Promoting Nursing Scholarship through Faculty Research Talking Circles

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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.

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
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**

9. Paul D. We were not the savages - First Nation history. Talking circle: A place for peace, harmony, and reflection. 2007.