Transforming the Classroom: Humanistic Engagement in Learning and Clinical Practice

Margaret Brommelsiek, PhD
Director Interprofessional Education Health Sciences
Assistant Research Professor
University of Missouri-Kansas City
School of Nursing & Health Studies
Learning Objectives:

• See the value of mindfulness and reflective practice as tools for improved provider-patient relationships.

• Understand the attributes of humanism as applied to teaching and learning.

• Learn to facilitate discussions using Socratic questioning for improving students’ humanistic skills.
“Nothing exists as an isolated self – it is dependent upon and connected to everything else.” -- Thich Nhat Hahn
• Mindfulness – focusing our attention and awareness on something or someone – to be present in the moment in a non-judgmental way.

• Mindfulness = intentional presence.

• Concept comes from Zen Buddhism.

• To be mindful is to get in touch with our senses – to see, hear, touch, feel, and taste more clearly.
Quick Reflection Exercise:

How can being mindful impact the way you teach in the classroom and clinical setting?

Discuss with your group
• Mindfulness opens the door to curiosity – to observe rather than judge.

• Mindfulness helps us to solve problems more effectively--viewing them with an objective lens (what is possible) rather than with a subjective lens (this can never work).

Quick Reflection Exercise:

- Reflect on a recent troubling experience you have had as a teacher.
- How did you approach that experience?
- What lens did you use – objective or subjective?
- If subjective, how could you approach it more objectively?
- If objective, how did that lens help you?
Dialogic Communication

- Humanism in communication is referred to as **Dialogic**.
- It is called presence, encounter, existential communication, and dialogue.
- A dialogic encounter places essential faith in human interaction – an attitude or orientation toward another.
- Dialogic communication is a reciprocal process grounded in trust, openness, sincerity, and empathy.
Martin Buber and the Dialogic:

- Concept of the I-Thou and I-It relationship with three types of dialogue:
  - Genuine dialogue where a mutual relationship grows;
  - Technical dialogue with a goal of achieving understanding;
  - Monologue where one is more focused on self than in relationship.

Six Characteristics in the *I-Thou* relationship:

1. **Mutual openness** (direct; sense of responsibility to the other).
2. **Non-manipulative** (absence of forcing one’s beliefs on the other).
3. **Recognition of uniqueness** (acknowledgement of unique attributes of one another).
4. **Mutual confirmation** (mutual confirmation and awareness).
5. **Turning towards** (expressing oneself freely without reserve).
6. **Non-evaluativeness** (seeing the other’s point of view; affirming or confirming (even when in opposition to the other).

One-Minute Communication Exercise:

• What is your communication style in the classroom?

• What is your communication style when meeting with a student?

• Are these the same or different? If different why?

• Do you consider yourself to be Dialogic? If yes why/how? If no, why not?
Permissive Attention in Teaching:

• Making room for a personal connection with the student.

• Providing an atmosphere where distractions can disappear.

• Helping the student to be curious about what is troubling or challenging them.

“To doubt everything or to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both dispense with the necessity of reflection.” – Jules Henri Poincaré

Attributes of Critical Reflection:

• Critical Reflection helps to ground us emotionally.

• Critical reflection serves in creating an environment where each individual is respected, valued, and heard.

What Makes Reflection Critical?

• Reflection becomes critical through two distinctive purposes:

(1) Through understanding how considerations of power frame and distort our interactions with our students.

(2) By questioning assumptions and practices that may seem to make teaching easier but actually work against the long-term interests of the student.

Four Critically Reflective Lenses:

- **Autobiographies as Student and Teacher** – places us in the shoes of the ‘other’ -- we become more emotionally connected to our students. Personal self-reflection helps us to become aware of our assumptions and the instinctive reasoning that shapes our work.

- **Seeing through our Students’ Eyes** – viewing ourselves as our students helps us to become aware of the actions and assumptions that confirm or challenge existing power in the classroom/clinical setting and the meanings we intend to convey.

• **Drawing on our Colleagues’ Experiences** – engaging our colleagues in critical conversations can help us see aspects of our teaching style that are often hidden so we can re-think the way we currently perform in the classroom and clinical setting.

• **Seeking out Theoretical Literature** – helps us to better understand our experiences and to illuminate our processes as educators.

Two Minute Exercise: Reflecting on Humanism

- What does it mean to be humanistic?
- What does it mean to be humanistic in healthcare?
- Think back when you were with a student and you demonstrated humanism -- what was that experience like for you and for the student?
- Think back on a time when you were with a student and you were not as caring as you could have been – what was that experience and how did it impact the student and you?
“Attention on the object (focused) –makes its presence felt (the object of one’s attention).”

What is meant by “intentional looking”?

- Intentional looking is focused looking – to be fully present with a person, and to interact in such a way as to have a meaningful encounter.

- In healthcare, being present with a patient is the path to finding meaning and for making a correct diagnosis which leads to an informed judgment.

- In teaching, being present is the path to creating a recipracol learning environment with Socratic questioning a way to identify barriers and to facilitate corrective action in helping a student to find meaning which will lead to an informed judgment.

