A CASE STUDY-DEVELOPED Theory ABOUT THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN LEARNING THEORIES AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE PHARMD PROGRAMME AT QATAR UNIVERSITY

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Background

The Qatari Government established a College of Pharmacy in Qatar University (QU) in 2006 to comply with the Qatar National Vision 2030. A five year BSc and one year Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) were established. The PharmD is a one-year post BSc degree that qualifies graduates to practice advanced clinical pharmacy.

In curriculum planning, it is essential to consider the epistemology, theoretical nature, norms, beliefs and scope of the pharmacy profession in order to prepare pharmacy graduates to fulfill this scope. Also, it is important to explicitly recognise the professional identity of the pharmacist, because all of these factors affect pharmacists’ roles and the relationship between pharmacy schools and practice (Waterfield, 2011). Unfortunately, in pharmacy education, there is only a limited amount of literature that focuses on the scope of the pharmacy profession and the ideology of curriculum. This has led to that learning theories not being fully implemented in core educational practices, such as: curriculum design, teaching strategies and assessment, which has resulted in a disconnect between theory, practice and research (Waterfield, 2011). The adoption of Communities of Pharmacy (CoP) theory (Wenger, 1998) in pharmacy education, including PharmD programmes, is beneficial for all stakeholders involved in the education process, including: students, academic faculty members and professional practitioners, which ultimately improves the students’ learning experience (Burton, Boschmans, and Hoelson, 2013; Noble et al., 2011). Furthermore, adopting CoP theory has a fundamental role in knowledge transfer, research productivity, and integration between theory and practice and between research and practice (Waterfield, 2011).

Aim

To explore the nature of the disconnect between learning theories and educational practices in a specific case: the use of CoP theory in the QU PharmD programme.

Method

A novel CoP learning theory-informed framework (Figure 1) was developed through an extensive review of the literature. The framework was used as an analytical tool to pedagogically analyse the evidence of CoP theory in the QU PharmD programme. A case study approach (Yin 2014) based on 3 focus groups; 5 interviews with key stakeholders and key document review was completed, utilising thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to analyse key findings.

Results

After analysing the data and findings, it is possible to theorise about the nature of the disconnect between the learning theories and educational practices, and to discern the different ‘levels’ of the disconnect. Four levels of disconnect are proposed, as illustrated in Figure 2. Within each level there is a range of sub levels, demonstrating a continuum between each of the disconnect levels, such that distinct categorisation of levels is not absolute. The findings of this research suggest that some practices emerging from particular learning theories are implemented by default, without recognition of their relationship to a particular learning theory or a specific educational approach and without the intentional application of the theory. This suggests that the disconnect is at the ‘implicit disconnect’ level, meaning that some elements of the CoP framework were implicitly evident. This implicit disconnect contributes to the challenges found in the programme.

Conclusions

The case study-developed theory described here emphasises that the design and delivery of educational programmes should be based on the comprehensive and explicit implementation of an appropriate learning theory, which is potentially the CoP learning theory in PharmD programmes. This theory calls for better integration of academic, practice, accreditation, and governmental sector efforts in professional healthcare educational reform initiatives, to achieve the optimal connection between learning theories and educational practices in professional healthcare programmes, particularly PharmD programmes.

References


