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The Use of drama Within Midwifery Education to facilitate the Understanding of Professional Behaviour and Values

Abstract

Objective: To develop student midwife understanding of professional values and the application of these in clinical practice, prior to commencing their first clinical placement.

Design: An action research project

Setting: A Simulation Suite environment within a University setting.

Participants: 6 year 3 drama students and a cohort of 36 midwifery students.

Findings: the students were supportive of the idea of collaborative projects as this permitted the facilitation of student understanding of key professional values and their application in the clinical setting.

Key Conclusions: The students felt that the move away from a didactic approach to learning and teaching towards a more experiential model of teaching, enabled a more in depth reflection on the importance of professional standards and behaviour when providing care to pregnant women.

Key words: Collaboration, action research, midwifery, professional behaviour.

Background

Collaborative learning is recognised as being important in terms of the provision of quality care (World Health Organisation, 2013). Barwell, Arnold and Berry (2013) further maintain that working collaboratively ensures that health care professionals have a nuanced understanding of profession specific roles which can support high standards of patient care. Within the maternity services, in the United Kingdom, professionals working together across the confines of their profession has been identified as facilitating a culture where care is woman centred (RCM, 2015). In order to be effective in this role student midwives are required to undertake many areas of study which will facilitate this development, central to which is the development of professional identity and behaviour in midwifery practice (Phillips and Hayes, 2006).

First year student midwives can find it a challenge to adapt to a new set of regulations which govern not only their professional lives but also their personal lives, as the Nursing Midwifery Council (NMC) (2009) stipulates that professional values must underpin academic study as well a clinical practice. At undergraduate level an understanding of interprofessional working can improve communication and team working in the practice setting (Jackson and Bluteau, 2011). It is therefore important that within midwifery education programmes students are educated in a manner which enables the development of these professional qualities (Felstead 2013).

Teaching these behaviours can be challenging, especially when trying to facilitate student understanding of the application of professional codes and government policy into practice (Department of Health, 2015). The establishment of the values articulated within the Compassion in Practice (2016) document, more commonly known as the "6 C's" (care, compassion, commitment, communication, competence and courage) were developed as part of the recommendations of the Francis Report (2013). This report has as its focus the professional attributes identified as being requisite for health care practitioners when caring for vulnerable people (Francis et al 2013).

The Project

It was noticed, when facilitating learning for a group of first year student midwives that whilst they could recite the 6 Cs, few of them had a practical working knowledge of how these might be applied in practice. Indeed, as a group there appeared to be issues with regards to being caring and compassionate to each other within the academic setting; with students not respecting the views of their peers and or maintaining confidentiality. This highlighted potential problems in relation to how the students would conduct themselves within their first clinical placement and the negative impact that this might have for women accessing care from the maternity services locally.

Within the literature, the role of health care professionals as positive role models, in terms of the development of student professional behaviours, has been highlighted (Bailey-McHale and Hart 2013, Walsh 2014) as new students will observe, internalise and imitate their mentors (Murray 2005). Additionally, it is essential that students learn to not only observe but to critically evaluate and reflect on the behaviours that they have witnessed and make decisions whether these constitute professional values that are appropriate for the development of their own practice (Schon, 1987). By facilitating this process poor practice and unprofessional behaviour is identified and standards of care are improved (Francis 2013). Therefore, student midwives need to be encouraged to understand the importance of their role in reporting and highlighting any poor practice or attitude, and in doing so demonstrate the practical application of “courage” (NMC, 2015).

In order to facilitate student understanding, originally, group work was undertaken in the form of role play; where the group was divided into six groups of 6 students, each being given one of the 6C's to focus on (Department of Health, 2015). However, students were unable to fully engage with this form of learning as they found it difficult to visualise particular behaviours when they were acting. Moreover it was observed by the lecturer facilitating the session that the students did not enjoy viewing their recorded performance.

