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## **Introduction**

This paper draws upon the five-year experience of a group of nursing lecturers involved in planning, delivery and evaluation of a discrete module on the expressive arts within a Bachelor of Nursing course within one Scottish university. In part, this account is a reflective process on learning and pedagogy at a particular stage of a module's development within a dynamic degree curriculum. It is also, however, an explorative paper designed to analyse more generally possible directions for use of the arts in nurse education, but also to exemplify related practical activities which may be of use to educators in nursing across a variety of contexts.

**Context: The module and its place in the curriculum**

The Expressive Arts in the Caring Context is a Scottish Degree (SD) level 3 (15 SCOTCAT) module for students choosing the 'Arts' route option of a three-year Bachelor of Nursing (BN) or BN (Hons) programme. Originating from a previous mental health branch programme (McKie & Gass, 2001), this (SD level 2) unit was formerly limited to these students as part of a negotiated curriculum (Gass, Banks & Wilson, 2004).

Part of the validation of a new generic curriculum has been the establishment of 'arts' or 'science' routes for degree-option students. Students select a particular pathway (incorporating specific modules), emphasising the 'art' or 'science' of nursing, in year two and this choice predetermines students' 'art' or 'science' pathway for year three (see table 1 below).

DipHEN/BN					
Weeks 46-53	Wks 54-60	Weeks 61-68	Wks 69-75	Weeks 76-82	Wks 83-90
NU2901 KNOWLEDGE AND REASONING IN NURSING NU2902/3/4* THE CONTEXT OF NURSING NU2905/6/7* APPLIED HUMAN STUDIES IN NURSING	NU2662/2666/2670 INTER-MEDIATE NURSING PRACTICE 1	NU2660 RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE NU2908/9/10* APPLIED NURSING NU2911 PERSON/FAMILY CENTRED CARE (Arts Route) OR NU2912 PATHOLOGY AND THERAPEUTICS IN NURSING (Science Route)	NU2662/2666/2670 INTER-MEDIATE NURSING PRACTICE 2	ENQUIRY BASED LEARNING- Consolidation of stage two learning	NU2662/2666/2670 INTER-MEDIATE NURSING PRACTICE 3

Exit point: Diploma of Higher Education Health studies

Programme Overview - Stage 3

BN		
Weeks 91-110	Weeks 111-134	Week 135 Theory
NU3742 FACILITATING LEARNING AND MENTORING NU3901/2/3* TRANSITION TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE NU3904 APPLIED NURSING/MIDWIFERY RESEARCH NU3681 EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN THE CARING CONTEXT (Arts Route) OR NU3906 ADVANCING NURSING THROUGH SCIENCE (Science Route) NU3905 NURSING/MIDWIFERY AND HEALTH POLICY ONE OPTION	NU3672/3674/3676 MANAGING CARE AND RESOURCES	

Exit point: BN

\*Branch specific-Adult, Mental Health or Child

Table 1: Programme Overview

Unlike its predecessor, this module expands the range of artistic media and potential breadth of application to three nursing branches: adult, children’s and mental health. An enquiry-based learning (EBL) approach is embedded within the curriculum and the module is accessible to all B.N. students irrespective of branch choice (consistent with common course architecture principles in curriculum planning).

Enquiry based learning is a key mechanism for expanding student involvement in, and ownership of, the curriculum. It builds upon previous use of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) which involved students working in small groups with 'real-life' problems ('families') in practice (Sharp & Primrose, 2003). Via critical analysis, research and communication skills, PBL fostered students' personal growth and development (Amos & White, 1998).

Recent use of enquiry-based learning (EBL) develops students' knowledge through reflection and analysis of 'real life' situations, rather than problems/topics of PBL (Price, 2003). Aimed at integrating all aspects of the curriculum, EBL themes are allocated set hours within all modules (year 1 : 'holism'; year 2: 'evidenced-based professional practice' and year 3 : 'becoming a professional' and 'critical awareness of the place of evidence in practice'). These broad themes enable students to pursue their application within the context of a number of diverse modules.

These curriculum changes have enabled this particular module to flourish within an 'Art' route. Simultaneously, a 'Science' route, alongside a number of optional modules, is also available to students. In addition, students take one more option from a choice of seven modules. Module student numbers have ranged between twenty and forty, a figure encouraging an interactive (mainly workshop) learning format.

