Tuned in: Connecting Community Health Nursing Student’s Learning to the News

In his book *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don’t Follow the News*, Mindich stated that most young Americans who are “tuned-out” not only threaten their own generation but also “democracy itself” (2005, p. 127). He asked questions concerning how Americans can
help them tune back in. Unger (2015), too, noted that “the public is shockingly unaware of the world and educators need to confront this problem” (p. 1). Fennell (2002), a health education professor, stated that, “without the ability of students to understand current events related to health issues, their ability to think critically will be impaired and hence their ability to advocate for change in communities will be impacted” (p. 182).

The following classroom teaching strategy used in a community health nursing course may be a partial answer to those conditions noted by these educators.

During a recent class discussion, most students were able to identify the actors in television blockbusters, such as “Madame Secretary” (Hall, 2014) and “House of Cards” (Willimon, 2013), but could not name the current U.S. Secretary of State or the current U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services. Many of the students were not able to link course content to local and global events occurring throughout the semester. This lack of awareness reflected a finding in the literature that noted that “with each passing year, young people grow less interested in the news, regardless of how it’s delivered” (Rogers, 2014, para. 2). Nursing faculty can develop classroom interventions to inoculate against this apathy while teaching socially relevant content.

Such an intervention was implemented in an RN-to-Bachelor of Science in Nursing community health nursing course of 36 students in the spring of 2016. An assignment was created by the school of nursing’s Student Learning Outcome, stating, “Engage in ethical reasoning and actions to promote leadership in promoting advocacy, collaboration and justice as socially responsible citizens.”

Topics covered during the semester include vulnerable populations, epidemiology, public health care delivery systems, emergency/disaster preparedness, communicable diseases, and others. There are 5 weeks during the semester where the assignment titled Current Event is listed on the course calendar. The syllabus reflects the following assignment description:

**Weekly Current Event Objective.** To demonstrate application of community health nursing theory to local, state, national, or international current events described in news “articles” found in print, electronic media, television, etc.

**Aims.** (a) Students will be able to link a documented current event from a news source to the topic listed for the weekly lecture; (b) Students will summarize (one written paragraph) the relevancy of the article to the weekly topic; (c) Students will identify a community health nursing diagnosis, containing the terms, “risk of, among, related to” in the summary paragraph (Lundy & Barton, 2016); (d) Students will be able to discuss the content of their article when called upon during the class discussion.

**Evaluation.** Meeting each Aim is worth 1 point. This assignment is worth 20 points toward the course total (4 points × 5 weeks).

**Student feedback has been favorable:**
- I had such a positive experience while talking to my classmates about the current event.
- Before this assignment, I was not reading or listening to the news.
- I’m glad I had this opportunity to find articles that relate to what I am learning in community health.
- Use of the nursing diagnosis really helped me to understand how my article was related to nursing.

The requirement of students to “tune in” while taking a nursing course may be the beginning of behavior changes. Students who have participated in this learning activity may continue to be engaged as lifelong learners as a result of this educational intervention. Ideally, a follow-up survey will be distributed to these 36 students to measure the degree to which the student learning outcome was met.

**References**


**Elaine M. Rutkowski, PhD, RN, CNS**

erutkowski@fullerton.edu

School of Nursing

California State University

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