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## Training nursing students' communication skills with online video peer assessment



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### ABSTRACT

Communication is an important skill which nursing students must master in order to be effective in their career. One of the purposes of this study was to implement an online video peer assessment system to scaffold their communication skills. The other purpose was to examine the effects and validity of the peer assessment. Fifty nursing students enrolled in a psychiatric nursing course in Taiwan participated in the study. The experiment contained two rounds of peer assessments. In each round, the students had a therapeutic consultation with a simulated patient. It was recorded and uploaded on a YouTube platform which we designed to keep a log of viewing, rating and feedback from their peers. The peer assessment process was synchronized with the viewing of peers' communication videos so that feedback could be marked to the relevant point on the video. Expert evaluation scores showed that students' communication performance, when involved in peer assessments, significantly improved. In the first round, the scores determined by the peers were not correlated with those marked by the experts. However, in the second round, both scores were significantly correlated, indicating that the online peer assessment could be perceived as a valid assessment method for nursing communication skills training. Moreover, the analysis of peer feedback also revealed that their communication became more patient-centered gradually due to the peer assessments. On the whole, the students were satisfied with the peer assessment activities and appreciated the contribution to their communication skills.

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### 1. Introduction

Found in the constructivist and socio-constructivist paradigms for learning, peer assessment enables students to not only assess their understanding through explaining, simplifying, clarifying, summarizing, reorganizing and cognitive restructuring (Topping, 1998), but also to interact with their peers to construct knowledge and develop social skills (Tseng & Tsai, 2007). Thus, in recent decades, peer assessment has been identified in higher education as a valuable approach to student learning (Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999; Falchikov, 2003; Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). The method has been used extensively in various fields to promote student involvement in assessment with great achievements (e.g. Welsh, 2007; Davey, 2011; McGarr & Clifford, 2013; Asikainen, Virtanen, Postareff, & Heino, 2014). In nursing education, studies have shown that the peer

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assessment process assists students to promote in-depth learning, the development of professional practice and self-appraisal skills (Morris, 2001; Patterson, 1996; Welsh, 2007).

Due to its effectiveness for student learning, peer assessment or evaluation is also a pedagogical strategy that has been utilized routinely in nursing communication training (Hammer, Fox, & Hampton, 2014). Wang, Chen-Sea, and Wu (2004)'s study designed as an interpersonal communication teaching module to train students clinical communication skills. They found that students' ranking toward the benefits of teaching activities from high to low was: 1: peer feedback (96.8%), 2: video recording and replay (90.3%), 3: instruction and explanation (90.3%), 4: role-play experience (80.7%) and 5: the handouts (58.1%). Yoo and Chae (2011) investigated the effects of video-based peer review on communication skills and learning motivation among nursing students. The experimental group used peer reviews to evaluate the videotaped performance, while the control group assessed themselves alone by watching their own videos. Their findings indicated that the experimental group showed significantly higher communication skills improvement and stronger learning motivation than the control group.

Videos facilitate the observation and comparison of effective and less effective communication, allow illustration of nonverbal communication and provide consistent teaching from year to year (Wang et al., 2004). In Losh et al. (2005)'s study, they used video scenarios in teaching sessions to help students identify effective communication techniques and to stimulate discussion about communication benchmarks. The majority of students (76%) felt the videotapes helped them to gain a better understanding of the written communication benchmarks. Noordman, van der Weijden, and van Dulmen (2014) adopted a video-feedback teaching strategy to improve generic communication and motivational interviewing skills for experienced practice nurses working in primary care. They found nurses who received video-feedback appeared to pay significantly more attention to patients' requests for help and their physical examination. They also provided significantly more understandable information. With respect to motivational interviewing, nurses who received video-feedback appeared to pay more attention to "agenda setting and permission seeking" during their consultations.

The use of video-based pedagogy and peer-assessment in nursing communication training are well documented; however, integrating networking technology into both approaches has received limited attention in this field. Therefore, this study explored the possibility of implementing online peer assessment activities in nursing communication training. In addition, the effects of online peer assessment on facilitating students' communication skills and its validity were examined. Finally, how nursing students perceived the activities was also investigated.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The state of nursing communication training

It is widely accepted that a nurse's ability to communicate is an important factor for good clinical practice. However, clinical nursing staff thought the communication training was insufficient when they were attending school (Fallowfield, Saul, & Gilligan, 2001; Wilkinson, Gambles, & Roberts, 2002). The outcomes of many communication training courses were even more limited (Kruijver, Kerkstra, Francke, Bensing, & van de Wiel, 2000). In some counties, communication skill training has been somewhat neglected (Liu, Mok, Wong, Xue, & Xu, 2007). The reasons for these difficulties, and barriers to learning, included limited class time and large classes, meaning it was difficult for students to have the opportunity to practice their communication skills in the classroom (Chant, Jenkinson, Randle, Russell, & Webb, 2002). Furthermore, while reviewing the state of communication skills training to pre-licensure registered nursing students, Chant et al. (2002) indicated there was a lack of formal research design which limited the ability to provide an indication of the kinds of communication skills training that would be the most effective. In a recent study, Grant and Jenkins (2014) updated this review and found that the evidence to support specific communication interventions continues to be low. They recommended that future communication education research should more consistently use theoretical frameworks, tools tested for evidence of reliability and validity and their accompanying outcome measures.

Recognizing the importance and deficiencies of nursing communication training, some studies have implemented innovative training courses. Kluge and Glick (2006) used computer-based interactive training where the students dialogued with a pre-recorded patient and a camera recorded their conversations and non-verbal communication. Crawford et al. (2009) designed a recorded scenario which allowed students to watch it at a time convenient to them. There was a series of assessment questions which invited students to consider communicative and care delivery aspects of the events depicted. Emmanuel, Collins, and Carey (2010) asked students to design a wearable mask for interpreting therapeutic communication skills. They suggested that future research should further explore efficient ways of conducting training programs and guide students into a deeper learning of communication skills. However, despite the above studies being designed with innovative ways for different communication training courses, and students generally being satisfied with the teaching activities, they did not actually measure students' learning outcomes. And, although these studies used innovative strategy, they did not adopt any web-based technology to help students learn effective communication.

For these reasons, this study implemented an online peer assessment system so its effects on facilitating students' communication skills could be evaluated. As a result, it would be able to verify the validity of this communication training method, echoing the views of Grant and Jenkins (2014)'s review in nursing communication skills training programs.

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