

Research matters: harvesting collective wisdom to find new ways of engaging in research.

Authors:

Ms. Jessica Biles, Master Hlth Sci (Ed), RN | Lecturer in Nursing, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health, Charles Sturt University, Albury Campus | jbiles@csu.edu.au

Ms. Sophia Dywili, RN, RN, Dip NEd, Dip OT; Dip Int Maternal Hlt, B Adult Ed, M ScNurs. | Lecturer in Nursing, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga Campus | sdywili@csu.edu.au

Professor Mary Fitzgerald, PhD, RN | Professor of Nursing, School of Nursing Midwifery and Indigenous Health, Charles Sturt University | Mafitzgerald@csu.edu.au

Ass Professor Margaret McLeod, PhD, RN, RM, MA (HSM), GradDip (MH), BA(SocWel), Cert (MidMan) | Associate Head/Associate Professor School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health, Charles Sturt University

Author Contact |

Jessica Biles | Email: jbiles@csu.edu.au

Postal Address | School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health, CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

World cafe has been used internationally as a means of harvesting the collective wisdom of people. The paper discusses how a School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous health used World Cafe as methodology across four regional campuses in New South Wales. The results were reported in three themes: Practical Application, Culture and Opportunities. A range of critical questions have been crafted from the findings to stimulate actions to enhance the research culture.

KEY WORDS: Nursing, research, Culture, World café

Introduction

The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health (SNMIH) in this study, is set in a vast expanse of rural Australia with four campuses set between one and a half hours and seven hours apart. Strategic plans for 2013 state that all academics in the School will engage in and promote research productivity. Set with this task, there was a feeling generally in the School of individuals being overwhelmed and unprepared which could well have resulted in inertia.

The aim of this study, was to harness the collective wisdom of the school members and generate innovative and imaginative ways of encouraging everyone to contribute to positive research outcomes.

The objectives of the study were to stimulate conversations across the campuses of the School, and collect and synthesise ideas that would be used to operationalize a concerted effort to improve research engagement by all academics of the school.

We claimed the research had the potential to benefit the School in two major ways; firstly through the process of the research, increase engagement across the campuses and the secondly as tangible outcomes that could be used to operationalize the strategic plan. Through the process of this study, academics had equal opportunities to be participants in a research study and contribute to School strategic planning, thereby, improving feelings of self-worth, teamwork and productivity regarding research. The outcomes are new ways of engaging in and increasing research productivity and a publication.

Literature Review

Global Perspectives

D'Auria (2000) attests to the importance of drawing a distinction between research and research capacity, with the former reflecting the production of research, and the latter the ability of individuals or groups to undertake research activities (Segrott, McIvor & Green, 2006, pp. 639 – 640). The literature suggests that there is a deficit in research capacity within nursing, with corresponding low levels of funding (Franck 2003; Rafferty, Traynor, Thompson, Illot & White 2003; Scott 2002 in Segrott et al 2006, p. 638). While many schools of nursing across the globe are striving to develop and identify research capacity to increase research outputs, there is still a need to focus on the advancement of high-quality research production (Mead & Moseley 2000; Wilson-Barnett 2001; Crookes & Bradshaw 2002; Franck 2003, in Segrott et al 2006, pp. 638 – 639).

The rationale for harnessing nursing research capacity is linked to two factors, the first the advancement of evidence-based practice to improve patient care and the second, the transfer of nursing education from hospital to university environments (Clare & Hawes 2001; Wilson-Barnett 2001 in Segrott et al 2006, p. 639). Stanley, Sitterding, Broome & McCaskey (2011) claim that the move to the university system '*... was crucial to develop additional knowledge and skills needed by nurses, to develop the science for nursing practice, and to position the profession and its leaders to join the leadership table in health systems ...*' (p. 480). These factors have resulted in nurses having increased responsibilities and the growing prominence of the areas they work in (e.g. primary care) demand that practice is effective and cost efficient (Rafferty et al., 2003; Thomas and While 2001, in Segrott et al 2006, p. 639). It would seem that the range of educational courses provided by universities at undergraduate and postgraduate levels shows a commitment to produce skilled and competent clinicians who have the capacity to think critically and produce scholarly work, designed to advance professional understanding.