## **Module Content, Sequencing and Thematic Development**

Table 2 provides an overview of the main elements of module structure, sequencing, content and inherent thematic development. The foundation themes indicate some of the forms around which content is placed (art, narrative), particular skills required (reflection, interpretation, response) and anticipated results from such engagement (ethics, transformation of practice). Appreciation of art forms via the appropriate senses is nurtured, alongside active engagement with module content by students. Such participation favours the interactive and relational format of a workshop and limits lecture format to introduction and broad thematic overview. Workshops adopt a common format of preparatory work (e.g. literature sourcebook), a short presentation, group discussions and thematic collation. Mirroring contemporary teaching of the humanities (Bassnett, 2002), art forms are sequenced from more familiar and concrete (e.g. film) through to more challenging and abstract (e.g. poetry, photography, visual art).

Workshop content is presented and discussed in terms of addressing and informing issues of care and, in particular, considers the art of nursing. Module progression, as table 2 indicates, is towards more explicit discussion of nursing practice ('the art of nursing'), as reflected by the students' own interactive ('exhibition') workshop towards the end of the module.

**TABLE 2: OVERVIEW OF MODULE**

Lecture 1	Lecture 2	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3	Workshop 4	Workshop 5	Workshop 6	Assessment
Introduction and overview	Art, Ethics and Humanities	Film/video	Literature	Poetry	Photography	The art of nursing	Student exhibition	Student group presentations
e.g.s of art, workshop themes, module booklet, student visits assessment	Art, aesthetics, humanities, response, interpretation, place in nursing	e.g. <i>Angela's Ashes Girl, Interrupted As Good As It Gets</i>	e.g. <i>A Will to Win The Trick Is To Keep Breathing The Bell Jar</i>	e.g. <i>'Sick Kid' 'Bad Day in Charge' 'Gralloch'</i>	'images of health – past and present' in gallery format and and group discussion	focus on practice issues around the 'art of nursing' theme	students invited to bring items illustrative of module theme, present to group	25-minute group presentation on arts' perspectives on nursing practice
▶ <b>Foundation themes</b> art		narrative	interpretation	Response	ethics	transformation	of practice	
		▶ ▶ <b>Running themes</b> e.g. the person and the professional, death, communication						
						▶ ▶ <b>Emergent themes from students</b> e.g. old age, travelling people, AIDs		
		▼ ▼ e.g. context – text - subtext ▼ ▼ narrative ▼ ▼						
		▶ ▶ <b>Comparisons and contrasts with nursing practice</b> e.g. assessment construction of patient/family narratives holism professional practice						

This 'exhibition' workshop is helpful in bringing module and workshop themes together and in preparing students for assessment presentations.

A number of 'running' themes are illuminated in different ways by the art forms of the workshops. Examples of these include 'the person and professional' (linked to E.B.L.) , 'death' and 'how can you know what someone else is feeling?' This latter theme is exemplified in different ways through four excerpts in tables 3 – 6 below ('Running Theme': 'How can you know what someone else is feeling?')

Table 3: 'How can you know what someone else is feeling?' Film

In the film *Good Will Hunting* (1997), Robin Williams demonstrates some lessons of life experience in his dialogue with a youthful artistic genius, Matt Damon:

'by reading *Oliver Twist*, does that encapsulate you?'

'You don't know about real loss'

(Miramax Collector's Series, 1998)

Table 4: 'How can you know what someone else is feeling?' Literature

The novel *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* by Janice Galloway illustrates some aspects of the professional-client relationship within a wider narrative of the personal and social context/meaning of mental health problems (Galloway, 1999).

HEALTH VISITOR (Alert to the change) Nothing else to tell me, then?

PATIENT No. Nothing special.

She looks blank and vaguely disappointed. I am not trying.

PATIENT I have a friend visiting tonight. That's all.

HEALTH VISITOR Anyone special? Going out?

PATIENT Just the pub, have a few drinks, that kind of thing.

HEALTH VISITOR Lucky girl. I can't remember the last time someone took me out. Lucky.

Table 5: 'How can you know what someone else is feeling?' Poetry

The poem 'Gralloch' by local author Gerard Rochford, evoking the human experience of abortion, is used to challenge students in their use of skills of observation, interpretation and sensitisation (Rochford, Gibbons, Gray, 2004).

