

Learning from senior nurse educators: Reflections on values of classroom teaching session observation in nursing education

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Article Info

Article type:
Commentary

Article history:
Received: October 30, 2023
Accepted: January 4, 2024
Published: June 29, 2024

Keywords:
Nurse Educator, education, teaching observation, teaching strategies, effective teaching and learning, teaching behaviors.

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The article can be accessed at:
www.rjhs.org

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/rejhs.v12i2.9>

Abstract

Observation and communication with others in the discipline are crucial for professional development, particularly in nursing education for new faculty and nurses transitioning to become educators. Classroom observation is a valuable way to learn how to teach and gain insights into teaching and learning. This paper aims to communicate the author's critical reflection after observation of various classroom teaching sessions by focusing more on factors and teaching behaviors that could contribute to students' development of professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills. In addition, the author discussed students' responses to the used teaching strategies and his own beliefs about teaching and learning inherent in the similar situation. Finally, the author described possible other strategies educators would employ if teaching the same situation.

Apprendre des infirmières enseignantes principales: Réflexions sur les valeurs de l'observation des séances d'enseignement en classe dans la formation infirmière

Resume

L'observation et la communication avec les autres membres de la discipline sont cruciales pour le développement professionnel, en particulier dans la formation infirmière pour les nouveaux professeurs et les infirmières en transition pour devenir éducatrices. L'observation en classe est un moyen précieux d'apprendre à enseigner et d'acquérir des connaissances sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Cet article vise à communiquer la réflexion critique de l'auteur après l'observation de diverses séances d'enseignement en classe en se concentrant davantage sur les facteurs et les comportements pédagogiques qui pourraient contribuer au développement des connaissances, attitudes et compétences professionnelles des étudiants. En outre, l'auteur a discuté des réponses des étudiants aux stratégies d'enseignement utilisées et de ses propres croyances sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage inhérentes à une situation similaire. Enfin, l'auteur a décrit d'autres stratégies possibles que les éducateurs pourraient employer s'ils enseignaient la même situation.

INTRODUCTION

One of the ways for someone to develop his or her profession competencies is to observe and talk to others who are already in the discipline. This is the same for new nursing and other health professionals' education, especially for new faculty who are trained to be educators. As a requirement of my graduate nursing course 'Theoretical Foundations of Nursing Education,' I observed various classroom teaching-learning sessions. Classroom observation describes the practice of sitting in or being present in another teacher's classroom to observe, learn, analyze, and reflect (1). Observation is an important part of learning how to teach (2), as classroom observation presents an opportunity to see teachers in a real-life teaching situation, and it is considered an important practice at every stage of developing teaching experience (1,2). One of the classroom teaching and learning sessions I observed comprised 47 second-year undergraduate students. This teaching session lasted 3 hours was taken in class 35, Health Science Building of the University of Western Ontario, Canada, and facilitated by one nursing professor. The course taught was the Family and Community Health on the topic of Cultural Diversity: Clients' Contexts and Caring.

The purpose of this paper is to communicate my critical reflection after observation of the highlighted classroom teaching session. In this reflection, the focus will be on factors and teaching behaviors that contributed to students' development of professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills. In addition, the author discussed students' responses to the used teaching strategies and the author's beliefs about teaching and learning inherent in the same situation. Furthermore, the author describes possible other strategies other educators would employ if teaching the almost identical situation. Finally, a conclusion is drawn based on the observed classroom teaching and lessons learned.

Contributing Factors to the Effectiveness of Observed Teaching Session

To be effective and successful, every teaching session needs to be delivered in a conducive learning environment (3,4,5). In the observed three hours teaching and learning session, the teaching and learning environment was very conducive with the observations that the classroom was well-equipped with teaching materials and resources, and every student was free to sit in any of the available comfortable seats. According to Papp and colleagues (6),

students learn most effectively in an environment that facilitates learning by encouraging and making them part of teaching and learning sessions. Contrary, when the environment is unpredictable, unstructured, and overwhelming, students can be left with feelings of vulnerability and anxiety (4,5). In addition, different teaching methods and approaches were used, and that contributed to the best outcome of the teaching session. The course was delivered in ordered and logical steps with prepared materials. Teaching methods like group discussion were integrated into course delivery. Use of group discussion in the classroom was not only beneficial for students' social skills, but also enhanced their level of understanding (1,3,6,7). The use of improve learning with group discussion, open-ended questions were used and as highlighted by Ndayisenga and colleagues (3) and Stenlund et al (8) that enhanced and promoted students' opportunities to apply critical thinking and helped students think for themselves.