Segrott et al (2006) claim the relatively recent shift of nurse education to the tertiary environment '*is a key driver for the development of research capacity within the discipline*' (p. 639). While a number of other professional groups have a long and distinguished history of university education, nursing is still adjusting to the change, despite the passage of some decades. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties of adaptation, '*University nursing departments and academics are now expected to undertake research as an integral part of their roles, whilst still maintaining existing clinical and teaching commitments* (Cooke & Green 2000; Gething & Leelarthaepin 2000; Newell 2002, in Segrott et al 2006, p. 639). Further, in the academic world nurses find that promotions and career development are linked to research productivity. This is the new reality for nurse educators and it must be embraced and celebrated if we are to be valued in the university sector.

Stanley et al (2011) maintain that '*... in many ways, creating a culture of inquiry at foundational level is similar to any new practice initiative ...*' (p. 487). Still, academic staff in many Schools of Nursing across the world have found it difficult to make this connection. Lewis and Simmons (2010) contend that the creation and consolidation of a university research culture '*must be addressed not just within their walls, but outside the wider society*' (p.342). *It is dependent on a stable political climate, democratic tradition and high tolerance of free speech* (Lewis & Simmons 2010, p. 342). It could be argued that Australia has all these features, but universities across the country continue to face the parallel challenges of establishing and supporting robust research cultures, designed to produce quality research outputs.

University culture and research

In the Australian context, Hemmings, Smith and Rushbrook (2004), identified three main influences on research publication namely; individual attributes, attitudes and work circumstances. Related to these factors are issues such as academic experience and writing skill and confidence, lack of motivation and work circumstances e.g. academic leadership, workloads and research culture. Other barriers and challenges that have contributed to a decline in research outputs in universities include lack of research skills, lack of funding, lack of mentoring, weak societal demands for research knowledge (Lewis & Simmons 2010; Lodhi 2012). Many academics, whether rationally or irrationally claim that high teaching loads prevent them from publishing. Some universities have tried to manage this tension by introducing a '*differentiated staffing approach, with some faculty assuming an essentially clinical posture, while other assume an essentially research posture*' (p. 342). However, the benefits of such a split should be closely scrutinised, for this approach has the potential to create a class differential within academia, with clinicians relegated to lower class status, despite their expert knowledge of research, theory and clinical practice relationships. Avins and Golberg (2007) assert that there is '*a clear value of honest inquiry in the form of clinical research*', with the potential to align and

reward all segments in society (p. 561). Nurse researchers are well placed to be leaders in this respect, if they have the opportunity to develop and grow their research capacity.

Creating a research culture

Hannis (2011) ascribes to a university research culture whereby academics undertake and present world class academic papers at local and international conferences, leading to publication in peer-reviewed academic journals. Universities cultivate research values and beliefs, evidenced by academics mentoring inexperienced researchers, supervising postgraduate research students and conducting research (Hannis, 2011; Segrott et al, 2006; Lodhi, 2012). Lodhi (2012) adds an important component in the development of this culture, suggesting that it is an activity that is driven by internal motivation; because it is the individuals themselves who initiate and conduct research. Mentorship by these motivated and well known academics and their interaction with colleagues may create research interest among mentees and result in a sustained research culture in a university (Lodhi, 2012).

Research Design

Methodology

The World Café, as a democratic process was developed by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in the early 1990s (Aldred 2011; Jorgenson and Steier 2013; Farr 2013). The World Café was conceptualised as '*... an intentional way to create a living network of conversation around questions that matter ...*' (Brown 2002, p. 2). Further, '*... as the conversations connect together, collective knowledge grows and evolves [and] the wisdom of the group becomes more visible.*' (Brown 2002, p. 3). Farr (2013) claims that the World Café methods are '*... deemed a fairly rigid process by some ...*' (p. 1). However, conversations are designed to be extremely flexible, even when guided by the six overarching principles outlined by Brown (2002) and Brown and Isaacs (2005). These include, creating a hospitable space; exploring questions that matter; encouraging everyone's contribution; connecting diverse people and ideas; listening together for insights, patterns and deeper questions; and making collective knowledge visible (Brown 2002, p. 4). One of the key factors in the utilisation of World Café methods, is the creation of a 'safe' conversation space, where participants in the discussion have equal status, and '*... authority structures are temporarily suspended*' (Jorgenson & Steier 2013, p. 393). This can be empowering for participants, who are actively encouraged to express their views in an egalitarian environment.

