Nursing students' knowledge about an empowering discourse: Pretest and posttest assessment

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Summary

Background: Supporting patient empowerment is an essential part of patient education. One possible supportive intervention is an empowering discourse. Nursing students should learn about empowering discourse during their education and acquire knowledge about this intervention.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to evaluate nursing students' knowledge about an empowering discourse in the atomistic and holistic categories in connection to a computer simulation program. The ultimate goal was to discover how students understand the structure of an empowering discourse as a whole.

Methods: A one-group pretest—posttest design was adopted. The data were collected from graduating nursing students ($n = 42$) in six Finnish polytechnics, through concept maps created in connection to a computer simulation program during pre- and posttest phases.

Results: Results revealed that nursing students' knowledge of an empowering discourse improved after using the computer simulation as a learning method, but the students still lacked holistic knowledge of an empowering discourse.

Conclusion: Based on this study, more attention should be paid to learning methods in nursing education so that students achieve a sufficient knowledge base to empower their patients.

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1. Introduction

Supporting patient empowerment is essential in patient education (Anderson & Funnel, 2010; Keleher & Parker, 2013;

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OECD, 2010; WHO, 2013); nursing students should therefore learn about supportive interventions. One such intervention is an empowering discourse between a nurse and a patient (Van Ryn & Heaney, 1997; Virtanen, Leino-Kilpi, & Salanterä, 2007). In this study, we were interested in nursing students' knowledge of this empowering discourse and its change as a learning outcome in connection with a computer simulation program.

An empowering discourse is here defined as a process including a systematic structure (Fig. 1, Virtanen et al., 2007, 2013) aiming to support patients in taking care of and making decisions concerning their own health (Leino-Kilpi, Luoto, & Katajisto, 1998). The systematic structure of an empowering discourse consists of three phases: (1) initiation, including creating an appreciative atmosphere and negotiating the patient's discourse goal concerning their health problem; (2) progression, including focusing on issues based on the patient's existing knowledge and knowledge expectations, and supporting the patient's active participation in the discourse; and (3) conclusion, including assessing the achievement of the discourse goal (Virtanen et al., 2007, 2013). The empowering discourse process comprises knowledge on bio-physiological, functional, emotional, social, ethical and financial issues supporting patient empowerment (Leino-Kilpi et al., 1998). Thus, in order to adequately realize an empowering discourse, sufficient knowledge about its structure is required.

More emphasis needs to be placed on students' knowledge about an empowering discourse. To our knowledge, nursing students' knowledge about this discourse has not been studied previously. However, in some studies where learning related to patient education has been evaluated, students' knowledge related to an empowering discourse can be identified. These studies have shown a development in students' personal knowledge about teaching as a process of engaging with learners (Little, 2006), the construction of

students' knowledge about the realization of patient education according to the patients' needs (Choi, Hui, Lee, & Chui, 2010), and students' understanding about supporting patient empowerment (Rash, 2008; Sandström, 2006; Scheckel & Hedrick-Eriksson, 2009). In addition, some studies have addressed learning skills (Kaymakçi, Yavuz, & Orgun, 2007; Scheckel, Emery, & Nosek, 2010; Sensenig, 2007) and attitudes to patient education related to patient empowerment (Choi et al., 2010; Goldenberg, Andrusyszyn, & Iwasiw, 2005; Little, 2006; Rash, 2008; Scheckel & Hedrick-Eriksson, 2009; Scheckel et al., 2010; Sensenig, 2007). Nevertheless, the evidence is insufficient concerning students' knowledge of the structure of an empowering discourse.

Moreover, there is clear potential in computer-aided simulation programs to achieve an appropriate level of knowledge about an empowering discourse. A computer simulation program is a learning method offering students an opportunity to experience some of the elements of real situations prior to encounters with patients (Jeffries, Woolf, & Linde, 2003). These programs allow nursing students to actively engage in and control their learning (Durmaz, Dicle, Cakan, & Cakir, 2012; Kiegaldie & White, 2006). Previously, computer simulation programs have produced positive learning outcomes, for example in learning about nursing interventions (Durmaz et al., 2012; Jeffries et al., 2003; Kiegaldie & White, 2006; Tatti & Lehmann, 2001) and observing physiological systems (Botsis, Halkiotis, & Kourlaba, 2011). However, computer simulations have not been used for learning about an empowering discourse.

In this study, we evaluated students' knowledge about the structure of an empowering discourse by using a distinction between holistic and atomistic knowledge (Marton & Säljö, 2005). Holistic knowledge concerns the whole structure, including all phases of this empowering discourse. Atomistic knowledge concerns single phases and fragmented knowledge concerning the structure of an empowering discourse (Virtanen et al., 2013). Specifically, the purpose of this study was to evaluate nursing students' knowledge about an empowering discourse in these two categories in connection to the computer simulation program.

The research questions were:

(1) What knowledge do nursing students have about an empowering discourse?
(2) Does this knowledge change through contact with a computer simulation program?
(3) If there are changes in students' knowledge, what are they?

The ultimate goal was to discover how students understand the structure of an empowering discourse as a whole.

2. Methods

2.1. Design

This was a one-group pretest—posttest design with an evaluation of nursing students' knowledge about an empowering discourse assessed with a concept-mapping method in connection to a computer simulation program.
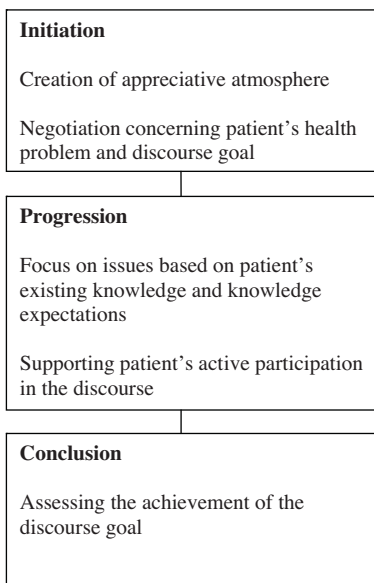
STRUCTURE OF AN EMPOWERING DISCOURSE

Initiation

Creation of appreciative atmosphere

Negotiation concerning patient's health problem and discourse goal

Progression

Focus on issues based on patient's existing knowledge and knowledge expectations

Supporting patient's active participation in the discourse

Conclusion

Assessing the achievement of the discourse goal

Fig. 1 Structure of an empowering discourse.