Learning Nursing Concepts Through Television Programs

Engaging students while developing an understanding of nursing concepts is a challenge to nurse educators. In nursing education, one of the primary pedagogical goals is to ensure students develop a set of analytical and critical thinking skills to be safe and efficient nurses in the practice setting. The theories and concepts learned in a nursing course are not something just to be memorized for a test and then forgotten, but are practical, dynamic, and applicable in real-world health care environments.

Instructors and textbooks try to structure case studies for teaching, but these activities can be sterile and lack the richness and the uniqueness of getting to know others in a nursing situation. Audiovisual images, such as television programs, compress complex stories into rich, visually intense images and bring situations to life in a more powerful way than the traditional lecture approach does. Television programs can provide the basis for creating experiential exercises and interactive activities that offer unlimited possibilities in the classroom. Television is a permanent fixture in American culture, and most students have grown up watching television and are familiar with the characters and situations encountered in many shows. As a result, popular television shows are a potential gold mine of fun and meaningful examples to demonstrate a variety of nursing concepts.

Activity Description

These activities are designed to engage students and to facilitate their developing understanding of nursing concepts and behaviors. The following are just a few examples of how television programs can be used to teach nursing concepts and behavior in an Introduction to Nursing course early in the curriculum.

Students are asked to find clips of the four main characters from Seinfeld (Seinfeld, Mehlmanard, Gross, & Greenburg, 1989) to demonstrate the principles of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Students assess and analyze each character’s behavior in relationship to Maslow’s levels. For example, Kramer’s focus is on physiological needs—food, sexual pleasure, and having a place to live—whereas George’s quest is for a job and a sense of safety and security separate from his parents. On the other hand, Elaine’s need is to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation through meaningful friendships and sexual intimacy, demonstrating the love and belonging level of the hierarchy. Finally, Jerry’s need for positive reviews of his performance, in all facets of his being, is a model of the esteem level of the hierarchy.

Through the years, programs have been based on the concept of family. Segments can be shown as a montage of program clips to reveal the changing meaning of family, differing family types and structures over time, or to compare and contrast the variety of ways families cope with a particular situation. Over the years, family-based shows have addressed the addition of new family members, either through birth, marriage, or moving in, and its effects on family dynamics and roles. Many shows also confront explaining death (of a beloved pet or family member) to children. The opportunity to use these programs to assist students in understanding the family life cycle, structure, dynamics, communication patterns, and child development are abundant.

Soap operas such as General Hospital (Hursley & Hursley, 1963) and All My Children (Nixon, 1970) have many scenes involving nurses in hospitals. Although the images from soap operas and other television programs may be all the student has as a context of the nursing profession, nursing practice setting and professional role today is different than what is portrayed at either General Hospital or Pine Valley Hospital. Segments from these programs showing nurses in action can illustrate teachable moments on a variety of topics including professional appearance and comportment, interdisciplinary collaboration and communication, the role of the nurse, and nurse-patient interaction, as well as the concept of professional boundaries.

Finally, in an episode of The Golden Girls (Vallely & Beyt, 1992), Rose is hospitalized in the intensive care unit, and the nurse enforces the immediate family-only visiting policy. Rose is separated from her friends and roommates during a time when she most needs their comfort and support. This program segment highlights the importance of the nurse seeing the uniqueness of each nursing situation, being a patient advocate, and using critical thinking and professional judgment when responding to the individual nursing situation.

Student Response

Student response has been overwhelmingly positive. The activity generates significant discussion, and even a little laughter, among class members. The use of familiar television program situations and characters to introduce beginning nursing students to new concepts associated with the study of nursing provides a way for them to begin to build a knowledge base and to see the dynamic nature of nursing concepts as applied to a variety of situations. Students have stated that the viewing of these television program segments and the associated learning activities have made the concept they read about come to life and have helped to clarify their understanding and use of the concept. These responses provide evidence that the use of television programs in the classroom is an effective and fun strategy to facilitate the teaching and learning of foundational concepts in nursing.
Feathers of Phenomenological Reflection

This exercise was designed to give visualization to how spoken words can be manipulated. Gossiping is a tactic used by bullies to impose harm on their targets. If we as nurses work to stop gossip in our work environment, we also will lessen the power that nurse bullies have over our work environment and us. By helping nursing students realize gossiping at work fuels a bullying environment, we as educators are taking the first step to help our new generation of nurses eliminate the bullies from our profession.