Methods

Participants – all full, or part time, members of the academic staff. Information about the study was kept on the School's common drive in the form of a plain language statement, information was

presented at the School Meeting, written up in the School newsletter and the subject of emails to all eligible staff.

Data collection – Each participant undertook one to two, thirty-minute telephone or face to face conversations in the world café style. In each conversation they took either the role of host (made the invitation, hosted the session, engaged in focused conversation, acted as scribe and submitted data) or they were the invited guest (accepted an invitation, engaged in focused conversation and helped the host scribe).

The questions that the hosts were asked to pose for conversation were:

- What do you think our key stakeholders (under/post graduates, clinicians, service managers and other disciplines in the university) appreciate about research in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health (SNMIH)?
- How can we all make a positive contribution to the Research culture of the School?

The participants (host and guest) were asked to have a conversation around these questions for twenty minutes. The host was then asked during the last five minutes to make at least three (more were welcome) points in writing that encapsulated the answers to the questions. The data was submitted in a word document, without names, to a third party for compilation.

Analysis – The investigators were sent the unidentifiable data on word files that were stored and password protected. Twice each member of the team read the data before theming took place during a research team day-long meeting. After the themes were set the data was re-read and data formally coded to themes and subthemes.

Findings – were reported under three themes and *sub-themes using quotations from the data. A discussion of the findings included reference to important literature.

Ethics

The submitted data had no identifying marks on it. Participants were free to take their ideas further and they were welcome to identify themselves at any stage of the project. Either the sending or accepting of an invitation was taken as consent to participate. An application was made to the Minimal Risk Human Research Ethics Committee of the School and given approval on 15 May 2013 (no. 409/2013/03). Information about the study was given at a School meeting. An information sheet was prepared and any of the Chief Investigators were available to answer further questions.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify, through the collection and synthesis of ideas, strategies that could be used to operationalize a concerted effort to encourage research engagement by all academics of the school. Thematic analysis of the data derived from the World Café exercise generated

three key themes which have been identified as Practical Application, Culture and Opportunities. These three themes encapsulate the core contributions and concerns of the participants.

Practical Application

This theme of Practical Application refers to the utility of the research. Participants suggest that '*... a research reputation enhances the School's standing with its stakeholders and wider community*' (10). It was considered that celebrating the School's research successes with its communities '*...would ensure it is viewed by the public...*' and this would assist the development of individual's research profiles (11). Two sub-themes emerged within this notion of Practical Application, these being Personal Utility and Professional Practice. There was a recurrent view that the perception of practical application is mediated by the level at which an individual is operating or practising; e.g. an undergraduate student would have a different understanding of the value of research to that of a post-graduate student who holds a senior professional appointment.

Professional Practice

Professional Practice refers to the application of research evidence to the practice of the discipline (i.e. Nursing, Midwifery, Pharmacy). There is a sense in the data that research is not considered important by students or clinicians. It was suggested that we need to articulate what we consider constitutes research to provide guidance to '*... students, teachers, academics and clinicians ...*'. There is also a perception that research means different things to different people. Undergraduate students, for example, were thought to be 'afraid of' and 'freaked out' by research. Thus, they may not realise how important it is '*...for those who facilitate knowledge assimilation to contribute to and critique the existing body of knowledge*'. If clinicians have not developed this understanding during their education, '*...they might not see the need or benefits of developing research skills ... unless this relates directly to their job description ...*' This it seems, is aggravated by an '*...emphasis on models, design and methodology, rather than findings, outcomes, impacts of research*' .

