

Journal Reflection: Teaching Students to Think Like Nurses

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Chapter six of Sorrell and Cangelosi's book *Expert Clinician to Novice Nurse Educator: Learning from First-Hand Narratives* was written by a philosophy professor, Christine Sorrell Dinkens and explored Socratic pedagogy. The chapter included how nurse educators can use this pedagogy, specifically to bridge the knowledge-gap action (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). The type of teaching Socratic pedagogy uses requires that active listening is used with engagement from both students and instructors, which is especially beneficial for nurse educators to use when teaching in clinical areas (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016).

Dinkens also discussed how Socratic pedagogy can be useful to help students develop the crucial critical thinking students need because the type of dialog it uses is question-driven and discussion-based, focusing on the student so that inquiry is shared between the students and instructors (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). Dinkens added that by engaging students in that dialog, they will be able to make connections between what they have already learned in courses like pathophysiology and what is happening in the patients presented to them (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). This is beneficial as well because students can do this in a situation that is straightforward and typical (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016).

Since Socratic pedagogy has been seen to be negative in some ways because of the questioning of students, it needs to be used appropriately and as an act of caring within teaching, ensuring that the questioning is not antagonistic or dismissing an idea a student has (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). It is also important to remember that just like the students, the educators also do not always have all of the answers, and everyone is learning together. One of the roles the educator plays is to guide questions and thinking to help ensure collaborative learning (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). With this, Dinkens also discussed the concepts of stingrays and gadflies. There will be times that a nurse educator has to be that stingray and call out a student, but

keeping it respectful and appropriate to the situation will help students see that the educator is trying to help the student and better them in nursing practice (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016).

Dinkens also discussed the *Socratic veil*, which referred to how Socrates did not want to give answers to the students and instead put them on a path that would help them explore and find those answers (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). This is important to do as a nurse educator, because as Dinkens explained, education is not simply a matter of giving knowledge to someone but to help students realize they have the knowledge within them (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). This further demonstrates how asking students questions instead of providing them with the answer improves the lesson and helps students learn. Additionally, with the *Socratic veil*, novice students do lack knowledge, but this makes them free to notice things that we as instructors may not (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). Students should be encouraged by educators to share what they do think or believe in those moments instead of what is in a textbook or what the students may think the instructor wants to hear (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016).

Analogies and examples are also a core part of Socratic pedagogy. As explained by Dinkens, analogies can help students make abstract concepts more concrete, leading to a better understanding by students of a situation (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). Another concept of Socratic pedagogy is to end some conversations without a resolution or lack of one, or an *aporia*. Dinkens explained that *aporia* is not always appropriate in every conversation, but in others, it can be used as technique to create a desire within students to further work towards a solution and to identify the importance of lifelong learning (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). Overall, the goal of using Socratic pedagogy is to ensure that students think, reflect, and learn (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016).

Reactions and Initial Feelings

I enjoyed reading about how Socratic pedagogy can be used by nurse educators. Dinkens shared an example of how it can be used in clinical pre-conferences to engage students and start to work on helping them develop critical thinking skills as they discuss patients before starting the shift, allowing them to work through what they notice, can expect, and also clarify any misunderstandings or concerns they have. I have used this approach in the past when I taught a semester of clinicals. Each student was asked to share what the main diagnosis was for the assigned patient and what some of the assessments and focuses for the shift should be for the patient. Doing this allowed the other students to learn at the same time and also allowed me as the instructor to ask questions to make them think more and guide them and also clarify anything they did not understand about the patient or diagnosis.

Another important takeaway from the reading and learning about Socratic pedagogy was that it allows for the students to work together and as a group. Dinkens quoted Boghossian (2003) which showed how with Socratic pedagogy, the whole learning community is impacted because in a group setting, even those who are hesitate will likely speak up and/or can benefit from others sharing (as cited by Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). I have learned this in my educational experience as my preceptor has shared with me that one of the groups I taught would speak up more and contribute to the class if they were first allowed to be placed into small groups to talk amongst themselves before answering. I used this tactic during lecture, and the students were able to work together, discuss, and then felt more confident in answering the questions I had for them about the content.

I also feel it is so important to remember that an educator does not have all the answers and that as educators, we recognize that it is ok to not have all of those answers. Going into

education, I often worried about what would happen if a student had a question I could not answer. I have been fortunate to have been placed in those situations now, and realized that I can ask questions to guide them to the answer, and we all learn together. One of the educators I observed last semester would also simply use the phrase “let’s look it up.” This opens up the conversation further and allows for more learning to occur for students and instructors.

