

Incorporating Discernment and Reflection in a Classroom

Nursing Perspectives II NURS 560

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In the Fall of 2023 the Ignatian Mentoring Program provided a chance for me to incorporate an Ignatian Pedagogy into a course I had taught a previous year. I had been reflecting on this course and looking at ways to bring in reflection where nursing students could discern and reflect on not only their practice, but how they bring their entire self to care for others. I worked closely with Stacey Raj, my mentor, where I shared my own thoughts on how to incorporate Ignatian characteristics into the classroom.

Research and Background

I first began looking at how to incorporate mindful meditation into the course as part of the discernment and reflection. Mindful meditation for one minute at the start of each class was what I thought would allow my students to be present to incorporate the new content given. Hadash et. al. (2023) found that mindful awareness can help to sustain visual attention and executive function when practiced. I looked at different videos to incorporate one minute of mindful meditation at the start of each class that would walk the students through the process. The video I selected focused on breathing and body awareness in a one-minute exercise (Beach Cities Health, 2024).

Discernment was something I also wanted students to be aware of when moving through reflection. I wanted students to have a reference point on the steps and process of Ignatian Discernment (Loyola Press, 2024). Lastly, I looked at questions to incorporate reflection that would allow students to utilize the discernment process and evaluate moments in time that have shaped who they are as a person and how this could impact the care they give to patients. I was hopeful these exercises weekly would broaden their own views and experiences.

Incorporation into the Classroom

The first week of class in Spring 2024 I shared with the students the Ignatian Discernment (Loyola Press, 2024) and the mindful meditation video (Beach Cities Health, 2024) I chose to incorporate each week. I stated that at the end of each weekly class I would share one reflection question where they could incorporate the discernment steps in answering the question if needed and asked that they journal the weekly information for their own personal self-reflection. I told the students that I would be requesting their feedback on the process mid semester and at the end of the semester to see what they liked best about the experience and how they incorporated the principles outside of class. All students were very receptive to be part of this process with me.

Below is the list of the weekly reflections I asked students to reflect upon:

1. What makes you feel calm? Why?
2. How do you encourage yourself when you try something new?
3. How do you stay focused and clear of distractions?
4. How do you savor the time you get alone?
5. How do you set boundaries and avoid absorbing someone else's emotions and stress?
6. How do you forgive yourself when you make a mistake?
7. How do you advocate for yourself?
8. What new opportunities have come out of the challenges you've faced?
9. What does growing older mean to you?
10. How do you handle a bad day?
11. If you had a theme song, what would it be? Why?
12. What is your earliest childhood memory?

13. What do you with others knew about you?
14. Do you prefer to red fiction or non-fiction? Why?
15. If you had a superpower, what would it be? Why?
16. What would you do if you knew you could not fail? Why?

Reflection in Nursing

Journaling in nursing has been used for decades to help nursing students reflect on their interactions in clinical settings and to internalize new knowledge (Greenleaf Brown et. al., 2022). This practice has been shown to be an effective tool in nursing students to lessen anxiety and promote metacognition (Greenleaf Brown et. al., 2022). I incorporated this with the reflection and discernment within the Nursing Perspectives II course due to the content covered over the semester. The students focus on growth and development which encompasses birth to death. The students spend part of the semester within a medical-surgical practicum and the other half of the semester within an obstetrics and pediatric practicum. Through my experience many students have difficulty processing all that they experience through these practicums. I wanted them to take the discernment and reflection to better help them process the experiences they would encounter.

Results and Conclusion

Student response was very positive from the beginning of the semester. Most of the students reported they especially liked the start of each class with the mindful meditation exercise. However, several students reported they would have like to see a different one-minute mindful video each week. Students also reported they would like to see this incorporated into each course throughout the nursing program as it allows them to refocus and be present for the content they are about to discuss.

About two-thirds of the class found the Ignatian Discernment helpful in their reflection responses. Most found the aspect of trusting in God and making a decision, even if they are not certain about it. The greatest take away for this group of students using discernment and reflection was incorporating God into their decision making, recognizing the Xavier Jesuit identity into their learning in a meaningful way, and focused mindfulness in reflection.

In conclusion, I would like to continue to utilize this process in future nursing courses to help students incorporate the Ignatian elements of discernment. I valued this experience in the Ignatian Mentorship Program. It helped me to connect to students in a meaningful way that students can continue in their nursing practice as they move through the Xavier nursing program and as they move through their future nursing profession.

References

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