### GRALLOCH

*The act of disembowelling a deer  
killed in a hunt*

(i)

You may experience  
slight discomfort;  
there might be  
some seepage.

I won't need  
to see you again,  
unless there's pain  
or excessive bleeding.

(ii)

Upon my sterile bed,  
beneath the scan  
of brash lights,  
I hear a screaming.

I will keep  
those barren birthdays;  
remember the boy  
who promised love.

Table 6: 'How can you know what someone else is feeling?' Photography

Local photographer Anne Campbell's image is used to invite a range of interpretations and inferences relating to the feelings of others and gives scope to develop parallels with situations encountered in nursing practice (Campbell, 2005).

Anne Campbell's picture here

The range of workshop themes can be further extended by briefly considering some of the themes which students themselves develop creatively at the 'exhibition' workshop. These, strongly personal, themes include childhood, nursing care, patients' illness journeys, hospice art, loss/bereavement, cancer, art as therapy, stigma, discrimination, dignity, travelling people, dying, depression and old age.

The relationship between module themes and nursing practice (or application) receives important consideration in several ways. Firstly, students are encouraged to engage with art forms through sight, hearing, touch, smell and emotions. In viewing pictures, 'grow(ing) by *looking*' may frame, or train, students' visionary powers (Murdoch, 1970). Similarly, careful listening during a poetry workshop may engage emotional interpretations having clear resonance with past, or future, nursing experience. A second way involves understanding art forms in terms of certain transferable/flexible narrative frameworks e.g. 'context – text – subtext'. Eliot's observation that we can '...make stories to the pictures' may help students place a piece of art or a poem within a wider context (Eliot, 1965/1860).

These analytic frameworks can also be more explicitly related to students' nursing practice where observation and interpretation skills are central to sensitive and particularised patient-centred care. Frank's (1995: 158) notion of 'perpetual self-reflection', or the way in which story helps to shape identity, may enhance the importance of narrative in understanding key aspects of the professional-client relationship (Hawkins, 1997).

## **Assessment and Evaluation**

These approaches, linking art forms to nursing practice, are given sharpened focus in the module's assessment. Students are required to deliver a group presentation, incorporating teacher and peer review elements, which:

'reflects and critically evaluates the place of expressive arts as a means of offering alternative perspectives on practice'.

The particular form of a group presentation often releases the potential for students to be creative and innovative in addressing this assessment.

Examples of this in recent years have included:

- the use of drama to illustrate the place of infection control throughout the centuries
- the use of role play to demonstrate aspects of the nurse-patient relationship
- the composition of poetry by students themselves to illustrate a theme (e.g. loss)
- the use of mixed media (photography, poetry, art) to highlight a theme (e.g. childrens's nursing)

Constant review of materials and incorporation of new content has enabled the module to remain fresh and challenging for both students and teachers alike. Both literature and poetry workshops receive regular updated sourcebooks. These often incorporate excerpts from visiting guest speakers (e.g. poets and writers-in-residence) and have also integrated

material generated by students who have undertaken the module previously.

### **Relationship to practice: 1**

The scope of the module has expanded significantly during the past five years to include:

- guest speakers (local artists, curators, poets, archivists, freelance photographers, bibliotherapists)
- contacts with our university's School of Art
- links with community initiatives (e.g. hospice writer-in-residence)
- students' visits to sites of interest (e.g. art galleries, hospital art, memorials, university writers' festival)
- learning resources e.g. art gallery's learning support officer

By seeking engagement with these wider 'communities of practice', the module seeks to open the curriculum up to the influence of others with an interest in, and a commitment to, dialogue between health and the arts (Staricoff, 2004). In table 7 below, some perspectives from practitioners of this particular 'community of practice' are outlined.

Table 7: Communities of Practice: Perspectives

'The use of historical photographs of nursing presents students with images that are at the same time strange and familiar. They can identify with what was happening but they can also spot differences and, in doing so, begin to reflect on the changing image (and reality) of the profession'

*Health board archivist*

'The module's open inclusion of the arts in the wider context as linked to the art of nursing supports a learning environment which encourages deepening awareness of the shared relationship between arts and health and its unique role in nurturing the wellbeing of individuals and communities'

*Hospital art gallery curator*

'Situations are not always what they seem: observational skills increase, peoples' perceptions of images are varied and influenced considerably by personal life experience. Students can then take their responses and insights gained to viewing their own profession through the eyes of others'

*Freelance photographer*

'The module's importance is in bringing together two worlds which normally don't interact, to challenge assumptions, to ask questions, to allow the possibility of real change'

*Scottish poet*

All these initiatives further illuminate nursing practice in terms of personal and professional identity, contextualised nursing care, excellence in nursing, the art and/or science of nursing and, most pertinently to art itself, the relationship to others' experiences. These points are illustrated by considering student evaluation of the module. Although generally positive, these evaluations indicate the challenges students experience in undertaking the module, issues that require addressing by the module team.