Objective

This exercise was designed to help nursing students understand that gossiping in the workplace is never acceptable. Even when the words spoken are intended to be positive, there is always a risk that someone who is a bully will maliciously reiterate the words out of context. Nurses must be conscientious of their workplace conversation and realize there is other less harmful subject matter than our colleagues that can be discussed at work.

Strategy

Passive learning is no longer a productive method with modern critical thinking students. However, a mix of the phenomenology philosophy as described by Taylor (1993) with Johns' (1998) reflective practice model offers today's generation of learners the interactivity and creativity to keep them engaged in learning.

The goal of this blend of teaching was applied to realizing the potential harmful effect of spoken words. The topic of reflection was how bullies manipulate spoken words into gossip to harm their targets.

An introduction of the topic and key ideas was disseminated. Students then were given a worksheet that contained pictures of individual feathers with words on each. The top half of the paper contained a group of feathers with wording that made a positive statement about coworkers. The bottom half of the paper contained negative words that bullies might add to manipulate the positive statement into a harmful one.

Students were instructed to cut out the feathers and toss them into the air to mimic the words being spoken. After all of the feathers were settled, any feathers that landed upside down were turned over by students. Students then were instructed to look at the conversation the feathers revealed and read it out loud. A reflective journal entry or group discussion are two appropriate ways to evaluate student understanding of this activity related to gossip mongering.

References


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Safe Blood Administration Learning Activity

In a single year, nearly 5 million Americans need blood transfusions, 92.7% of which are administered by nurses (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 2007; Novis, Miller, Howanitz, Renner, & Walsh, 2003). Human error is often cited as the most common cause of adverse effects from blood transfusions (Dzik, 2007).

In an era of emerging technology and bar coding systems, it is important that nurses do not bypass necessary checks and basic safety measures. An observational audit of 12,448 blood transfusions by Novis et al. (2003) found proper identification procedures were fully completed only 62.3% of the time and post blood administration monitoring occurred only 81.6% of the time.

Objectives

A learning activity for nursing students was designed to facilitate active learning about the procedure for safe blood administration. The teaching method includes activities that are effective by auditory, visual, kinetic, and observational learners. The objectives of this activity are for students to:

- Verbalize knowledge of blood type matching.
- Demonstrate the ability to perform the required checks prior to blood administration.
- Identify the signs and symptoms of transfusion reactions.

Interactive Learning Activity

The teaching session begins with a 10-minute review of blood type matching through a competitive game of giant paper dice. The dice are easily handmade and taped together using copy paper.

The activity is designed to be used in a group, with group size limited only by how many students can fit around a large conference room table. A group of 6 to 10 students is ideal.

The group is divided into two teams. Each team receives two dice. One die has the various blood types on each side (A, B, AB, O), and the other die has Rh+ and Rh- written on three sides each.

References


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One team then becomes the blood donor, and the other team is the recipient. The two teams roll the dice and decide together whether the blood types and Rh factors are a compatible match. If the blood types of the two teams do not match, the donor team receives an award; however, if the blood types do match, then the recipient team receives an award.

In the second half of the blood transfusion activity, students are grouped in pairs, with one student acting as the patient and the other student acting as the nurse. Students serving as patients wear paper blood transfusion bracelets on their wrists and are given a list of signs and symptoms of transfusion reactions to act out. Students can be assigned patient names of pop culture personalities such as Big Bird and Beyonce to keep their interest.

The students serving as nurses are given blood packs (i.e., juice boxes) and are required to complete all of the necessary checks (right patient, right time, right route, right dose, matching transfusion numbers, matching blood types) prior to administering the blood. The nurses also are responsible for finding a second nurse to serve as a witness according to the hospital policy. Nurses then sit with their patients for an abbreviated 15 minutes and are instructed to document any signs and symptoms that may be indicative of a blood transfusion reaction. Once finished, the nurses then share their observations with the rest of the group.