There was a possibility that the effectiveness of the observed teaching and learning session may have resulted from a conducive environment as well as the use of appropriate teaching approaches like the collaborative approach. According to Laal and Ghodsi (9), collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and respect the abilities and contributions of their peers. By using the collaborative learning approach, the teaching and learning process of the observed session involved welcoming students and encouraging them for active participation and discussion. In addition, learners were considered as an important knowledge resource and were able to contribute to the learning process. To achieve that, the student-centered approach was used. Evidence shows that the student-centered learning model places students in the center of the learning process (3,9). With this approach, teaching is more enjoyable and can lead to improvements in students' performance (11). As a result of using collaborative teaching approach, students were motivated to learn important skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving (10).

Furthermore, other different teaching approaches were used like the indirect guided approach, as the facilitators guided the students to discover how the cultural diversity has significant impact on nursing practice, and the course facilitator guided students to describe that in the different context by using examples.

Additionally, a research-based approach was used by the course facilitator as teaching resources were anchored on current research findings and evidence about Canadian population, and diversity. Problem-based approaches were used with the focus on how understanding cultural diversity can promote best practice in nursing (7,12).

Moreover, effective time management may have contributed significantly to the effectiveness of the teaching session that lasted three hours as it was planned. With good time management, the facilitator was able to start and finish the planned course on time. It has been reported that time management may positively influence students' learning outcomes and academic performance (13). Also, effective time management in teaching motivates students and helps the teacher to cover the planned content (13).

Teaching Behaviors Contributed to Students' Competencies Development

Having a successful and effective teaching session requires certain feelings and attitudes of the teachers (7,8,14,15). When teaching adult learners, a good teacher should know how to bring out the best in his or her students. The course facilitator's behaviors determine, to a great extent, their effectiveness in the classroom and, eventually, the impact they have on students' achievement (15,16). In this teaching session, professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills of students were developed as a result of the facilitator's behaviors. The observed behaviors were professionalism, the facilitator's personality, classroom organization and management behaviors, planning and organization of the course to be taught, and ability to monitor student's potential and progress.

Professionalism was observed during the teaching session. According to Demirkas (17) and Raso et al. (18), teacher professionalism could be interpreted as a professional work field with sociological, ideological and educational dimensions. It aims at achieving the highest standards in teaching profession which are based upon the professional formation, knowledge, skills, and values (17). With professionalism, the facilitator has been able to use personal experiences to provide real-world examples, understand students' feelings and responding to students with respect (16). The professor engaged in the role of a facilitator instead of being an expert in this domain by using case studies, group discussion, open-ended questions as well

promoting students' autonomy while participating in assigned activities. With facilitator behaviors, the teacher created a learning environment that promoted problem-solving and then acted as the guide on the side (19). This author considers the role of a facilitator should be present in monitoring students and providing assistance when a barrier to learning is reached (19). A good facilitator should have classroom organization and management behaviors. To achieve that, the teacher included activities and strategies which are engaging all students with their learning styles (16). The integration of educational strategies engaged all students in classroom activities as well as creativity. Effective facilitation was evidenced by students' response to used strategies aimed to improve the learning outcome.

Teaching Strategies and Students Response to Teaching Strategies

There are different teaching strategies that can be used to achieve and improve the learning outcome of students (14). It is very important to select appropriate teaching strategies to make the teaching session more effective and appealing (14,20). To make it effective, different teaching strategies have been used during this teaching session, such as active learning strategies (with discussion, guided discussion, and brainstorming), interactive lecturing, case studies and concept mapping.

Strategy One: Active Learning Strategy

By using active learning strategies, students were able to interact with the prepared materials via activities such as completing given tasks and engaging with their surroundings (21). The use of active learning strategies provides encouragement to nursing students, as they are exposed to the active learning environment, they can be successful in the clinical setting (5,22). With active learning strategies, students were arranged in small groups of four to six students and each group discussed a given case study or scenario, that engaged all students to reflect and to think critically about the scenario and relate them to covered content on cultural diversity and client's context and caring. After a few minutes (around 10 to 15 minutes) allocated to these learning activities, each group designated one student who presents the group work done to the other class members. According to Dyer (20), guided discussion and brainstorm strategies moves the conversation from teacher to students and from students to teacher and that makes

students feel more comfortable engaging in discussion. In addition, this engaged all students in activities within a short time. Here, the facilitator's role was to assist and to clarify the activity. Evidence shows that active learning promotes recall and deeper understanding of materials as students are actively engaged with the course content (21). Furthermore, there are equity benefits with active learning because it can use different modes of course delivery, educators can support students with different learning styles as some of them may be more visual or auditory learners (23).

