or “art-based reflection”, “poem” or “poet” or “poetry”, “poetry in education” or “poetry in nursing” or “poetry in nursing education”. Combining two or three terms by using “AND” was also done in order to get more specific and related literature. Moreover, hand searches through reference lists were also undertaken to include relevant articles in the review. A search of key terms was also performed to find other valuable publications through Google Scholar, DiscoverEd (The University of Edinburgh library search engine), and The Knowledge Network NHS Scotland. A total of hundreds articles were identified at this stage. These results were specified as studies, which had been published in English and within the last ten years. Ultimately, a total of sixteen articles will be reviewed and used in this study.

ANALYTICAL FINDINGS

The importance of reflection in education

Many benefits would be gained by using reflection in nursing practice. Reflection could enhance patient-centered care (Coleman & Willis, 2015), stimulate critical thinking (Burton, 2000; Cotton, 2001; Epp, 2008; Jasper, 1999; Lindahl et al., 2009) and critical doing (Burton, 2000), influence nurses’ ability to make professional judgment and clinical decision making (Epp, 2008; James & Clarke, 1994; McBrien, 2007; Tashiro, Shimpuku, Naruse, Maftuhah, & Matsutani, 2013), develop self-awareness (Coleman & Willis, 2015; Cotton, 2001; Hargreaves, 2004; Jasper, 1999; Rees, 2012; Tashiro et al., 2013), transform new perspectives (Hargreaves, 2004; Tashiro et al., 2013), enhance the effectiveness of practice (Burrows, 1995; Rees, 2012), stimulate students to bridge the gap between nursing theory and practice (Burton, 2000; Cotton, 2001; Duffy, 2009; Tashiro et al., 2013), encourage students to think about integrating them and changing practice (Epp, 2008; James & Clarke, 1994), enhance long-life learning in nursing education (Burton, 2000; Coleman & Willis, 2015; Duffy, 2009), and develop writing skill for the written reflection (Jasper, 1999). Considering the benefits which might be gained by developing students’ reflective ability, it is not surprising that reflection has been considered as an important competence for nurses and student nurses.

For more than twenty years, reflection has been immensely popular as a pedagogical tool in nursing education (Bradbury-Jones, Coleman, Davies, Ellison, & Leigh, 2010). Many guided models of reflective writing have been developed and used in implementing reflection in education, for instances John’s

guided model of reflection (Coward, 2011; O’Connor, 2008), Driscoll’s model (Macdonald, 2015), Gibbs cycle (O’Connor, 2008), Peshkin approach to reflection (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010), Value-Based Reflective Practice (VBRP) (Paterson & Chapman, 2013; Rankin, 2013), or narrative journaling in a specific format which is developed by institution (Burrows, 1995; Epp, 2008; Hargreaves, 2004). However, there have been several critiques about using a model or guided format in reflecting, which mostly emphasized that it may restrict the breadth of reflection; an outcome that could inhibit students to think critically (Burrows, 1995; Coleman & Willis, 2015; Coward, 2011; Epp, 2008). Other negative outcomes resulting from using the same model for years in nursing education include ‘reflection fatigue’ (Burton, 2000; Coward, 2011; Macdonald, 2015), a condition in which students become apathetic to reflection, and misunderstanding of reflection’s purpose (Coleman & Willis, 2015; Coward, 2011). Consequently, the roots of reflection might disappear (Coward, 2011) and the ultimate aim of reflection might not be achieved. For this reason, the development of innovative strategies for reflecting, particularly in education, is paramount (Epp, 2008). In recent years, using art-based pedagogies has been considered and developed as a means to bring back the nature and aim of reflection (Casey, 2009; Hahessy, 2016; Jack, 2015; Macdonald, 2015).

The importance of reflection in practice

Several current studies showed the importance of reflection, especially in practical-based professions (Chelliah & Arumugam, 2012; Hatlevik, 2012; Noormohammadi, 2014; Rees, 2012), including nursing. Reflection may be beneficial to improve learners’ clinical skills (Chelliah & Arumugam, 2012), positively influence someone’s self-efficacy and autonomy (Noormohammadi, 2014), bridge the gap between theory and practice in nursing education (Hatlevik, 2012), maintain and develop professional attributes (Rees, 2012), and manage their distressing emotional challenges and the labour of nursing work (Rees, 2012). In many countries, student nurses are prepared to be reflective practitioners who are able to demonstrate reflective thinking in their practice. Therefore, reflection has been introduced and used as part of the nursing curriculum (Coward, 2011). It might be beneficial for being a reflective practitioner in daily practice is undeniably difficult and reflective thinking itself is a difficult skill to develop and apply (Clegg, Tan, & Saeidi, 2002; Duffy, 2009). Therefore, the development of reflective thinking must not spontaneous but should be deliberately stimulated by and in the educational context (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009). The development of reflective skill during academic education may be achieved through discovering the appropriate means to stimulate students’ reflective skills, such as portfolio, reflective journal, and reflective assignment, and by then including that method into the curriculum.

Why Poetry?

