



Contemporary Issues

The pedagogy of remembrance: How we remember and learn from the past



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1. Introduction

Whilst the teaching of technical knowledge and skills continues to dominate nurse education, more attention is now being given to the acquisition of values, behaviors and attitudes necessary to assume the role of nurse at the point of qualification. At the core of nursing is the alliance between the nurse and those that they care for. Nursing values ‘encompass an application of what is important for the nurse personally as well as what is important for patients’ (Butts and Rich, 2011: 109). Ensuring that nurses, and by turn, nursing students, practice to the values and philosophical underpinnings of their profession is recognized as an important factor in providing good patient care (Rose et al., 2018). Student nurses need to recognize and understand the range of values and perspectives that contribute to their decision-making, including their own personal values, and how these are formed and evidenced as part of their clinical practice.

Our job as nurse educationalists is to prepare students to exercise judgment over their clinical decision-making that is evidenced based, values orientated, and which provides a reflective critical account of their thinking and actions (Noone and Seery, 2018). The Pedagogy of Remembrance has been described as practice and theory of how we remember and learn from past historical events (Simon and Eppert, 1997). It combines gaining and deepening historical knowledge on a topic, in this case nursing, and shaping desirable attitudes and values, through the use of non-formal educational methods. Developing a framework upon which to teach professional values is of significance for the continued development of high levels of practice, professional disposition and critical thinking (Noone and Seery, 2018; Kaya and Boz, 2019). The following paper explores the use of such an approach to teaching and the potential it may offer to promote, amongst other things, ethical discourse and the critical exploration and reconciliation of personal and professional values as part of nurse education.

2. Learning from the past

What we select to present in terms of historical context as part of our teaching is largely down to personal choice, professional experience and professional assimilation. Increasingly, we are starting to question

professional and social histories, and the way that memory of events and people have come into being and passed on. For instance, nursing continues to remain a female dominated profession. The notion of a nurse being a woman naturally equipped with female compassion is a historically constructed identity that continues to prevail today. The idea that nursing was a vocation which women were called to do, not for money, but out of a sense of self-sacrifice is a redeeming image that has spanned many decades within and outside of the profession. It is only in relatively recent times that historians and sociologists have criticized the material exploitation inherent in the profession, the gendered dimensions of nursing that facilitated that exploitation, and the racial grounds that ensured the hierarchical exclusion of women of color in the most highly skilled areas of the profession. History is literally being rewritten, and it is incumbent on the nurse lecturer to give thought as to the significance and interpretation of historical matters as part of their teaching when exploring nursing values. Nursing is under increasing scrutiny and, it is argued by the authors, there is an expectation for nurse lecturers to focus on those periods of history that are broadly perceived negatively or controversially by the public for whatever reason. The nursing profession in UK is currently having to ‘make sense’ of the abuse and mistreatment of vulnerable adults at a specialist hospital in the East of England. An undercover film for the BBC’s Panorama programme showed staff intimidating, mocking and restraining patients with learning difficulties and autism at Whorlton Hall, an NHS funded privately run hospital, in County Durham. This follows on from the Winterbourne View care home scandal (2013), again highlighted in a Panorama programme, in which six care workers were given prison terms for ‘cruel, callous and degrading’ abuse of disabled patients.

Remembrance pedagogy forms part of an evolution in historical education that has seen a move away from a pursuit of specific historical figures to focus on larger questions viewed very much within the context of contemporary political and social developments and cultural matters (Stevick, 2017). A critical Pedagogy of remembrance recognizes that historical memory is often constructed and regulated through social practices that work to constitute a collective memory. It is not historical events but rather their scholarly, social, and cultural representations that are to an increasing measure the catalysts for the

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processes that shape our consciousness, identity and perception of others (Kranz, 2005). These collective memories evoke limited and often exclusionary structures of cultural identification as they mobilize attachments and knowledge towards specific sociopolitical interests (Simon, 2005). Any historical event involves a set of questions and ambiguities endemic to the way in which it is recorded and remembered. The history of something, including the history of nursing, is always the reflection of a specific point of view, be it polemical, political, or ideological. In this way, history constitutes a practical, but also highly selective, perspective by which we view the world and our place in it (Simon et al., 2000). Historical remembrance both mirrors and creates a discourse with the world and is never, despite its seemingly factual presentation, a neutral representation. In order to address these biases educational systems should constantly question the reporting of historical events and be mindful about the way in which histories are portrayed in lesson.