Students’ Responses
During this interactive teaching strategy, students verbalized and demonstrated the checks and documentation required when administering blood. Students stated they felt confident in being able to identify the signs or symptoms of blood transfusion reactions.

Overall, the students enjoyed the inclusive and lively design of the lesson. One student commented, “When we were doing the activity, we did not even realize how much we were learning. I was just having a good time acting out what John Lennon would be like if he was itching all over.”

At the end of a busy clinical day, this 20-minute interactive teaching session afforded students the opportunity to learn about the safe administration of blood, while keeping the students actively engaged.

The Admissions Committee: Experiential Learning in an Online Graduate Nursing Education Course
Most experienced nursing faculty are aware of the challenges associated with developing an admission selection process that is efficient, ethical, and fair. In response to the need for a more ethnically diverse health care workforce (Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2004), many nursing programs have reevaluated their admission policy and selection criteria. Nursing programs should strive to produce graduating classes that reflect the ethnic diversity seen in their communities. For this reason, a process should be in place to admit an ethnically diverse population of students who are not only likely to graduate but who are also likely to be successful on the National Council Licensure Examination.

Admissions Committee Learning Activity
These issues and challenges provided the basis for a learning activity in a graduate-level online nursing education course. The three objectives for the learning activity were to:

- Develop an admission policy.
- Develop selection criteria.
- Apply the policy and selection criteria to a group of fictional applicants.

A total of 24 students enrolled in the online course were divided into five learning groups. Each learning group took on the role of an admissions committee charged with the development of an admission policy for the selection of fictional applicants to a nursing program.

Groups were encouraged to develop their admission policy and selection criteria based on current trends from the literature. Reading assignments and references for the unit included literature addressing the need for a diverse workforce (IOM, 2004; Sullivan Commission, 2004).

Based on the instructor’s observations of online group interactions, a great deal of discussion regarding the most appropriate variables for admission criteria occurred within all of the groups. The need for student diversity was recognized, but most groups struggled to identify ways to achieve this short of awarding points for ethnicity.

Following the policy and selection criteria development, the learning groups were given an identical database with information on 53 applicants, from whom the groups were to select 15 for admission. The fictional applicant database included name, gender, age, ethnicity, standardized test scores, cumulative grade point average (GPA), science GPA, course grades in prerequisite courses, years of experience in health care-related jobs (paid or volunteer), community service experience, in-state or out-of-state residence, rural or city origin, family members who have attended college, writing sample scores, and letter of reference scores.

Using the admission and selection criteria they had developed, the...
learning groups held online admission meetings to select students from the large applicant pool. This process caused students to recognize the limitations in the policies they had developed as well as the challenges of leaving personal bias out of the selection process.

As an example, one of the fictional applicants had a 3.87 cumulative GPA and a 4.0 science GPA, was an ethnic minority, and had previous health care experience. However, the applicant also was older than age 65. Age became an issue among group members, despite the fact that it was not a variable initially considered for selection criteria. Difficult decisions such as this occurred in every group.

**Student Response**

The admission policy, selection criteria, and finalists for each group were posted in a public viewing room within the online course. Students were asked to take note of variations seen and discuss the decisions that were made and why certain applicants were or were not selected with members of other learning groups. The final lists of accepted applicants varied among the groups, which fueled a robust online discussion. It was fascinating to note that many of the quiet students were willing to share their perspectives during this process.

As a final step in this learning activity, students individually reflected on the experience, specifically commenting on changes they would consider if they participated in this exercise again, the potential impact admissions policies have on nursing education and the profession, and what they learned from this process.

Students collectively were surprised that the final lists were so dissimilar, which further emphasized the importance of clarity when educational policies are developed. Many commented on the difficulty of this work, with a newfound understanding of the admission process. Students remarked on the difficulties associated with consensus building within their groups but also recognized how this work translates to actual teaching practice. One student specifically described a new appreciation for group work required in online courses.

This learning activity combines the concepts of education policy and student diversity. Nursing faculty should develop a variety of online learning activities that are student centered, purposeful, and engaging. It is particularly important to role model such teaching strategies and enhance the pedagogical expertise of graduate nursing students who are preparing for careers in nursing education.

**References**


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