- 'Enjoyed exploring a new way of viewing nursing in relation to popular media. Stretched me in a new way'.
- 'In all I believe it provided a different perspective on the nursing process'
- 'What it taught me is that using different tools can assist you to think outside the 'norm' and this can benefit the patient as it can inform how you practice'
- 'I feel that a group presentation is quite risky as there is always someone in your class/group who does not pull their weight and help the group'.

### **Relationship to practice: 2**

The importance of students' engagement with texts, pictures and other artefacts throughout the module is linked closely to considerations of nursing practice. Despite dangers of instrumentalism (reducing art to means towards an end), linkages with students' clinical practice are central. Four broad, but overlapping, themes can be considered in relating the arts to nursing practice, namely the art of nursing, ethics, reflective practice and spirituality. These shall now be discussed in turn.

The place of the art (or aesthetic) of nursing can be contrasted to the science of nursing's emphasis upon objective and measurable data (Carper, 1978). An 'aesthetic of nursing' claims an understanding of engaged, expressivist and interpretive elements in any consideration of practice. Such demonstration might be found in the areas of finely tuned skills, e.g. touch, eye contact, gestures, body posture, response and other

healing qualities. Whilst 'other-regarding' views of nursing (i.e. patient welfare) should limit any narrow expressivist perspective of the art of nursing, two other aspects of art are noteworthy.

One is the notion of discipline as intrinsic to the artistic process. This highlights current notions of excellence in nursing where both art and practice share in processes of constant revision, refinement and 'creative agony' in pursuit of a finished art form (or practice) (Williams, 1961; Katims, 1993). Another considers the way in which new forms of art (e.g. avant-garde) can stimulate nursing practice in creative and innovative ways (Drummond, 2004). Both considerations are suggestive of nursing as a distinct practice whose knowledge and skills are mediated via diverse social, personal and historical ways (MacIntyre, 1981). Such perspectives have been usefully explored in photography ('image of nursing – past and present') 'art of nursing' and interactive 'exhibition' workshops. In the latter two workshops, student creativity is often illustrated in their choice of materials displayed in 'exhibit' format e.g. favourite poems, hospice calendar, family photograph collage featuring personal identity, book chapter from childhood library featuring nursing and clips from influential films.

A second way of relating module themes to practice is in consideration of ethical issues. Taking into account evidence that nursing students find ethics a challenging topic (Begley, 1995), the arts are seen as providing a useful complementary educational context for such considerations.

Reading literature and poetry, by providing 'vicarious experiences', can help students gain 'vertical', or deep, understanding of such human experiences as death, loss, illness, adaptation and acceptance (Begley, 1995). In so doing, development of 'insight' may become an experiential and particularised correlate of the application of general ethical principles and theories such as autonomy, justice, deontology and utilitarianism. For this module team, recognition of students' ethical development as a result of exposure to module content has been noteworthy in workshop discussions, reflection on clinical experience and assignment presentations.

A third area where relationship to practice can be considered is that of reflective practice (Higgs & Titchen, 2001). By considering texts, pictures or photographs as 'open' in narrative and action terms, potentially fruitful linkage can be made between the 'reading' of such texts or images and the narrative, or experiences, of the reader (or viewer) herself. Dickens' account of Sarah Gamp's nursing of her patient, Mr. Chuffey, may initially evoke responses of dissociation (Dickens, 1994/1844):

'Why, highty tighty, sir! Is these your manners? You want a pitcher of cold water throw'd over you to bring you round; that's my belief'

However, other insights into caring for elderly, disabled or vulnerable people in terms of attitude or motivation may be gleaned from such reading.

Fourthly, an aesthetic capturing 'normal processes of living' can be extended to include spirituality (Dewey, 1934). Where spirituality in health care contexts includes such experiences as hope, trust, consolation, meaning and purpose, art can extend students' horizons towards understanding these in the lives of their patients (Pike, 2002).

