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Enhancing Critical Reflection of Students DuSHuS.nrod

The paucity of empirical studies assessing and measuring critical reflection makes it difficult to determine whether or not critical reflection can be taught. Studies investigating students' critical reflection as demonstrated in journal writings reveal mixed results. Findings by Bain et al. demonstrated that the primary indicators for the occurrence of critical reflection are the student's performance on his or her first journal entry and also the length of the entry.¹⁶ Bain et al. and Sobral speculate that the actual time spent on the task of critical reflection had the most influence on the students' performance.^{16,17} Williams et al. found no improvement of critical reflection scores as rated on a 5-point scale over an 8-week period.¹⁸ The authors partially attribute this lack of change to minimal or non-directive feedback and a short time frame.¹⁸ While valid and reliable methods of measuring the achievement and depth of critical reflection are currently being investigated, no comparisons between various methods to promote reflection have been investigated.^{3,5,6,16,18,19}

Journaling as a Method of Promoting Reflection

Regardless of the conflicting data concerning the ability to teach critical reflection, many authors espouse methods for encouraging and promoting reflection, with journaling being the foremost.^{7,9,10,16-23} Several limitations and perceived difficulties with journaling have been identified. Kerka provides an exceptional summary of the literary works to date on this topic.²³ Limitations of journaling include the students' loss of enthusiasm of the task over time, frustration and uncertainty regarding what to write, and the solitary nature of writing.^{16,23} In addition, students often simply document concrete observations of their experiences without any reflection.²³ Some strategies identified to encourage quality journal writing include providing guidelines regarding content and format, perhaps by suggesting a theme, giving a clear explanation of the purpose, and identifying how the journal will be used.^{20,22,23} In addition, instructors should provide the student with feedback and encouragement throughout the process to facilitate additional reflection.^{10,16,18, 21-23}

Physical therapist students are greatly challenged when they have to apply their academic knowledge in the clinical environment. Since journaling is the foremost method to promote reflection, (in)formation for the physical therapist student is a liability.

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