

Creating Community in the Classroom

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Summary

Senior nursing students in a Baccalaureate of Science Nursing program (BSN) participated in a classroom activity in which they were asked to create a collage to illustrate key concepts related to effective community health nursing. A description of this innovative community health nursing teaching strategy is supported with theoretical foundations for the promotion of the art of nursing in the education of undergraduate nursing students. The details of the activity design and instructions are described. Student responses to the activity demonstrated this activity increased their understanding and awareness of major concepts essential to the practice of community/public health nursing. Additionally the students described important personal awareness about specific community health nursing assessments and interventions which will increase their contribution in a variety of nursing settings. This awareness can uniquely contribute to effective community health nursing.

Broadly speaking, community is a collection of people who share some important feature that binds them together. Communities may be described as geographic, solution oriented or common interest communities (1). Within the classroom, each group of nursing students forms a community that shares common interests of learning, experiencing the role of the professional nurse, and accomplishing goals. It is the responsibility of teachers to develop creative teaching techniques in nursing to facilitate attainment of these common interests. By incorporating the use of teaching/learning strategies into the classroom that creatively involve the student, application of important concepts can be enhanced and reinforced (2,3) and move nurses away from rule-driven behavior toward practice founded upon the lived moment and the use of alternative care modalities (3).

A Community/Public Health Nursing instructor in a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at a Midwest University created an innovative teaching/learning activity to involve the students as they applied important community/public health concepts in the classroom. This activity used student created collages followed by a reflective thinking activity to demonstrate the concepts and definitions of community and community/public health nursing in a senior level nursing class. Theoretical support for this artistic activity and the

implementation of this teaching/learning method are presented here.

Knowing in nursing

Nursing has long been described as an art and a science and is understood and expressed through patterns of knowing (4). The four fundamental patterns of knowing in the discipline of nursing include empirical, ethical, personal and aesthetic knowing (5). Empirical knowing traditionally has been related to the science of nursing in BSN education. Ethical, personal and aesthetic knowing is related to the art of nursing (4). Orem (6) described the art of nursing as “expressed by the individual nurse through her creativity and style in designing and providing nursing that is effective and satisfying”. The effective nurse works to create an authentic personal relationship with the client and to do this must incorporate self understanding into nursing practice (5).

Conventional methods of education may not be able to support the depth necessary to develop the patterns of knowing that are integral to the art of nursing. The use of aesthetics in education provides a vehicle for fostering creative self-awareness in nursing students at all levels (2). Art can inspire nursing students to cultivate the sensitivity that is vital to the growth of ethical, personal and aesthetic knowing. These activities can help students connect

their interpretations and visual dialogues of art with ideas about good nursing care, and positively effect their own professional motivation (7). A classroom exercise in experiential learning has the potential to increase personal and aesthetic knowing, self understanding, and creative thinking which in turn increases reflective and critical thinking in nursing. Exercises in the classroom designed to reduce the "strain and stress of the instrumental world...make it more likely that the world of relation will open up" (8).

Aesthetics and Education

While literature regarding the mechanism for engaging nursing education with aesthetic arts is limited, art provides teachers alternate methods to enhance learning, reinforce concepts in academic areas (3) and develop personal and aesthetic knowing (9). For example, incorporating strategies for creating an appreciation for aesthetic knowing eliminates the mismatch in method and desired outcomes when nursing education is focused primarily on technology and procedures while maintaining that nursing is an art.

The use of art in nursing education has been successful in a variety of venues. Learning is enhanced by both using art to elicit observations as well as by encouraging students to participate in the creation of aesthetic pieces. Creative arts interventions have also been used to lower stress and increase positive emotions during an undergraduate nursing research class (10). Carr (4) described an undergraduate nursing course that allowed students to explore aesthetic patterns of knowing by participating in aesthetic presentations. *Anthony (22) encouraged nursing educators to employ innovative learning techniques that connect art with active learning. An example he shared is a teaching method in which the instructor used television drama to foster active classroom discussion and thus knowledge retention.* Maag and Fonteyn (12) created an active learning process in which students made their own illustrations of cardiac anatomy and function. These activities also promoted student artistic expression and aesthetic learning.

Why does art make a difference and why should nursing education continue to explore its worth? Herman Hesse, a German poet from the 1900's once said, "I have known it for a long time, but I have only just experienced it. Now I know it not only with my intellect, but with my eyes, with my heart, with my stomach" (13). Johnson (14) identified a concept she called transformative moves which described presence with another - even

symbolically as in a work of art - as a mechanism or connection for grasping meaning in a situation. Chinn and Kramer (15) stated "art is present in all human activity that involves forming elements into a whole". By using works of art as representations of what is known, these representations provide the benefit of "knowing" in a broader sense to enrich and educate students the discipline of nursing. Smith et al. (16) used participatory research to link the humanities to teaching and learning at the graduate level of nursing education. The authors stated, "through images, symbols, and sounds, nursing students give voice to their appreciation for universal truths and the uniqueness of the individual experience". They further reinforced that learning cannot occur in a vacuum; it requires linking, connecting, and patterning with an emphasis on broad strategies to create global understanding of human experiences. In summary, the use of art can enhance nursing students' knowing through aesthetic experiences and thus create a global understanding of human experiences (17).

Collage as art

A collage is created by the addition or subtraction of an unlimited variety of already finished materials such as pictures, newsprint, objects, wallpaper, decorative/colored paper, cloth and organic substances. Creation of a meaningful assemblage is the goal, where the creator uses materials judiciously to depict understanding and expression of a concept, experience or feeling (18). Examination of materials used in collages can promote student self awareness (9) and create description of a person's world (2) thus evoking understanding of diversity among people and communities. The use of collage in this teaching/learning activity was used to depict concepts of community and expand students' awareness of their own preconceived notions of community and community/public health nursing.

