

Lifelong Learning and the Library: a reflective essay

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I think having a community library in the place where you live is as basic to how we've decided to run this country as access to a good health service. Cradle to grave. A basic human right. Books might not seem as immediately essential to our quality of life to a good health service, but they are. Books are where the stories live. Books are where humanity stores its thinking. And once a child learns to read, books are where they might discover what they want to do and who they want to be. (Hughes, 2014)

From their childhood, the authors both remember fondly, rushing to their local libraries where the librarian was gatekeeper to a magical world of lions in wardrobes, giant peaches, sleuthing teens and big friendly giants. It provided a sanctuary from the outside world and a place of independence which planted the seeds for future ambitions.

It has been suggested that children's experiences of libraries can influence future interactions with these services (Snowball, 2008), but as

the authors progressed into their adolescence the sense of wonder and intrigue seemed to fall behind. The magical world transformed itself into an isolated place of dutiful study. As seen in Kuhlthau's writing (1993), during their adolescence students see libraries as a self-service facility without need for librarian assistance. Little did the authors realise however, that as they set out on their nursing careers, their footsteps would bring them back to the library doors time and time again. Lifelong learning is a term that is frequently called upon in nursing, and wider professional circles, but what does this represent? Within nursing there are many actors who play a role, clinical nurses, researchers, educators, managers, regulators and government; but the most important role is played by the patient (Richards and Borglin, 2018).

As nurses we work in an environment that is constantly evolving and reshaping to meet the demands of an ever-changing society. Within nursing, the commitment to life-long learning is committing to and understanding the responsibility in upskilling and developing to meet these demands. As both educators and post-graduate students, the authors have seen first-hand how a good library service is invaluable in supporting and guiding the nurse on the path of life-long learning. As educators, our library offers resources which bridge the gap between theory and practice in pre-registration nursing. The current pre-registration nursing curriculum is split equally between the academic setting and the practice setting (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2010). Often the clinical setting can be a chaotic and complex environment for learning. For this reason the availability of the library services as a haven away from this challenging environment offers our students an invaluable tool to augment their learning.

From day one, the library service and our local NHS Support Librarian are involved in our students' journey to becoming a registered nurse committed to lifelong learning. Our librarian welcomes every nursing student in the Trust at their induction, making clear the resources available to them and most importantly welcoming them into the community of the library. As students' progress on their journey; current, relevant and sage advice is readily available to them both formally and informally; including the use of twitter and social media in a professional capacity. The librarian takes an active approach in reviewing and determining different avenues of learning which enhance the student experience.

As anyone who works in education will know, finding teaching space is often akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Yet our library service offers the luxury of dedicated classrooms which we use for facilitation, debate, teaching and reflection to mention a few. A central part of being a nurse is developing self-insight and this involves taking time away from the clinical area and reflecting on our hopes and fears. The questions raised by Englemann (2014), 'what inspires others to do more, become more, think more and believe more?' are central to developing insight, reflective practice and leadership skills. In line with this, one of the sessions we facilitate on a weekly basis in the library is the student nurse forum; students are offered a safe space with peers from their branch of nursing and educators from the practice/academic setting. The space offered to us by the library allows these skills to take shape. The well-known saying "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn" often attributed to Benjamin Franklin; rings especially true to the authors who for the last year took on the role of student as well as educator. Within this new role we found ourselves

battling with the gripes our students often present to us; finding time to complete academic work, work-study-life balance, and the often overwhelming task of navigating databases to perform a credible literature search. These challenges led us back to the library door once again where we found more services and support than we were initially aware of. From group sessions on the understanding and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative research, to tailored sessions meeting individual users' specific needs. Our library community grew as we began to get to know the library team, staff and fellow learners, always ready to lend a hand and suggest a book.

Upon enrolment at the University on top of the back to school nerves, there was trepidation of new systems which had advanced since our last experience as a formal student. While we were told about these systems and how to use them, it was the time our local librarian afforded us and his active approach to our learning which put us on the right path.

Writing this piece has provided us with an opportunity to reflect on their journey so far; it has not been a straightforward journey, it has had many twists and turns along the road from enchanted child to educator, student and nurse. The library however has remained ever present and has once again found its status as a place of sanctuary from the outside world and where the seeds of our ambitions take root.

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