Strategy Two: Interactive Lecture Strategy

Using prepared PowerPoint slides as teaching aids, the facilitator transferred the contents by using interactive lecture as the teaching strategy. An interactive lecture is defined as the lecture in which active involvement and participation by the students (15). The use of interactive lecturing was helpful to cover large content quickly in an effective manner. The course materials were organized in logical ways and included some questions and cases to be integrated throughout the teaching session. That strategy was suited to students, and they were clearly informed. Currently, literature points out that use of interactive lecturing strategies (method) is working better when combined with other direct teaching strategies like questions and answers in nursing education (24). However, lecture seems to be a somewhat boring teaching method, it is still the most basic teaching strategy for nursing education and it is effective when it is used in combination with other varieties of other techniques such as videos, Prezi presentation, and Poll everywhere application (14). That combination of lecturing with the use of teaching aids and interactive techniques is not only attractive to students but also makes the teaching session a lot of fun.

Strategy Three: Case Study Strategy

During the classroom teaching session, the facilitator integrated some cases studies based on cultural diversity, imposition, and clients' values were discussed in different contexts of nursing practice. These case studies reflected on some ethical dilemmas in real-life nursing context. This stimulated and engaged students to use critical thinking to deeply analyze the given case study in their small groups. According to (25) case studies are stories that are used by educators to present complex, realistic, and contextually rich situations involving dilemmas,

conflicts, or problems that help learners critically think about how they can be solved in professional was without causing any harm. Furthermore, using case studies assist nurse educators to promote active learning as well as the development of critical thinking skills (26). The use of case studies helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and between the classroom and workforce (7,14,26). To analyze case studies critically, students can use concept maps to develop their reflection and critical thinking.

Strategy Four: Concept Map Strategy

The concept map is defined as a technique that allows students to understand the relationships between course contents by connecting ideas with visual map diagram (25). For students, to use their critical thinking and reflection, the course facilitators used different concepts like iceberg concept of culture and tried to link that concept with others related to the context of community health nursing such as ethnocentrism and cultural safety. Students worked in their small group and critically reflected on those concepts. The literature said that concept maps activities allow learners to analyze the connections between the previous knowledge, ideas; connect new ideas to their new learned knowledge; and organize those combined ideas in logical, structure that allows new knowledge to be included in future (12,27). Concept mapping provides students with an opportunity to analyze the interrelatedness of gained information, visually mapping out concepts to deeply understand the entire picture of a patients' health condition (14,27).

Author's Beliefs, Reflections and New Knowledge About Teaching and Learning Inherent in the Situation Under Review

In education, beliefs are closely linked with educators' strategies for coping with challenges in daily professional life and to general well-being, and can shape students' learning environment and motivate students' for their achievement (28). In addition, educators' beliefs and attitudes and educational philosophies have significant influence on their teaching approaches (29). The attended teaching session has strongly strengthened my beliefs about teaching and learning and I have been inspired by the course facilitator. This stimulated me to reflect on different teaching experiences from my undergraduate class, different assisted teaching session as tutorial assistant at University

of Rwanda. I combined that reflection with knowledge gained from graduate course of Theoretical Foundation of Nursing Education at Western University and realized that some of the professors the nursing program used to give us much contents on their topic but without engaging students in learning process and that was not benefiting equally to all students including myself. Other professors used to actively involve learners in the learning process and this was more beneficial to me. I found that teaching was meaningful to us, as that course facilitator modeled and positively influenced my expectation and my perspective of teaching and learning. While having a conversation with the course facilitator of the observed session, I was curious to know about her teaching philosophy that guided her during the course teaching process, and she shared that: *“my teaching philosophy is to connect my nursing bedside practical experience and nursing academic experience to teach students in real life-long learning as future nurse”*. To apply this philosophy when teaching nursing students in the same conditions, it is necessary to teach by demonstrating care, respect, and engaging learners in the learning process. As a growing future nurse educator, I hope to integrate these beliefs in classroom and clinical education practice. My beliefs in the same situation should be to take into consideration and reflect on the teaching-learning process, the role of teacher, adult learner, and learning environment.