Key stakeholders are looking for relevance to practice so '*... closer links with industry will improve research collaboration and practice*'. One suggestion is the need to maintain an up-to-date webpage with current publications and research because both students and researchers access these. The multi-campus nature of the university makes meeting with colleagues more difficult. There is a perceived need for more face-to-face contact for staff to facilitate contact with more experienced researchers in the school such as its professoriate.

Personal Utility

This refers to the beneficial use of research for the particular individual. For instance, one participant noted that ‘...stakeholders do not really seem to think about research unless it is a means to an end’.

It also seems that different stakeholders would want different things from research ‘...e.g. undergrad/postgrad/clinicians would appreciate research contributing to a best practice framework, while service managers and other disciplines in the university would appreciate the ongoing professionalism and development that research offers’. Pursuing this subtheme of personal utility, a view was expressed that ‘typically students are only interested in research papers which inform their current assessment tasks’.

This notion of personal benefit extends to the prospective researchers too, as evidenced by the following comment in relation to academics:

‘If the School and other discipline groups perceive there will be benefits...of involvement in multidisciplinary projects, this could increase the likelihood of research engagement’.

Moreover, other disciplines value the access staff of the School offer to the world of nursing practice – which means they are a conduit to a rich source of data for research.

Culture

Participants in the World Café exercise were asked to consider how they could contribute positively to the research culture in the School. The responses revealed relevant values held by the participants. For example, there was an expressed desire ‘...to generate the joy of enquiry throughout the school...’ and ‘...develop a culture where discovery through research is desired rather than forced on staff...’. More concrete or practical responses placed more emphasis on the ways in which external stakeholders could assist the research culture. For instance, it was suggested that where an undergraduate student encounters a paper or text book authored by a staff member, ‘... this may lead to acknowledgement and appreciation of the research expertise within the School’. Also, ‘... staff sharing research in research subjects would establish rapport...’. Even this potential benefit was offset, though, by an expressed view that students may develop a negative view of research because of the research/teaching tension and a perception that academics favour research over teaching. This sub-theme continues with comments identifying a perceived ‘...big disconnect with research and stakeholders...’, a need for the School ‘...to engage more with our stakeholders...’ and suggestions for a forum where this could be achieved.

Dialogue with key stakeholders about the research being conducted in the School is perceived to be a mechanism for raising their awareness of that research. One explanation for the perceived divide relates to a perception of researching “on” rather than “with” which ‘...conflicts with industry world

view'. Celebrating research contributions with the community was one mechanism put forward for strengthening ties whilst raising research profiles of individuals and teams. This could be done through a monthly lunch and/or an annual research day. The establishment of links with clinicians is also considered important. It was suggested that 'humanistic' as well as academic qualifications for researchers should be taken into account.

Looking more inwardly, participants perceived a need for a culture of research trust and collaboration, e.g. '...share research ideas, share research skills and joint data and collaborate [with] joint publications'. There was a sense that such a '...culture could be promoted in the school by better understanding the interests of staff so as to choose who could be involved in projects...' and making research a part of the work schedule. Allied with this is a perceived need to create more publishing opportunities. Some considered that '...there is great research going on but it is not esteemed or valued by the department...' and others perceived a need for researchers to share their research more amongst colleagues and to '... align with others, especially larger projects at other campuses'.

Consistent with this perspective of sharing was a suggestion that experienced researchers could invite '...new academics and novice researchers to participate in their research teams', and increase teamwork and mentoring. There was a cautionary recommendation that the School '... should have a more focused process for recognising potential and grooming it towards achieving a more productive research culture...'. The School needs to be strategic in its approach to research and in addition, it needs to ensure that the '... strategies are well publicised/advertised to our stakeholders'. It needs to develop its '...own narrative...' about how its research contributes to the social good of communities (9).