One of the art-based approaches that have been used in several developed countries, with positive outcomes for reflection, is poetry (Casey, 2009; Foureur, Bush, Duke, & Walton, 2007; Hahessy, 2016; Holmes & Gregory, 1998; Wright, 2006).

Poetry itself has been used across education for several professions, including medicine, teaching, social work, and nursing (Jack, 2015). In nursing education, there have been several studies conducted to explore the use of poetry for nursing students. Poetry has been considered as a means to develop students' reflective ability, increase their capacity for compassion and empathy, and reduce their stress (Coleman & Willis, 2015; Foureur et al., 2007; Hahessy, 2016; Holmes & Gregory, 1998; Jack, 2015; Raingruber, 2009; Wright, 2006).

Poetry has been considered and developed as a pedagogical tool in professional education, possibly because its nature seems relevant to humanities, which are placed at the core of social science (Coleman & Willis, 2015; Hahessy, 2016; Jack, 2015; Raingruber, 2009). Poetry may be considered positively because of its capacity to achieve and foster several aspects, which are apparently essential to the humanities. Several recent studies have investigated the benefits of using poetry in professional education (Clancy & Jack, 2016; Foster & Freeman, 2008; Jack, 2015; Mohammadian et al., 2011; Wright, 2006). Several studies denoted that by using poetry in education, there are some benefits gained. Firstly, poetry could enhance learners' emotional intelligence towards themselves, colleagues, and patients (Clancy & Jack, 2016; Foster & Freeman, 2008; Jack, 2015). It also could enhance learners' professional communication (Clancy & Jack, 2016; Foster & Freeman, 2008) and it might be an effective educational approach to reveal the relevance of studies to humanities (Clancy & Jack, 2016; Foster & Freeman, 2008) because it may increase understanding of subject (Jack, 2015). Furthermore, it may enhance memory and broaden learner's paradigm and experience of education and its approach (Foster & Freeman, 2008). Lastly, it may reduce learners' stress, anxiety, and depression (Clancy & Jack, 2016; Jack, 2015; Mohammadian et al., 2011). All the benefits of using poetry in education seem in accordance with the advantages of doing reflection, which has been discussed above. Therefore, poetry could be used effectively to help students in developing their reflective abilities.

The employment of poetry in promoting reflective skills

There were several studies which specifically tried to investigate the employment of poetry for reflective purposes (Coleman & Willis, 2015; Schwind, Santa-Mina, Metersky, & Patterson, 2015; Speare & Henshall, 2014; Threlfall, 2013). By using poetry as a reflective tool, there were two dimensions of affirmation that students can obtain: a) affirmation of their values and beliefs and b) affirmation that their chosen profession is worthwhile (Speare & Henshall, 2014). The students might pay more attention about the linkage between theory and practice whilst they were engaging in the poetry reading activity.

In particular to nursing, poetry is not a new concept (Coleman & Willis, 2015) and has often been considered as a way to achieve the aesthetic part of Carper's Fundamental Patterns of Knowing in Nursing, which are also known as 'the art of nursing' (Coleman & Willis, 2015; Holmes & Gregory, 1998; Jack, 2015). The aesthetic pattern could be defined as the

acquisition of knowledge which is gained from subjective experience (Carper, 1978). This model indicates that the subjective experience is the input, the knowledge is the output, and the aesthetic pattern is the means, or in-between process, to acquire the output. Therefore, using aesthetics/an art form (such as poetry) as a means to gain knowledge from experience, might be relevant to the nursing profession and its educators. Students may have a greater sense of patients' feelings and perspectives; the students also felt less restricted and more able to express their feelings. Therefore, using poetry for reflection could be a vehicle to bring the students back from the skeptical paradigm of reflection, to its fundamental purpose (Coleman & Willis, 2015). Furthermore, by using creative activities, such as poetry, students could learn about care and how to care, the importance of caring, and the challenges in providing care (Schwind et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

From the start of this millennium, studies about the use of poetry in education have been carried out, and have yielded positive results. From the literature review, it is promising to note that the development of reflective practice, as required to be an attribute of a registered nurse, could be stimulated and achieved by the employment of poetry, as a reflective tool in clinical education. The literature review demonstrated that using poetry, as a reflective tool in nursing education, is both feasible and worthwhile. Some studies attempted to prove that using poetry as a means of reflection in an education setting is beneficial; however, it was noticed that most of the studies were conducted in developed countries. Concerning its potential as a professional development resource, it was considered valuable to bring the concept of using poetry as a reflective tool into a developing country setting.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

None declared.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Dr Jennifer Tocher, who has supervised the accomplishment of this study and to Dr Sharon Levy who has helped me to sharpen the ideas in this paper. I also thank Dr Susanne Kean, who has supported me by sharing her expertise, knowledge, experience, and positivity to contribute to nursing through academic writing. This paper is based on and significantly expanded from author's dissertation at The University of Edinburgh.

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Cite this article as: Uligraff, D. K. (2019). Utilizing poetry to enhance student nurses' reflective skills: A literature review. *Belitung Nursing Journal, 5*(1), 3-8. <https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.631>