In thinking of the gadfly and stingray analogies, I have also been in those situations, and while it was difficult to be that stingray, the overall outcome from it was gratitude from students. Midway through the clinical I taught, I had one student tell me how when she first came into clinical, she recognized that I was strict (yikes!) but respectful. She stated I was clear about what was expected of students, which made her want to do her best and be respectful of me. After her clinical rotation with me, she thanked me for being more strict and setting higher standards because it made her work harder and learn so much more than she thought she would on the rotation. Reading through the gadfly and stingray discussion made me realize that it is ok to be that stingray at times and be more strict with higher expectations but being respectful and having the gadfly present too is what helps it come full circle.

I also enjoyed the few tips that were given at the end of the chapter for nurse educators who are transitioning to using Socratic pedagogy. One I personally struggled with when I began educating others is being comfortable with silence. Students need time to not only process the question but to also think the question through in order to answer it. It is sometimes difficult to allow that silence to pass and not answer one’s own question, but with practice, I have found that I am actually not uncomfortable with that silence any more, and in fact, those I am teaching are more uncomfortable with it, prompting them to answer.

Pertinent Concept

The pertinent concept from this chapter was Socratic pedagogy. Various ways were shown as to how it can be incorporated into one's teaching as well as the impacts it can have on the learning process. There are various facets of it that can be difficult to fully embrace and work into one's teaching, however, keeping the reasoning behind it in mind as well as adding it into one's style in pieces while using other methods too can make it more achievable and valuable. There are supporters and critics of Socratic pedagogy, however, I feel it is beneficial for nurse educators to bridge that knowledge-action gap as Dinkens discussed (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016).

Questions Formulated About Socratic Pedagogy

During my reading of the chapter, I wrote a few notations down that I questioned about Socratic pedagogy and how to use it. Some critics view Socratic pedagogy as questioning students in a way that embarrasses them or calls them out such as when they make a mistake or trying to point out a gap in their knowledge (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). Dinkens also discussed that it is important to ensure that a student's question or idea is not dismissed or ignored when an educator seeks the answer from another student or to ensure a student does not feel singled out (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016). From working with students in a clinical setting, I feel it is difficult to balance that, so my question would be what ways have other educators found help one to balance it, especially a student who may be struggling or may even be difficult, to ensure no one is felt as if they are being singled out or ideas not acknowledged? The other question I have is what ways have nurse educators found Socratic pedagogy useful?

Responses to Questions

For my question about balancing, I believe it comes back to the same concept as a stingray. There is a delicate balance of needing to be respectful and purposeful. If one particular student is needing to be called out more than others, it is necessary to take time with that student one on one and away from others to have a conversation. While that student may initially feel singled out, if there is mutual respect and the situation is handled appropriately, the student will see that an educator is simply trying to ensure the best for the student and guide the student. Socratic pedagogy is about guiding students, so if we as nurse educators use that core principle, students will identify this helping no one to feel as if they are being singled out or left out as it is a journey that everyone is on with an end result of learning together.

In researching Socratic pedagogy in relation to nurse education, I felt a summation of Socratic pedagogy that was given in one article, and actually summed up the chapter for this reading too, answered all of my questions. The foundation of Socratic pedagogy is based on three main components, “working collaboratively in groups; exploring interpretive questions that lack a specific answer but activate prior knowledge; and reflecting on the discussion” (Kost & Chen, 2015, p. 23). If these three concepts are used as a part of applying Socratic pedagogy, it does not matter how the content is delivered but more on what the students are learning and letting that guide the questions that are asked and what results as conversations among learners. A nurse educator may have key concepts that the students need to learn, but allowing them to learn it as a group and in ways that they can explore it to learn it, they will benefit much more from the lesson.

Further Questions for Reflection

A question that I have that I would like to further reflect on and work through as a nurse educator is how do you interweave the stories you have into those “fact-heavy lectures” (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2016, p. 120)? I feel I have many stories, but sometimes I am not always able to recall them or recall them after the fact. Planning the teaching session has helped, but I still have moments in which I am done teaching and think about another story I could have shared. I believe it will come with experience.

Applying it to the Nurse Educator Role and Next Steps

In ways, I feel I have already started applying Socratic pedagogy components to my role as a nurse educator without even knowing! As I discussed, I am comfortable with silence, allowing the students to process the questions I ask so that their answers guide the conversation and learning. I have also shared stories with learners during lectures and clinicals, though I would like to recall more to add! I also encourage students to think outside of what they have read in a textbook or been stated in a lecture and apply it to a clinical setting or think of how it would apply. I am also a big supporter of allowing students to learn from one another. I have seen students teach one another or help another student who does not understand, and it makes a big difference to not only the student or students who needed a little extra help, but also to the ones who helped those students learn. With that said, for my next steps, I want to continue to incorporate more ways into my teaching that allows the students to teach and learn from one another as I learn from them too.

References

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