The term Pedagogy of Remembrance emerged from the field of historical education and in particular with the act of remembrance in relation to the atrocities conducted as part of the Second World War. The first author came across the term whilst visiting the Majdanek concentration camp on the outskirts of the Polish city of Lublin in 2015. The historical team at the Majdanek museum, along with German colleagues, are credited with defining and developing the concept (Kranz, 2005) which they continue to promote as an approach to reconciliation and learning (Zuk, 2018). As an emerging field of interest, it remains little researched and its use limited outside the field of historical remembrance. The authors could find no evidence of its use in nurse education in a search of the wider literature.

The teaching of history is long associated within nursing curricula to enculture nursing students to the profession (Kelly and Watson, 2015). Contained within this, is the notion of a redeeming present and future, through an expanded understanding and appreciation, of a traceable and articulated past (Wood, 2014). Whilst the construction of dominant historical memories, or strategic remembrance practices, serve a pedagogical function (for example, educating one on the historical achievements of nurse leaders such as Florence Nightingale in order to inspire the next generation of nurses), the pedagogy of remembrance offers a critical awareness of what has been remembered, how these memories have become represented, whose interests they serve, and with what potential social and political effects. It is concerned with the values and ethical meaning underpinning historical happenings and how these events shape and impact on the thinking of today. Accordingly, the educational process of remembrance is seen as a combination of reflection on the past with reflection on our own predispositions, opinions, values and attitudes (Kranz, 2005) to the event or topic being studied. Having an understanding and sense of what took place, and analysing the meaning that students make of this in light of contemporary thinking and knowing, play an important part in provoking learning. The focus of the teaching is not so much on the presentation of certain historical facts but stimulating the intellectual processes that shape critical thinking.

The teaching and communication of professional values is cited internationally as problematic and varied, ranging from guest lecturing (Tunkara Bah and Sey-Sawo, 2018), by unplanned interactions (Shafakhah et al., 2016) and by utilizing the codes and standards relevant to the country of teaching (Numminen et al., 2011). Adhering to a code conveys a sense of boundaries or limits within which the student must conduct themselves in order to be considered professional. It does not necessarily encourage students to debate the history or thinking that underpins these approaches or the system of care on which nursing is based. In failing to meet such a challenge, we create the risk of self-deception in our students. Codes and standards offer a sense of security and protection; however, they do not necessarily encourage people to challenge or critically evaluate the underpinning values and concepts on which their practice is based (Numminen et al., 2011). If such codes and proliferations are taken at face value, without any critical

evaluation of its moral, social and historical content, their relationship with their patients will be influenced only by their adoption of a prescribed professional value system.

3. The Pedagogy of Remembrance as a teaching process

The educational theorist Hanns-Fred Rathenow points out that the pedagogy of remembrance is action-oriented and combines cognitive, affective, and pragmatic elements (Kranz, 2014). It combines reflection on the past with reflection on one's own disposition, views, and attitudes towards a particular event or people. The role of the lecturer is to act as an interface between the re-presentation of historical happenings and contemporary questions concerned with an ever-changing world. Remembrance as a transitional pedagogy does not have a prescribed method, sequence, or procedure to follow, however, like many transitional pedagogies, transformation is seen as the result of the following conditions and processes (McGonigal, 2005):

1. An activating event that exposes the limitations of a student's current knowledge/ understanding;
2. Opportunities for the student to identify and articulate the underlying assumptions in the student's current knowledge/understanding;
3. Critical self-reflection as the student considers where these underlying assumptions came from, how these assumptions influenced or limited understanding;
4. Critical discourse with other students and the instructor as the group examines alternative ideas and approaches.

