

Short Communication

Promoting Nursing Scholarship through Faculty Research Talking Circles

Lisa Martin*

Department of Nursing, St. Catherine University, USA

*Corresponding author

Lisa Martin, St. Catherine University, 2004 Randolph Avenue, F22, St. Paul, Minnesota 55106, USA, Tel: 612-227-4709; Fax: 651-690-6941; Email: lcmartin@stkate.edu

Submitted: 01 July 2016

Accepted: 06 September 2016

Published: 08 September 2016

ISSN: 2379-9501

Copyright

© 2016 Martin

Abstract

Faculty attrition and retirement within nursing education has become an important focus for the nursing profession. As a result academic institutions have begun to actively recruit and hire new nursing faculty to address attrition. Several authors have studied this trend in order to create awareness and to help develop an appropriate response to faculty leaving academia and thus contributing to the nursing shortage in the U.S. As new nursing faculty enters the educational system, they must begin to make significant contributions in nursing research and scholarship. The author of this article is an assistant professor from a private University and describes her involvement in supporting nursing faculty in attaining scholarship and research through the use of talking circles. The use of talking circles has evolved from indigenous culture and is a small group of participants who find meaning and understanding with a common experience. The article describes the process of using talking circles to promote nursing research and scholarship and the discoveries made. Overall, the use of talking circles was successful in connecting and supporting nursing faculty to move their scholarship towards dissemination.

Keywords

- Nursing
- Education
- Research
- Attrition
- Talking circles
- Indigenous knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Within nursing academia there is a current trend of faculty attrition and retirement. Demographics revealing this trend have been studied and anticipated for years with reasons for the trend related to the “baby boomer” generation reaching retirement age, along with other reasons for attrition, such as promotion, change of career, or a voluntary decrease of work hours [1,2,4,6]. This trend has prompted nursing education nationwide to actively recruit and hire new faculty to fill resulting vacancies and begin to groom new faculty to contribute to nursing scholarship. However, it is likely that newer faculty will experience greater time poverty due to orientation to teaching in the academic environment, and have limited previous experience with conducting research programs, writing grants, completing institutional review board (IRB) project applications, and translating results of research efforts into scholarly dissemination.

As a member of the nursing faculty in a private University, there was great need for nursing scholarship and research support in order for faculty to be successful in creating a scholarship trajectory. The purpose of this article is to describe the implementation of nursing faculty research/scholarship talking circles in order to support faculty to create research projects and scholarship, and to disseminate important contributions and discoveries to the profession.

BACKGROUND

During the 2014-2015 academic year there was a request

from University administration to increase the level of scholarly activity within nursing and other academic departments. The nursing department included approximately 80 faculties, some with high levels of experience in research and publishing. Nursing faculty did not have a history of formally meeting to address research and scholarship, to provide collegial support, or to share insights and expertise on the various phases of research and scholarship. In addition, the department had recently hired several new faculties who were orienting to the teaching role, designing curriculum, and developing service partnerships for the University as a whole. Within this environment, faculties were inquiring how to begin research and scholarship efforts. The department decided to implement talking circles for nursing faculty on the topics of research and scholarship and I served as the circle facilitator. The goal of the talking circle was to achieve greater connection between faculties, build faculty-to-faculty scholarship relationships, and provide development towards increasing contributions in scholarship.

The topic of mentorship to produce nursing scholarship is present in the literature and several authors have provided support [3,4,6]. Nursing faculty in academia has multiple levels of complexity to their roles and this can decrease their availability to engage in scholarly writing. Faculty productivity is often divided between teaching, student advising, development of curriculum, involvement in department-wide and university wide-efforts, conducting research, and contributing volunteer

service to the community and university. In addition it is common that universities do not provide formal development programs to increase scholarship expertise in faculty [3]. Some authors have found the use of a faculty writing group as an effective way to increase scholarly productivity [3,6]. Faculty writing groups can involve faculty at various levels in the experience of writing, and offer accountability to group members to advance writing projects.

In this University, talking circles were used regularly to explore the lived experience of group members who were discovering a common venture, for example, faculty new to academia. The talking circle itself has evolved from indigenous culture and adopted to the present time for diverse purposes in bringing people together to find meaning and understanding with a common experience [4]. The talking circle utilizes small group communication to promote input from all of the circle members. Talking circles are similar to writing groups, with a greater emphasis placed on collaborative relationships, sharing information and experience, and addressing identity and interaction in the group process.

TALKING CIRCLES

To provide definition on the talking circle, Daniel Paul, with the Maliseet First Nation Community of Tobique, Indian Reserve, New Brunswick, Canada made these comments:

A Talking Circle consists of a number of people, ranging from two to twenty for the best results, gathered together in a circular formation to share ideas, hopes, dreams, cares, and energies in total unity and a sacred connection to one another. It is also a place where individuals come to seek help, support, healing, and understanding for any particular discomfort or instability they may have, or has been with them for some time. The Circle is a protective shield of honesty, trust, and comfort. The material brought to the Circle is usually private, personal and/or confidential, and as a general rule all material heard in the Circle, stays in the circle unless a waiver or consent has been rendered beforehand [9].