Description of the collage activity and results

Personal and aesthetic knowing, as described by Carper (5), were foundational to using collage as a teaching method. This method moved the instructor from the role of information giver to that of participant in the process of discovery. The use of collage in the classroom allowed the instructor to ask questions, stimulate self-discovery, nurture the creative learning process and guide the class through discovery (2). A six step method for incorporating art into the classroom as described by Powell and Higson (19) was integrated into this assignment.

The steps included: having a clear educational aim, selecting the best resource or method, designing an exercise using the resource, creating the learning environment to encourage engagement, facilitating responses, and discussing and applying understanding to professional and personal development.

Four objectives guided the collage assignment. At the completion of the activity, students would be able to: identify their preconceived ideas about community and community/public health nursing; gain a broader understanding of the subsystems of communities and how these subsystems intersect; identify roles of community/public health nurses; and apply community assessment skills to their collage “community”.

Students were instructed to bring scissors and glue and a diverse selection of magazines to share with peers, to the first day of class. At the beginning of the first class period, they were given directions to cut or tear out pictures or words from magazines that best depicted the concepts of community and community/public health nursing and do so without communicating with each other. After twenty minutes, students were then assigned by faculty to a group of 5-7 students for a total of eight groups. This was done for several reasons: to minimize interactions of previously established peer groups, decrease the sense of familiarity with peers, heighten awareness of others, and create new communities. Students were then told to glue the items they selected from magazines to a piece of poster paper provided by the instructor, again without talking to each other. Twenty minutes later, students displayed their work in front of the class, were encouraged to view all collages and informally share their ideas.

Faculty then led discussion and asked each group to consider two lines of questions. First were questions about the collage and included: What was evident in the collage? What was missing in the collage?, What were the boundaries of the created collage “community”?, and What community subsystems could be identified in the collage?. Peers were then invited to offer their observations. The second line of questions focused on group process and dynamics and addressed how decisions were made in the group without using verbal communication, what was the process like, who were the leaders, who felt left out or on the fringe and who was center stage.

Discussion was concluded with conversation about how the activity demonstrated the parts, functions and processes of a community. Examining the pictures included in the collages allowed for discussion on the subsystems of their communi-

ties, as described by Anderson and McFarlane (20). Geographic boundaries were depicted by use of white space and how some pictures extended beyond the boundaries of the poster paper. This discussion expanded into the roles of government and zoning. Rural versus urban communities were discussed through examination of how pictures and words were closely spaced and grouped together. This was also depicted by where students hung the group collages within the classroom. Discussion on the processes of the activity demonstrated the challenges that many community members may have in communicating with each other to complete a common goal. Language barriers were also discussed and were demonstrated through the use of non-verbal communication during the group process. Lastly, leadership in communities was discussed and was depicted by the way decisions were made in individual student groups.

The final piece of the activity was an anonymous reflective writing. When discussion was complete, students were asked to reflect on the following questions: What is your overall impression of the collage activity? What was the most difficult part of the collage experience?, and How did the collage experience help you understand concepts of community? Students were then given the opportunity to verbally share their responses to the reflective writing activity. Students most commonly believed that the activity itself was an enjoyable way to learn about community concepts. Several students commented on how it helped them to reconnect with each other at the beginning of a new semester. Others found the lack of verbal communication challenging yet fun at the same time. One student shared that using other means of communication was definitely a learning experience and gave her an appreciation for language barriers within communities. Those students who verbally expressed their views unanimously agreed that this method of learning was helpful in that it assisted them in appreciating diversity within a community and thinking outside the box. They described the ability to see a bigger picture when conducting a community assessment and had developed an understanding of community that had not been considered before. Several students stated that they now had a better understanding of the professional roles of community public health nurses.

Conclusion

“Education is for the future; yesterday’s methods will not suffice for tomorrow’s needs” (21).

Innovative approaches to teaching and learning can increase aesthetic knowing among nursing students and in turn potentially increasing awareness of the complex and diverse nature of human experience and nursing knowledge. Such approaches may also “encourage students to explore intuitive meanings and to develop understanding about the relationships between abstract concepts and their own personal lives” (2). Using the innovate approach of

collage creation, senior nursing students broadened their perspectives of community and their future roles as community/public health nurses. The creativity and expression supported by this method helped students develop a holistic understanding of the diverse nature of health and illness at the level of the community. Such understanding can contribute uniquely to the future health and wellness of communities.

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Közösség kialakítása az osztályteremben

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Kulcsszavak: kreatív tanítási módszerek, közösségi egészségügy, művészet az ápolásban

Összefoglalás:

Végzős BSc. ápoló hallgatók egy olyan tantermi tevékenységben vettek részt, mely során arra kérték őket, hogy egy olyan kollázst alkossanak, mellyel a hatásos közösségi ápoláshoz kötődő fő fogalmak illusztrálhatóak. Ennek az innovatív közösségi ápoló oktatási stratégiának az alkalmazását az ápoló hallgatók képzésének elméleti alapú megújítása igazolja. A tevékenységek felépítése és az utasítások részletes leírásra kerültek. A hallgatói reakciók bizonyítják, hogy ez a tevékenység fejlesztette a hallgatók körében a közösségi ápolási gyakorlat fő fogalmainak megértését és tudatosítását. Ezen kívül a hallgatók beszámoltak az egyes közösségi ápolási felmérésekkel és beavatkozásokkal kapcsolatos fontos személyes felismeréseikről, melyek különböző ápolói feladatok megoldásánál fogják segíteni a munkájukat. Ezek a felismerések egyedülállóan hozzá fognak járulni a hatásos közösségi ápoláshoz.
