Education Theory and Classroom Games: Increasing Knowledge and Fun in the Classroom

Games are a valuable teaching strategy in higher education classrooms. In the July 2005 issue of the *Journal of Nursing Education*, Glendon and Ulrich discussed the creative approach of games. Two games, *What’s That Intervention?* and *Name That Drug*, were described as “an excellent way to teach content, create community among students and faculty, and enhance students’ critical thinking abilities” (Glendon & Ulrich, 2005, p. 338). This article describes another game, *Who Wants To Be A Nurse?*, that also meets the needs of adult learners by actively involving them in the learning process in a fun and exciting way.

Theoretical Background

Knowles’ adult education theory, andragogy, greatly influenced education and changed the way adults were taught. Until the 1950s, teachers were perceived to be all-knowing and the students, whether children or adults, needed or wanted to learn the new knowledge. New knowledge was passed from the teacher to the students and the teacher was viewed as the expert in the front and center of the classroom who was not to be questioned. The students were passive in the learning process.

Knowles’ theory was one of the first to distinguish between how children and adults learn. Knowles recognized that although children may enter the classroom with no prior knowledge to influence the learning process, this was not the case with adult students. Age, maturity, and prior knowledge influence the learning process for adult students. Depending on adults’ age and maturity level, they could bring prior knowledge from formal education, work, and life experiences to the classroom. The teacher is viewed more as a facilitator of learning as opposed to an individual who possesses all knowledge. Andragogy shifts the power and responsibility from the teacher to the students. The teacher empowers the student during the learning process (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

Originally proposed in the early 1950s, Knowles set forth five basic tenets of andragogy, which indicated that adult learners: (1) are independent and self-directed, (2) value life experience with age, (3) want learning to be linked to required tasks, (4) focus on problem-centered learning, and (5) are primarily motivated by internal sources (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). A sixth tenet was added later regarding the adult learners’ need for motivation behind learning. The concept of andragogy created a separation from pedagogy, which had not occurred in the past. Andragogy can be applied in self-directed learning situations, informal and formal educational environments.

Classroom Games

Students of all ages enjoy games. Classroom games have multiple advantages, including increased active learner participation; learning, knowledge retention, and motivation; and insights about links between theory and practice (Billings & Halstead, 2005). *Who Wants To Be A Nurse?* was developed by a faculty member to vary the instructional strategy for approximately 60-junior level nursing students in an acute care course. During the semester, the faculty member used games, as well as case studies, concept mapping, simulation, lectures, and small discussion groups, to vary the stimulus in the classroom setting to enhance the learning process for adult learners. *Who Wants To Be A Nurse?* was initially received with hesitation but then evolved into active learning and laughter as the students’ competitive nature took over.

Who Wants To Be A Nurse?

*Who Wants To Be A Nurse?* is a classroom game based on a combination of two popular television game shows, *Family Feud* and *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*. In preparation, faculty develop PowerPoint® slides displaying multiple-choice questions focusing on what is currently being learned in the classroom, or the questions could be written as an overview to assist with an NCLEX-RN® review. Two teams with five members each are selected.

Five students are selected to be the judges and are responsible for determining the correct answer for each question. Therefore, they are the only individuals allowed access to their textbooks and notes. One student runs the scoreboard and one point is given for each correct answer, and one student plays the game host, who is responsible for reading the game questions and answers. The remaining students are the audience and can be rotated to different positions throughout the game.

Each team is given three cards (“Ask the Audience,” “50/50,” and “Phone a Friend”) that can be used at any time except for the bell questions (i.e., the initial question for each round). Once the rules have been explained, the faculty steps back to allow the game to be played by the students. The faculty remains present to correct any misinformation presented, to help facilitate in further explanation during the game, if needed, and to conduct a debriefing session after the game.

To begin playing, one student from each group comes to the front by a podium and bell. A question is read from the PowerPoint slide, and the first person to ring the bell and correctly answer the question wins. The host will start with the team that won the bell question and continue to go down the team line asking questions until they get one wrong or are unable to answer. If the other team gets the correct answer, the host switches over to the second team and proceeds as before. If neither team gets the correct answer, then a second player from each team is sent to the front to answer a question with the
bell. The game proceeds in this manner until a set number of points are earned or until the end of class.

Conclusion
As a nursing faculty member, my goal is to provide an open, safe, fun, and cognitively stimulating classroom environment for students to actively engage in the learning process. Classroom games are an excellent instructional strategy to meet this goal.

This is a win-win situation for everyone, especially the adult learner. Who Wants To Be A Nurse? is one example of a game that can be successfully played in this environment.

References

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