



CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

Creativity for engagement and celebration: keeping clinicians engaged over the festive season

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Abstract

Background: Reflective practice and the development of critical thinking skills are considered important tools for clinicians by theorists and researchers. This paper draws on personal experience of using reflective models developed by Schon, Dewey and in particular Mezirow, to guide the ideas, planning and implementation of an initiative to keep clinicians engaged in a programme underpinned by the principles of practice development over the festive season.

Aim and objectives: To reflect critically on the outcomes of using creativity as an active learning approach to assist clinical teams in making the links between the Essentials of Care programme and practice development principles.

Implications for practice: The process of engaging in reflective practice leads to personal growth, empowerment and self-awareness, which ultimately enhances individual professional growth. Reflective practice is often seen by clinicians as a process to be used after an event; in this experience, the use of reflective models helped the development of a successful initiative. The challenge, therefore, is to develop ways of encouraging clinicians not only to use reflective practices after an event, but to use reflection in the creation and development of ideas that can lead to positive change in clinical practice and workplace culture.

Conclusions: As coordinator of a programme underpinned by practice development principles, the most significant personal learning was a greater understanding of the importance of critical reflection in bringing about transformational learning. Encouraging clinical teams to participate in active learning led to positive experiences, enhanced knowledge and increased participation from teams involved with the Essentials of Care programme.

Keywords: Enlightenment, empowerment, emancipation, engagement, active learning, Essentials of Care

The Essentials of Care programme (EoC), is a NSW Health and Nursing and Midwifery Office initiative aimed at creating a person-centred culture and overall improvement of patient care (NSW Health, 2009). The evaluation framework for the programme is underpinned by the principles of emancipatory practice development, and aims to engage clinicians at the bedside in exploring their clinical practice and identifying ways to enhance patient care and teamwork and to celebrate practice (NSW Health, 2009). As coordinator of the programme across a Local Health District, I strive to role model practice development approaches for staff who have been trained as facilitators. This approach aims to help facilitators develop understanding of how to implement the EoC programme on their individual

wards and units and engage their colleagues using practice development principles and approaches (McCance et al., 2013).

As the Christmas period was drawing near last year, I reflected on what had occurred in relation to the nursing team's engagement with the EoC programme over the previous festive season; thinking particularly of the work of Schon (1987), Dewey (1997) and Mezirow (1997), who demonstrate the benefits of reflection for professionals in developing critical thinkers and lifelong learners, and empowering individuals to think and act on their practice (Johns and Freshwater, 2005). I therefore took the time to analyse and decipher any presuppositions I had, and to think about the level of engagement with the programme, and what my role would be in improving this (Mezirow, 1997). What I uncovered was that nursing teams did not continue with their regular EoC sessions and there was no progression with any of the quality projects. The outcome of this was that many teams struggled to regain momentum once the holiday period was over. I therefore wanted a strategy to help teams to maintain interest and engagement in the programme over this period. Considering that this is often a time for much needed rest and relaxation, with school ending, summer at its peak and most nursing managers taking leave, I was mindful that any strategy had to be fun and not too arduous.

My 'ah ha' moment came one morning while in the shower: why not have an EoC Christmas notice board competition? Each ward/unit is encouraged to have a notice board solely dedicated to the EoC programme. These are placed prominently on a wall where all staff, patients and visitors can see them. The aim is to provide a creative space where staff can promote EoC, celebrate achievements and display their quality initiatives/projects. Teams are encouraged to use the boards as a conduit for information, regularly changing the focus or theme for what is displayed.

Following the 'ah ha' moment, the next key consideration was what to base the competition on. I wanted teams to have an opportunity to think about the EoC programme and the links to practice development methodology. The theme I chose was:

To reflect on how EoC relates to enlightenment, empowerment, emancipation and encouragement.

Encouragement was added to the theme as this is one of the key strategies used by facilitators of the EoC programme to gain participation among their colleagues. The importance in choosing this theme was to make the links to theory. Advancing staff understanding of the EoC programme and the theory that guides the framework is important for achieving the overall aim of the EoC programme which is to create person-centred outcomes (NSW Health, 2009). Using the principles of practice development provides numerous opportunities for clinicians to engage in learning (Manley et al., 2008). The relevance of the 'three Es' to the stages of the EoC programme is that the facilitator journey and implementation of the programme itself is through enlightenment (raising awareness of the programme), empowerment (reflecting on practice and identifying opportunities for change) and emancipation (initiating change and evaluating the outcomes).