The activating event usually starts with some kind of object, activity, person, or piece of writing that makes the past tangible. Objects might be a photo or a monument, a relic owned by a person, a visit to a museum, or a historical novel or account by either a survivor or their descendants. This can be further supported with current informative and relevant activities by patients and their families so that this historical understanding can be synthesized and evaluated with modern day lived experiences.

The pedagogy of remembrance as a teaching process is particularly useful when exploring events that the student could either experience themselves or through members of their families, such as failings in clinical practice. Highly publicized failings such as those relating to the Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust (Mid Staffordshire Public Inquiry Final Report, 2015) have been explored by the author's using this approach. The inquiry into the failings suggested that over 400 patients died because of poor care over the 50 months between January 2005 and March 2009 at Stafford Hospital, a small district general hospital in Staffordshire, England. The event is played out and explored through a series of video newscasts, readily available from the internet, with a break following each allowing the students to reflect on what they have seen and heard. The session ends with a video of Robert Francis QC presenting the findings of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (Francis, 2013).

A lot can be achieved by getting the student to question their thinking in relation to a given situation or event (Stacey et al., 2015). Such an encounter aims to encompass the explicit and the tacit, what is said and what is assumed, what is known, and what is suggested. Such activities cannot be neutral, as this would imply a stepping away from rather than an engagement with past events. What is often missed is the complexities of such groups in their coming together and the sense in which relationships and understanding of historical remembering are structured by its members. Student experiences of learning are always personal and subjective: each comprehends, organizes and interprets information in a unique way, reacting with a different interpretation to an event in time because of his or her particular history, culture, social and personal backgrounds. By connecting participation and meaning, 'remembering' of the kind described here, links the student with not

only history but promotes a means by which social discourse can be had.

The next thing is to get the students to openly debate and share their reflections with each other (Ellis and Hogard, 2018). This is not a method as much a value and a way of being. It means encouraging all learners to understand their own construction of meaning and to accept the integrity of their own thinking. Accordingly, we invite and honor the ideas, feelings, and concerns of every learner taking part. A learner must trust their own thinking if they are to be motivated to learn further. When students know that the having and sharing of ideas is a sincerely respected norm in the learning environment, they will be more likely to expose their thinking (Zhang and Cui, 2018). In fact, it is one of the few ways they can come to realize that there are multiple viewpoints on any issue and to appreciate how others also use the process of construction for their own learning and grasp of truth. Ideally, learners realize that they can consider different, possibly opposing, perspectives as part of their learning experience.

To say that 'Mid Staffs' should never have happened would be to oversimplify the matter. This frame of mind tends to only see its society piecemeal: as an aggregate of success and failure. It does not see the structural conditions, political interplay and values within the historical account. The criterion on which decisions are made and actions taken need to be explored and reconciled in the individual's thinking and their understanding of the world now. This is most obvious when exploring the personal and professional divide as witnessed in the different levels of care and expectation amongst nurses and other healthcare staff as well as patients themselves. This type of learning can be unsettling in that it can lead to the questioning of accepted assumptions, past actions and personal values by which we habitually make sense of the world (Hardy and Summer, 2018). This process of remembrance, in its most ethical form, is not about consolidating collective identities, nor just about receiving new historical information, but promoting alternative ways of thinking and looking at an event in time. By exploring events in history, such as Mid Staffs and promoting critical discourse and debate of them does not require the recovery of absolute claims, that is right, that is wrong, but dialogue as to what it means to be, both in terms of thinking and behaviour, in comparison to what has gone before.

4. Conclusion

The encounter with a historical issue can be a stimulus to becoming aware of one's views, values and beliefs, and as a result, to articulating and revising them. The exchange of opinions within a group of learners is an integral part of the learning encounter. This is not to negate the role of the lecturer. Their preparation in terms of content and knowing how to manage and move a debate along is of the utmost importance. The issues that can be taken up when using this type of approach and linking it with critical reflection on the part of the learner embraces a wide spectrum of possibilities in which to explore not only our personal values, but those of the profession, society and cultural values. Above all, learning should highlight differing perspectives and levels and represent an attempt to connect the past with the present.

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