

The Pediatric Toy Project: Teaching Growth and Development Through Play

Teaching theoretical principles of pediatric growth and development in nursing can be challenging. Limited pediatric clinical experiences, time constraints, and lack of clinical practice sites requires students to progress rapidly from understanding theory to application in practice. Teaching and learning strategies to overcome the barriers that engage students in active learning and facilitate the application of theory to practice are needed (Valiga, 2012).

Creative approaches to teaching growth and development (such as toy critiques) are documented in the literature. However, evidence of teaching strategies that facilitate student application of growth and development theory to practice is limited. Furthermore, the literature supports the examination of new pedagogical approaches that use a variety of teaching methods that build on student experiences and connect theory to practice (Bowie & Carr, 2013). Knowledge of pediatric growth and development is one of the nine essentials in nursing education and its importance in the curriculum must not be ignored (Ahmed & Richardson, 2013; American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008). As nursing education evolves from a teacher-centered to a more learner-centered environment to facilitate a more collaborative experience, active learning strategies should be explored.

The Pediatric Toy Project

The purpose of the Pediatric Toy Project was to develop an innovative teaching strategy based on experiential learning

theory. The project was built on students' prior life experiences and expertise to engage students in the application of growth and development knowledge to clinical practice (Bowie & Carr, 2013). Traditional teaching strategies of a written worksheet or presentation were replaced with the project.

Each student selected a specific age group: infant, toddler, preschool, school age, or adolescent. Students were instructed to assume the role of a corporate research development nurse for a toy company and were asked to apply professional knowledge of growth and development principles to the development of a new toy or game for the assigned age group. Students were instructed to address the following areas in the toy development: (a) fine and gross motor skills, (b) verbal and writing development, (c) cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development, and (d) safety and anticipatory guidance. Students were encouraged to spend no more than 8 hours and to use materials found around the house in the construction of the project. The completed projects were presented during the clinical conference, and, if possible, the clinical group played with the toy to demonstrate how it worked. Students submitted a one-page written summary that discussed the process of the toy selection, how the toy met the developmental milestones for the age group, and a summary of current evidence from one article from a peer-related journal related to the project. Application of developmental theories and safety issues were addressed through student presentations of the toy to the group for critique and discussion. Faculty and student perspectives were evaluated through feedback, observation, and reflection.

Formative evaluations were completed by clinical faculty using a grading rubric.

Evaluation

Faculty and students reported a high level of satisfaction with the project over traditional teaching methods. Students verbalized an appreciation of the opportunity to use critical thinking skills to apply developmental theory to practice. Student evaluations reflected a positive learning experience, increased retention of concepts, and an improved ability to apply pediatric growth and developmental principles successfully. Future research is warranted to provide additional evidence on creative teaching strategies for accelerated nursing students to improve knowledge retention and application of developmental theories to patients across the life span.

References

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