- All are contingent on nuance.
Why nuance?

• Because within nuance are the cues that lead to meaning.

How does one locate nuance?

• Through Presence – deep engagement with a person.
• Presence is silent -- It encourages forming a relationship and being open to interpretation -- Presence evokes a reciprocity of caring.
Putting it into Practice
Five-Minute Intentional Looking Exercise:

• Give your full attention to the image in the next slide.
• Mentally make a list of everything that you see.
• Do relationships exist among the various parts?
• Reflect on what you have observed/experienced – what could this image mean?
• Share your thoughts with the group – what did others discover?
Which do you subscribe?
• Socratic questioning could be defined as intentionally engaging in casual conversation.

• Socrates used questioning as a way to gain knowledge, believing that wrestling with the bigger ideas of life through conversation held more value than simply reading books.

• The Socratic method provides students with open-ended questions not answers; it requires students to elaborate on key concepts and helps students to re-examine their own beliefs while facilitating a fuller understanding of a subject.
• Socratic questioning is grounded in empathy – through empathy the teacher can come to understand problems and challenges that students may be experiencing in their learning.

• The Socratic method creates an open, safe, and intellectually challenging learning environment.

• The Socratic teacher guides students to think in a disciplined and intellectual manner – the focus is on critical thinking.

Some guideline for using Socratic questioning:

- **Monitor** – get the student to tell you what they already know and to teach you the problem/concept.

- **State back** – what you the teacher have heard the student say, including any confusion that was apparent in the explanation.

- **Verify** – acknowledge what has been mastered by the student thus far.

- **Apply knowledge** – apply what the student currently knows and how it pertains to similar situations to build confidence in the student.
• **Model incorrect answers** – allow the mentee to correct you, the mentor to confirm his/her knowledge about the issue, concern, problem.

• **Strengthen** – prompt the mentee to give specific examples in support of his/her statements/explanations.
Preparing for Socratic Questioning:

• Pre-thinking the lead question for your discussion with students is a good way to prepare for using Socratic questioning.

• **Example:** if the question you are asking is “what is multiculturalism?” then the prior question that you should be clear on is “what is culture?” and the question prior to that “what is the basis of culture?” or “what are the factors that determine an individual’s culture?”
Preparing a List of Question:

1. Start with the main or lead question on which your discussion will be focused.
2. List a question you would have to be able to answer in order to answer the lead question.
3. List a question you would have to be able to answer for the second question and so on.
4. Keep your focus on the lead question and your last.
5. This should result in a list that probes the logic of the first question.
There are 6 major categories of Socratic Questions:

1. **Probing questions** that require students to go beyond a first reply with subsequent questions based on the student’s response.

2. **Factual Questions** that require students to recall specific information previously learned (who, what, when, where, why, how).

3. **Divergent questions** that have no right or wrong answer but encourage exploration of possibilities (requires both concrete and abstract thinking).
(4) Higher Order questions that require students to work out answers rather than cite back a response.

(5) Affective questions which elicit attitudes, values, feelings.

(6) Structuring questions related to the teaching/learning experience – (do students have comments, questions, etc.).
Types of Socratic Questions:

- **Clarification Questions**: What do you mean by….? Can you explain further?

- **Questions about the Initial Question**: Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why is this question important?

- **Assumption Questions**: What do you assume? Why would someone make that assumption?

- **Reason and Evidence Questions**: How do you know that? What reasons can you give for saying that? What other information is needed?
• **Origin or Source Questions**: Where did your idea come from? What makes you think that? Was this your idea or someone else's?

• **Implication and Consequence Questions**: What are you implying? What effect would that have? What is an alternative solution?

• **Viewpoint Questions**: You seem to be approaching this issue from... why have you chosen that perspective? How might another individual respond? What would influence them?
Two-Minute Socratic Exercise:  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4N3NdMlWVc4

1. Listen to the music.

2. Focus on the Image.

3. Using Socratic questioning, ask each other questions about what this image might represent.

Example: What is this chair doing on the sidewalk?
Making Connections:

**Mindfulness**
Intentional presence which opens the door to curiosity

**Communication**
Communicating with another is essential to being human. Humanism in communication is dialogic – grounded in trust, spontaneity, sincerity, and empathy

**Critical Reflection**
Critical reflection grounds one emotionally and helps one to know self -- Critical reflection creates an environment of respect, value, and trust

**Intentional Looking**
To be fully present with a person and to interact in such a way as to have a meaningful encounter -- Presence evokes a reciprocity of caring
Summary:

- Our students’ behavior are a reflection of our own behavior in the classroom and clinical setting.
- Using mindfulness can help us to be more present, to view things more objectively, and to reflect on our own actions and the actions of our students.
- Socratic questioning as a teaching tool can assist students in re-examining their own beliefs and to grasp key concepts through critical thinking toward the discovery of ‘self’.
Questions?

The content for this presentation was based on the curriculum used during a project funded by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation, *Intentional Mentoring: Humanistic Engagement in Learning and Practice (HELP)* at the School of Nursing and Health Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.