Pope and Mays (2000) suggest that action research is an appropriate method for identifying health care related problems and in doing so assist with the development of possible solutions in order to improve practice. Action research was therefore employed in this project as it helped to identify and address key aspects of learning within the student midwife cohort (Adamson. E, Dewar. B 2015). As part of the strategy to enhance learning and understanding it was decided that it would be appropriate to access experts in drama and production, from another academic faculty within the university. Contact was made with the University's Faculty of Music and Drama, which taught a module on collaborative contract working. Six drama students were given the task of developing two recordings, each of ten minutes duration, which simulated an interaction between a pregnant woman being seen in a hospital day care unit by a doctor, midwife and student midwife. The students were given expert guidance from a midwifery lecturer related to how each actor would need to behave and the technical terminology which might be employed in the clinical setting. The drama students were able to clarify anything which they did not understand which resulted in the development of two scripts. The first script gave examples of unprofessional behaviour by each health care professional and the reaction of the woman. The second script involved a simulation of the application of the 6 C's (DoH, 2015) and the NMC (2015) Code.

Figure A represents the timetable for the session which includes the time allocation given for each video and the facilitation of student feedback and discussion. This is an important aspect of experiential learning as students require sufficient time to be allowed for reflection and the assimilation of ideas and learning (Lisko & O'Dell 2010).

Figure A: Timetable of session including time allocation for student discussion.

DATE & TIME	TOPIC	Activities
0900 - 0915	Welcome to the Session. Set ground rules	Examine your prior reading on the development of professional values and their importance in clinical practice. Bring notes to the session
0920 - 0930	Simulation Video 1	Watch the recording and independently write notes on the behaviours observed. Note the reaction of the woman to the behaviours being demonstrated by the health care professionals and student midwife.
0930 - 0950	Group Discussion - Sharing of observations and critical discussion.	
0955 - 1005	Simulation Video 1 - with interruption	Watch the video and raise your hand when you observe a behaviour which is inappropriate and the recording will be stopped. Give a reason for why you have stopped the video at this point and make a suggestion for improvement.
1010 - 1020	Simulation Video 2 - Example of professional values and application of the 6C's in practice	Watch the video and make notes on the behaviours witnessed.
1020 - 1050	Critical Discussion and reaction	Discuss the second video-consider your reactions to the scenario when acted in this way compared to the first video. Were any of the suggestions that you made utilised? What effect do you think these had on the woman and her perception of her care? Which aspects, if any, could you use in clinical practice?

An evaluation of the session was facilitated at the end of the session. Students expressed a high level of satisfaction with 98% (n=35) students commenting that watching both scenarios helped them to assimilate their theoretical knowledge and understanding of the importance of professional values in clinical practice. All students fed back that they had found the reaction of the “woman” in both scenarios interesting, with 83% (n=30) students saying that they would not have noted her reaction in

a real situation if they had not undertaken the exercise (the students had not yet experienced a clinical environment).

The Drama students reported that this experience had given them an insight into the professional boundaries and regulations which support the provision of health care for health care professionals, which they had previously not appreciated. Indeed, the drama students commented that they had not been aware, at the beginning of the collaboration, that midwives are governed by a regulatory body. They additionally commented that this experience had demonstrated to them how the professional values of health care professionals has a direct impact on the perception of the patient of both the care that is given and the confidence that they have in the carer. This is an important factor in collaborative projects as women expect to be cared for by midwives who are not only clinically competent but who display appropriate professional behaviour (Felstead 2013). This is particularly relevant when the standard of care that the woman receives from the midwife depends on the relationship that is built between the woman and midwife (Thomas 2009)

Conclusion

Using action research in this project helped to identify areas which needed to be addressed whilst enabling the development teaching strategies with which to address these concerns (Koshy, Koshy & Waterman 2011). The success of the session was demonstrated through positive feedback from mentors in clinical practice, who commented on the student Midwives' professional values and caring attitude towards women that they cared for within their first clinical placement. As such it was highlighted by both mentors and the midwifery students themselves that they had gained a more detailed appreciation of the importance of the key values related to the professional behaviour and the provision of care. Following the teaching session the project and its findings were presented to the Faculty Learning, Teaching and Assessment Forum which supports learning and teaching strategies in a wider learning context. As a result of discussion within this Forum this method of teaching has been incorporated into current curriculum design as enabling health care professional students to understand the importance of professional values and behaviour is an integral part of all health care professional education programmes (HCPC 2017; NMC 2015).

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