Teams were provided with instructions that they could decorate their boards as creatively as they desired. All teams had previously been exposed to using craft as a form of active learning in EoC workshops and used this with their own teams to explore their values or develop projects. Although the main aim of the initiative was to keep teams engaged over the festive season, I also wanted them to gain a deeper understanding of practice development methodology. One of the key points when looking at the relationships between enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation is that a deeper understanding can be developed by engaging teams in workplace learning through active learning, (Dewing et al., 2006). As I followed Mezirow's model for critical reflection, I felt supported that my idea of using active learning to integrate meaning into the competition would help teams to uncover core knowledge of how EoC relates to practice development and their individual practice (Langley and Brown, 2010).

Ten teams accepted the invitation to participate in the competition and I was completely surprised by the buzz that it created. It was so inspiring as a coordinator to hear the excitement and stories from teams about the friendly rivalry it generated between the wards, with members of teams sent out on spying expeditions to find out what the other teams were up to. Teams were feeling empowered in designing their boards and networking across the facility was being enhanced. Some comments from teams included:

'Good opportunity to see other wards notice boards'

'Made me really think about what EoC is'

'Nice way to involve our patients over Christmas'

'Fun way of meeting other facilitators'

Tillott (2013) describes engagement as involvement, and positive and energetic interactions among colleagues. This active learning approach in the workplace environment rather than the classroom was helping the facilitators to enhance their knowledge about practice development and EoC (Manley et al., 2008).

The district director of nursing, nurse manager of the EoC programme and the facility director of nursing were invited to judge the notice boards. I excluded myself from judging to avoid any potential bias. Mezirow (1997) suggests that for transformational learning to occur, participants must be free from coercion and have full knowledge of the situation. The passion and commitment from each team was overwhelming; particularly striking was the involvement of patients in both the design and presentation of the notice boards.

All teams were individual in the creation of their notice boards; the key messages were displayed creatively through poems, songs, space for reflection, photographs of patients involved in craft, and stockings for patients and staff to provide feedback. Practice development principles of person-centredness, collaboration, inclusiveness, teamwork, feedback, enhanced holistic patient care, self-care, encouragement and reflection all featured in the messages. One nurse unit manager described how a patient with Alzheimer's became calm and did not wander the ward when given some decorations to create.

Figure 1: An Aussie Bush Christmas (notice person-centred nursing framework as the shining star in the top left corner)



In addition to their notice board, the team on the rehabilitation unit developed a song about their recent EoC programme, which was the creation of a dining room for their patients. Some patients and their relatives joined in with the presentation of the song:

Dining Room Jingle Bells

*'Dining room dining room Rehab is the way oh what fun it is to strive for Independence Yay.
Wheeling through the ward Physio done for the day with friends we are never bored laughing all
the way ha ha ha.
Patient call bells ring Nurses on the way oh what fun it is to laugh and sing in the Dining Room
today.
Dining room dining room Rehab is the way oh what fun it is to strive for Independence Yay.
A day or two ago I thought I'd never be alright until I came to N1G the staff are always right.
Dining Room Dining Room meetings once a week Empower-ment we strive to seek with EOC we are
on the way hey!'*

Details of all entrants were captured in the twice-yearly newsletter dedicated to EoC and shared across the Local Health District.

It was not only the success from the notice boards, but this excitement and engagement led to greater involvement from EoC teams at one of the facilities. They all came together at a Christmas party where we reflected on the year's achievements and the facilitators were asked what would they like to achieve in 2013. This led to a combined project among the facilitator group, which was presented at an EoC NSW showcase in 2013 (this has been an annual event for the past three years). Sponsored by the Nursing and Midwifery Office of NSW Health, the aim is 'to provide an opportunity to celebrate work of the EoC programme from across the state' (NSW Health, 2013). The project that was presented at the showcase was how EoC/practice development principles have been used to implement the new policy around clinical handover. Plans for this year's festive celebration have begun, with the teams wanting to involve the wider public and asking if they can have a competition to decorate the Christmas trees that are on display in the hospital foyer with tables set up by staff to demonstrate all their achievements through the EoC programme.

The outcomes from the festive notice board competition exceeded the original intent of keeping teams engaged and making the links between EoC and practice development. Using creativity as an active learning approach generated a positive experience for teams and allowed them to travel their own journey of enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation in the creation of their notice boards.

Using Mezirow's model for critical reflection not only provided me with a guide for my ideas, planning, and implementation of the competition, but also allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the importance of critical reflection in bringing about transformational learning. Reflection has long been viewed as an important strategy for nurses to develop critical thinking skills. My challenge now as coordinator of a practice development programme is to continue to develop and create innovative ways for clinicians to engage in critical reflection.

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