These points can be summarised in the metaphors frequently used to describe the use of the arts in nurse education. Two feature in the title of this paper (Pugh, 2001). One is the 'window' metaphor, indicating the way in which one might look *through* a text into a wider world (of practice). A second is that of a 'mirror' turned towards present and future practice (Brykczynska, 1997). Use of these materials within a nursing module may challenge certain hallmarks of current educational orthodoxy, such as transferable 'vocational skills'. No *direct* line (as in behavioural learning outcomes) exists between exposure to, and engagement with, literature, art or music and action (knowledge into practice). As Warner (2003) argues, literature 'doesn't "work" immediately'.

In turn, although the scientific, technological and managerial pillars of current healthcare planning work on impersonal, predictable and measurable bases, practice in a human activity such as nursing seldom follows these linear directions. Accepting that practice is 'messy', unpredictable and open to many different influences (Higgs & Titchen, 2001), the module's use of the expressive arts encourages students

to enquire more critically into the nature and legitimacy of evidence informing practice and may encourage deeper reflection upon the EBL theme of holism. If this could be more widely recognised, then a (re)turn to humanities in nurse education may offer hopeful signs for the future of nursing practice itself.

## **Discussion**

A number of key related issues arise from this module review.

Pre-eminent amongst these are foundational issues of the art forms themselves. Expressivism, sourcing art out of, or from, a person's emotions and experiences may help establish personal identity (Altieri, 1987). Some lines (below) from a poem by George MacBeth express emotions of confusion, pain, vulnerability and resignation arising from experience of debilitating illness:

And I'm a nervous nuisance, prone to tears.  
The time has come when I put on my coat  
With fumbling fingers, grappling with my fears

Of God knows what. Well, I know one that's worse  
Than all the rest. My wife's become my nurse.

MacBeth (2000)

In the context of nurse education, linking appropriate responsive emotions, in particular empathy, to such examples of expressivist art, may be seminal in helping student nurses understand such human experiences as childbirth, chronic illness, depression and suffering (Begley, 1995).

The module's thematic development, however, draws upon a broader range of influences than its title suggests to include the interdisciplinary study of the 'humanities' themselves and their emerging links with professional health care education (Pattison, 2003).

Communal ethical quests as 'the Good' and considerations of 'what it means to be human', therefore, become legitimate questions to reflect upon via the module's various art forms (Grayling, 2003). Murdoch's (1970) consideration that '...art is a special discerning exercise of intelligence to the real...', roots art firmly to concepts of life and action and can thereby help nursing to reflect upon its own practice (Brykczynska, 1997).

A second issue concerns key lessons in pedagogy itself. Although aware of being interpretive conduits between art forms and student learning, (e.g. via short introductions to sessions and academic support), we are also conscious of our own engagement with, and reflection upon, the art forms used (Pike, 2002). For each of us, this represents a different, although related and no less challenging, experience. Horizons have been broadened and interdisciplinary 'learning journeys' made. In this, it is hoped that we thereby become more 'teacher responsive' to our students' real learning needs (Pike, 2002). At the same time, however, participation in such 'discursive processes' as engagement, interpretation and response challenges pedagogy itself to retain and promote vitality, freshness, flexibility and creativity (Chambers, 2001).

## **Future Implications**

The future development of the module is dependent on a number of different factors. Internally, a small, but cohesive, module team engaging in reflective practice upon its own pedagogy has many opportunities to develop module content. Not least, a module title change might reflect more accurately interdisciplinary foundations, influences and community contacts (e.g. 'The arts and humanities in the caring context'). The participative nature of the humanities highlights the close relationship between learning and teaching. Moreover, Parker's (2001) observation that 'teaching is their research' has stimulated one M.Phil/PhD research study into one of the module's foundation themes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has outlined the reflective experience of a module team teaching an arts module within a nursing degree programme in one Scottish university. In part, the lessons learnt from this particular experience resonate with wider issues of the place of the arts and humanities in higher education. Specific points from this team's experience, however, remain key marking points for future development.

- developing themes from where students are (theory and practice)
- balancing challenging/abstract material with material which relates easily to the world of practice
- sequencing of materials in order to encourage interaction and engagement
- encouragement of student-led work
- involvement of /engagement with wider 'communities of practice' e.g. artists, curators, writers

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