My education philosophy is that teaching and learning process must be student-centered. In adult learners' approaches, I believe that student-centered approach is the best way of giving students many opportunities to learn according to their interest and needs. I also believe that students must be empowered to be responsible for their learning as adult learners. I believe that by facilitating teaching and learning sessions and engaging students with respect and care create a good and active learning environment. I feel motivated when students in my class are actively contributing their own views and sharing some experiences. To achieve that, there is a very big need for creating a conducive learning environment. I believe that teaching and learning environment has to be settled in a way which can enhance students comforts and feel engaged in self-directed learning opportunities. I feel that it is my responsibility to provide a good freedom and controlled learning environment which can attract, motivate, and enhance self-confidence in students.

Different Strategies I Would Employ if am to Teach the Same Group of Students and How they Align with My Developing Beliefs About Teaching and Learning

If teaching the same group of students, I would use the following strategies: active learning, interactive lecturing, case studies, and concept maps. I believe that in the teaching and learning process, using those mentioned strategies can shape students' learning environment and motivate them to achieve their expectations as adult learners. I believe that using active learning strategies will promote student-centered approaches. With that, students will be empowered and be part of the learning process. Active learning will promote recall and deeper understanding of materials as students will be actively engaged with the course content (21). To deliver my prepared content, I could use interactive lecture strategy instead of traditional lecturing. I believe that using this interactive lecturing would assist me to interact and involve engage active participation of the students, and classroom assessment strategies are embedded into a lecture at frequent intervals in order to foster deeper processing of course content (15). Furthermore, this interactive lecturing with respect and valuing of students' ideas, will promote an active learning environment. To strengthen adult learners approaches and critical thinking and reflection I could use a case study strategy. A case study could be elaborated based on cultural diversity imposition and clients' values and could be discussed in different contexts of nursing practice. I believe that, the use of case study would help to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and between the classroom and workforce (7,14,26). To strengthen the level of understanding of the same group I could use concept map strategy. I believe that with this activity of concept map could help the students to use their critical thinking and reflection. Using concept mapping allow learners to analyze the connections between the previous knowledge, ideas; connect new ideas to their new learned knowledge; and organize those combined ideas in logical, structure that allows new knowledge to be included in future (12,27).

CONCLUSION

Classroom teaching observation is an important practice of learning how to teach. This observation session was very beneficial to me as a nurse educator. The observation of the classroom teaching and learning session gave me more insight and opportunity to connect my knowledge

and experience in nursing education with the real-life teaching situations. In my experience, this reflection has helped me to clearly recognizing that in the context of effective teaching and learning session, students develop professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes because of different factors such as effective time management, conducive teaching environments, appropriate teaching methods and approaches. In teaching, teaching strategies and the behaviors exhibited by educators may determine the effectiveness of teaching and can have a significant impact on students' achievements. To teach effectively, the nurse educator needs to select appropriate teaching strategies. As a developing nurse educator, this teaching observation has significantly strengthened my teaching philosophy of student-centered education. I believe that the gained experience of teaching strategies and approaches will have the positive impact on practices and responsibilities and promote effective student performance. Following this observation, I plan to integrate different observed strategies like cases studies, scenarios and interactive lecturing in my future course. Gained experience will be shared with my colleagues working together in the same teaching and learning institution and I will related them to influence them positively in our daily teaching activities. That will contribute to the development of nursing profession education as well as in achievement of my institutional goals and mission in education.

Acknowledgement

Based on how this observational teaching experience was very helpful to me, I would like to acknowledge my professor for having included the activity of teaching observation among other activities for the requirements of the course. My notes of thanks are extended to the course facilitator of the observed teaching session who accepted my request to observe during classroom teaching.

Funding: None Declared

Ethical Clearance: Not Applicable

Conflict of Interest: the author declares that there were no competing interests while writing this article.

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► **Please cite this article as:**

Ndayisenga, J.P. Learning from senior nurse educators: Reflections on values of classroom teaching session observation in nursing education. *Research Journal of Health Sciences*, 2024; 12(2): 163-169

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