Limited time is generally regarded by participants as a barrier to research, with teaching perceived to take precedence over research: '*...the urgent teaching requirements suffocates academic research endeavours*'. Workloads were considered to be 'high' to 'very high' by some participants. Others pointed to the need for the 30% research allocation to be quantified in terms of hours. Strategies suggested for overcoming the constraints of time included the encouragement of staff to nominate a 'research day' for research activity not limited to Higher Degree Researchers (HDRs) and the appointment of a research assistant or Fellow as a resource to service the research needs of all School staff. However, some considered that '*...higher degree research comes with a Uni job...*' and those aspiring to research '*...have to take advantage of opportunities*'. Staff need to exercise '*...self discipline to use research time for research and not for teaching activities...*' (13). They need to treat research as a hobby.

Opportunities

Participants were generally keen to increase the potential opportunities for participation in research in the School. The suggestions for increasing opportunities for participation in research predictably

span a wide variety of strategies that reflect to some extent the differing levels of research expertise of the participants and the dual need for capacity building and research outputs identified in the literature.

Table 1: Summarises suggestions and categorises them into capacity building and research outputs.

Capacity Building	
Research Training	Writing workshops for staff
	Publications that include novice publishers
	Better use of training opportunities offered through the research office.
	Critical thinking to be linked with research and to be included in assignments.
Research Administration	Academics included in more experienced teams and funding opportunities explored.
	Dedicated research time
	Pool of researchers to be increased by acknowledging other qualifications/experience besides traditional research training degrees
	Grooming high achieving undergraduate and postgraduate students for research.
Research Outputs	
Stakeholder Engagement	Strengthen the links with research in the undergraduate and post-graduate programs. Increase number of joint academic student publications
	Develop innovative presentations that suit different audiences.
	Invite stakeholders to presentations.
Research Practice	Research teams to include people needing research skills development
	Teams of researchers to rotate first authors on publications.
	Increase number of publications from HDR candidates.

More radical ideas are the acceptance of qualifications other than research training degrees. Typically the number of staff undertaking PhD adversely affects the research productivity of the School – without undermining the HDR trajectory it may be worth discussing equivalence. Innovative presentations is another radical idea – it could be argued that health service professionals are performers and alternatives to the traditional scientific paper may have a stronger message for stakeholders and increase uptake.

Most of the opportunities already exist and the next challenge is to ensure that the staff in the School feel motivated and empowered to make the most of the opportunities.

Discussion

Conversation summaries were varied and far ranging. The overall tone of the text was enthusiastic and positive. We looked for innovative and imaginative ideas for academics to employ in order to optimise the research activity and outcomes in the School. There is a sound practical view that the research needs to be useful – to researchers and stakeholders alike. As impact is a criterion of concern in university research assessment exercises this bodes well for nursing. In addition the honest assessment that other disciplines are keen to research with us because we provide an entry to the field is astute and worth pursuing in more collaborative research studies. More information about the

current collaborative endeavours should be disseminated and our attendance at cross university functions increase.

The data revealed a plethora of good ideas, some of which have already been tried in the School with varying degrees of success. Of particular note there were ideas that have been talked about before but not actioned or actioned but not generally known about. As a consequence they are not ingrained in the culture of the School. Generally people talked of planning but not of a concerted plan where contributions at all levels are not only expected but facilitated and acknowledged generally. This type of concerted planning is either taken for granted or considered to be the responsibility of someone else.

Using the work of D'Auria (2000) ideas from the conversations roughly divide into the realms of research capacity building (training and administration) and research outputs (stakeholder engagement and research). In order to evaluate the success of any of the ideas they first need to become a part of the everyday work of the School. Structures and processes need to be organised that facilitate optimum involvement by all academics in the School. Apart from a few comments about owning responsibility for research success there is a dominant view that academics expect support and guidance from 'management' in terms of opportunities and time for research. The latter being seen as the biggest barrier to research endeavours.

As this was the first time that the School has used 'world café' it is understandable that the participant rate was lower than optimal. Feedback from participants will be sought and improvements will be made in another round of conversations to minimise participant difficulties. However the ideas generated were excellent and there will be more opportunities to engage and influence the implementation of change. In the next round it is likely that the questions, while remaining positive, may be more challenging. The team considered the responses and decided to recommend a School discussion of the findings and the establishment of a leader board to work through all the ideas and decide which to prioritise.