Talking circles have been widely used as a method for participants to share questions and beliefs on the topic of interest and in the circle there is shared ownership and a level of equality maintained between the participants [10]. One individual convenes the circle, opens and prompts discussion on the topic of interest, and promotes members to participate by facilitating an inclusionary discussion process. The person who convenes the circle also oversees and preserves the intent of the circle. The rules of the circle are to promote discussion where all are free to participate or raise questions. The circle's intent is to provide a safe place for members to ask questions, explore views, and connect with others who have similar interests. The length and frequency of the circle is not prescribed so that the circle continues until the discussion has been visited enough to the satisfaction of the members.

Use of the Talking Circle to Promote Nursing Research and Scholarship

The nursing faculty research/scholarship talking circle began by posting an electronic invitation to all faculties to

participate in exploring and identifying researchable topics within the department. Nineteen faculties expressed interest and participated. A short PowerPoint presentation was used to convey the purpose and intent of a talking circle along with links to scholarship resources already available within the University system. The first circle began with introductions for the benefit of newer faculty and for those nursing faculty attending from different areas of the University. Introductions were helpful to begin establishing a group identity as a talking circle and to facilitate inclusiveness.

In the first meeting, circle attendees were asked to write down a research or scholarship topic they were considering. Discussion on topics started between colleagues and then was shared with the larger circle. Faculty also wrote down obstacles they had experienced in developing a scholarship project. Some common examples of obstacles were: no time, statistician needed, lack of knowledge on doing research with students, and lack of knowledge on what the University offers to support faculty research. Faculty found the talking circle was supportive, a way to connect on the topics of research and scholarship for other faculty, and allowed writing partnerships to develop within the group. In addition, the first circle provided several ideas for future circle topics.

Future circles were scheduled as close as possible to meeting times that were in common to all faculties in all levels of the nursing program, avoiding midterms, finals, holidays, and semester breaks. The circle requested one hour of faculty time and attendance was voluntary. Ongoing nursing faculty research/scholarship talking circles were planned to occur on a monthly basis and all interested faculty at any stage of writing and scholarship were invited. The first year of circles addressed the following topics:

Month 2 – Time management and setting goals for scholarship

Month 3 –University resources supporting faculty research:
Guest Speaker from the

University's department of research and sponsored projects

Month 4 – Sharing individual writing progress, projects, and goals

Month 5 – Reflections from an experienced nurse researcher:
the Associate Dean

Month 6 - Revisiting circle topics of the year, sharing faculty project updates, reviewing

Topics for the next year.

Barriers to nursing research and scholarship

The talking circles revealed a common issue faculty experienced related to research and scholarship: a perceived lack of time. In the first talking circles, discussion on this issue included various details of time management and different ways individuals prioritized goals. Further discussion revealed that priorities were often chosen based on the perceived importance of the goal to the individual's work life. Goals were sometimes moved to a higher priority if faculty were aware of colleagues pursuing the same goals.

Another issue discussed was lack of awareness of the different types of funding support to pursue research activity. Within the circle, faculty found partnerships that offered support and accountability to create a manuscript. Some faculty shared ideas on how to broaden scholarship; others shared knowledge on funding opportunities, timelines for funding applications, and overall support that was available from the University.

DISCUSSION

Nursing faculty research/scholarship talking circles were successful in connecting and supporting faculty in research and scholarship and in allowing faculty to move their scholarship towards dissemination. This University evaluated nursing faculty performance annually on the presence of scholarly activity, accomplishments in teaching, and service. The talking circles were also successful for faculty to consider scholarly activity in preparing for the annual performance review.

Writing groups via teleconferencing has been recommended in the literature [3] in order to involve greater numbers of faculty in research and scholarship support. In this University setting, a summary of circle topics was requested online so more faculty could participate. While online information would not provide the talking circle experience, it could share with greater numbers the discoveries made and introductions to others with similar goals. Overall the nursing faculty research/scholarship talking circle filled a gap within the department and served a positive role in bringing faculty together to promote success in research and scholarship.

REFERENCES

1. American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Nursing faculty shortage fact sheet. 2016.
2. Brendtro M, Hegge M. Nursing faculty: One generation from extinction? *Journal of Professional Nursing*. 2001; 16: 97-103.
3. Cumbie S, Weinart C, Luparell S, Conley V, Smith J. Developing a scholarship community. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*. 2005; 37: 289-293.
4. Foley BJ, Redman RW, Horn EV, Davis GT, Neal EM, Van Riper ML. Determining nursing faculty development needs. *Nursing Outlook*. 2003. 51, 226-331.
5. Hinshaw AA. Continuing challenge: The shortage of educationally prepared nursing faculty. *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. 2001; 16: 3.
6. Houfek JF, Kaiser KL, Visovsky C, Barry TL, Nelson AE, Kaiser MM, et al. Using a writing group to promote faculty scholarship. *Nurse Educator*. 2010; 35: 41-45.
7. Yordy K. The nursing faculty shortage: A crises for health care. 2003.
8. Running Wolf P, Rickard J. Talking circles: A Native American approach to experiential learning. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*. 2003; 31: 39-43.
9. Paul D. We were not the savages - First Nation history. Talking circle: A place for peace, harmony, and reflection. 2007.
10. Wilbur JR, Wilbur M, Garrett MT, YuhuaM. Talking circles: Listen or your tongue with make you deaf. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*. 2001; 26: 348-384.

Cite this article

Martin L (2016) Promoting Nursing Scholarship through Faculty Research Talking Circles. *Ann Nurs Pract* 3(6): 1064.