



Creative Reflections: Processing Clinical Experiences During COVID-19

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Article Details

Article Type: Research Article

Received date: 02nd November, 2021

Accepted date: 29th December, 2021

Published date: 31st December, 2021

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Citation: Leyden, K., & Campbell-Law, L., (2022). Creative Reflections: Processing Clinical Experiences During COVID-19. *J Comp Nurs Res Care* 6(2):178. doi: <https://doi.org/10.33790/jcnrc1100178>.

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Abstract

Background: Supporting students through unexpected clinical experiences presents a challenge even in the best of times. Providing meaningful clinical experiences through a pandemic adds to the challenge. In the midst of a COVID-19 environment, different strategies were implemented through the use of information technology.

Aim: The aim of this paper is to discuss how a virtual platform was used to support students' clinical experiences through creative reflection during COVID-19.

Method: A virtual platform was used for student submission and presentation in the pediatrics and behavioral health courses.

Conclusion: A virtual platform is a feasible option and an appropriate strategy for students to reflect and talk about their clinical experiences.

Keywords: Debriefing, Healing, Holism, Finding Meaning, Self-Awareness, Instrument of Healing, COVID-19, Pandemic, Virtual Learning

Introduction

Introducing creative reflections offers students alternative outlets for debriefing about their unexpected clinical experiences. Faculty find it a useful, innovative method to facilitate students' expressions in finding meaning in their clinical experiences. Past reported student reflections have revealed the benefits of this type of reflection.

The pandemic presented challenges for classroom engagement; therefore, finding alternative strategies for students to have a platform for this type of reflection was necessary. The alternative strategy needed was to pivot from in-person presentations to a virtual platform. The literature supports that in times of universal disruption, such as, COVID-19, moving to a virtual platform is necessary [1-3].

Art Reflection in Nursing Care

There is reported evidence in several populations and communities on the benefits of creative reflections. Some of these populations include children suffering from trauma [4,5] those suffering from terminal illness [6,7], and military veterans with trauma during service [8] who therapeutically benefit from the creative reflective process and may not be able to express their emotions in other ways.

Integrating Creative Reflection in Curriculum

The creative process was first introduced in the school of nursing in the undergraduate curriculum in 2012. Since then, it has been threaded throughout the curriculum in several courses, including Pediatrics and Behavioral Health [9].

Various forms of creative reflections were used by students to illustrate unexpected clinical experiences. Faculty created a safe space for students to share their experiences. "Students allowed themselves to be vulnerable with their stories and personal journey toward healing." [9](p. 3). Experiences included students looking inward and exploring their own identity as a nurse and an instrument of healing.

Pedagogical Shift During COVID-19

The pedagogical shift allowed faculty to pivot student presentations of clinical experiences in a virtual platform. The same criterion was used to evaluate the students' work. A high degree of flexibility was used to facilitate the complexities of moving in-person presentations to on-line.

Methodology

Nursing student creative reflective experiences continue to be a required assignment in the pediatric and behavioral health courses in the baccalaureate-nursing program at a private, faith-based, liberal-arts university. In an on-going effort to support students' critical thinking skills, develop compassion for their patients, and engage in self-reflection, the assignment was delivered through a virtual platform. Assignment submission links were placed in the university course platform for students to upload all criteria. Submission components included creative reflective project, written summary of project, and students' self-recorded video presentation.

Population

Undergraduate, Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students in their Junior and Senior year were the population for this assignment. Students enrolled in the Pediatric (junior level) course and the Behavioral Health (senior level) course completed the creative reflection assignment. There were a total of 57 students in each of the two courses.

Creating the Environment

Historically, students presented work to faculty in an in person format. However, due to COVID-19, faculty had to pivot to a virtual environment in order to facilitate students' reflective presentations. Students submitted their work by uploading their art piece, summary, and self-video recorded presentation to the faculty through the University's learning modality system. Unlike the courses in the previous years where students had the opportunity to upload their reflections and present in person, during COVID-19, students did not have the option to present on-site. There was no way of knowing if their experiences would have been different presenting in person

versus virtual platform. However, antidotally, feedback from students and faculty revealed this assignment and method of delivery was worthwhile and a positive experience.

Summary

Students have an alternative outlet for debriefing or coping with unexpected clinical experiences by using creative reflections. A virtual format created the conditions and the environment for students to still have an opportunity to express their experiences working with unexpected clinical experiences during a pandemic. Virtual platforms were used to facilitate the students' engagement in the creative reflection process.

Recommendations

A virtual platform is a feasible option and an appropriate strategy for students to reflect and talk about their clinical experiences. One recommendation would be to consider using the virtual platform post pandemic. Another recommendation would be to compare students' experiences using virtual platforms for submission to their experiences with traditional, in-person presentations.

Conflict of Interest

Authors report there is no conflict of interest of any kind and attests to the originality of this work.

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