Conclusion

The next stage is to pose the following questions to the School with regard to the ideas generated in the conversations:

- Which of these ideas are already working? How might successful implementations be improved? What can we learn from these successful implementations?
- Which ideas not in process should be adopted? Can these be prioritised?
- How do we help each other to engage in these research activities?

This stage will provide an opportunity for academics who did not join the conversations in the 'world café' to engage with the project. True to the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry the questions concentrate on the strengths of the School rather than problems.

Funding:

A grant of \$500 was received by the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health, Charles Sturt University to assist in completing this research project.

References

- Aldred, R. (2011). From community participation to organization therapy? World Café and Appreciative Inquiry as research methods. *Community Development Journal*. Vol 46, No 1, January 2011 pp. 57 – 71.
- Avins, A. & Goldberg. H. (2007). Creating a culture of research. *Contemporary Clinical Trials*. 28 (2007) 557 – 562.
- Brown, J. (2002). *A Resource Guide for Hosting Conversations That Matter at the World Café (v1.0)*; Whole Systems Associates. Prepublication version posted for reader's feedback.
- Brown, J. & Issacs D (2005), *The World Café: Shaping our Future Through Conversations that Matter*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. San Francisco.
- Cook, A. & Green, B. (2000). Developing the research capacity of departments of nursing and midwifery based in higher education: a review of literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 32(1) p. 57-65
- D'Auria, D. (2000). Building a research capacity for occupational medicine. *Occupational Medicine* 50 (2), 79.
- Farr, J. (2013). 'Shared listening': using the World Café approach as a revision tool in a final year undergraduate program. *Compass: The Journal of Learning and Teaching of Greenwich*, Issue 8, 2013.
- Gething, L. & Leelarthaepin B. (2000). Strategies for promoting research participation among nurses employed as academics. *Nurse Educ Today* 20: 147–54
- Hannis, A. (2011). Creating a research culture at New Zealand university-based journalism programs. *Australian Journalism Review*.
- Hannis, G. (2011). Creating a Research Culture at New Zealand University-based Journalism Programs. *Australian Journalism Review*, 33(1), pp. 49-52
- Hemmings, B., Smith, E. & Rushbrook, P. (2004). Factors differentiating between those academics who do and who do not publish refereed works. *Issues in Educational Research*. 14 (2004) 2, 156 – 166.
- Jorgenson, J. & Steier, F. (2013). Frames, Framin, and Designed Conversational Processes: Lessons From the World Café, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. 49: 388 originally published online 10 April 2013.
- Lewis, T. & Simmons, L. (2010). Creating research culture in Caribbean universities. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30 (2010) 337 – 344.
- Lodhi, A.S. (2012). A pilot study of researching the research culture in Pakistani public universities: the academics' perspective. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 31 (2012) 473 – 479.
- Newell, R. (2002). Research and its relationship to nurse education: focus and capacity. *Nurse Education Today* 22(4) p 278-284
- Segrott, J., McIvor, M. & Green, B. (2006). Challenges and strategies in developing nursing research capacity: A review of the Literature. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 43 (2006) 637 – 651.
- Stanley, T., Sitterding, M., Broome, M.E. & McCaskey, M. (2011). Engaging and Developing Research Leaders in Practice: Creating a Foundation for a Culture of Clinical Inquiry. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*. 26 (2011) 480 – 488.
- Rafferty, A., Traynor, M., Thompson, D., Illot, I & White, E. (2003). Research in nursing, midwifery, and the allied health professions: Quantum leap required for quality research. *BMJ* 326: 833-4

Bibliography

- Cassidy, A. & Fox, J. (2013). Modified World Café Discussion Model for Conference and Course Settings. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*. Vol VI.
- Mann, K., Moyle, K., Reupert, A., Wilkinson, J., & Woolley, G. (2007). When two universities meet: Fostering research capacity among Early Career Researchers.
- Salazar-Clemeña, R., & Almonte-Acosta, S. (2007). Developing Research Culture in Philippine Higher Education Institutions: Perspectives of University Faculty. Paper presented at the *Competition, Cooperation and Change in the Academic Profession: Shaping Higher Education's Contribution to Knowledge and Research*.