



# The design and testing of a caring teaching model based on the theoretical framework of caring in the Chinese Context: A mixed-method study

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## SUMMARY

**Aim:** This paper aims to report the design and test the effectiveness of an innovative caring teaching model based on the theoretical framework of caring in the Chinese context.

**Background:** Since the 1970's, caring has been a core value in nursing education. In a previous study, a theoretical framework of caring in the Chinese context is explored employing a grounded theory study, considered beneficial for caring education.

**Methods:** A caring teaching model was designed theoretically and a one group pre- and post-test quasi-experimental study was administered to test its effectiveness. From Oct, 2009 to Jul, 2010, a cohort of grade-2 undergraduate nursing students ( $n = 64$ ) in a Chinese medical school was recruited to participate in the study. Data were gathered through quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the caring teaching model.

**Results:** The caring teaching model created an esthetic situation and experiential learning style for teaching caring that was integrated within the curricula. Quantitative data from the quasi-experimental study showed that the post-test scores of each item were higher than those on the pre-test ( $p < 0.01$ ). Thematic analysis of 1220 narratives from students' caring journals and reports of participant class observation revealed two main thematic categories, which reflected, from the students' points of view, the development of student caring character and the impact that the caring teaching model had on this regard.

**Conclusions:** The model could be used as an integrated approach to teach caring in nursing curricula. It would also be beneficial for nursing administrators in cultivating caring nurse practitioners.

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## Introduction

### Overall Caring Education

Within the past few decades, nursing education has attempted to move away from the traditional, behavioral, medical-model modalities for teaching and learning (Bevis and Watson, 1989; Benner et al., 1996; Bevis and Watson, 2000; Clark, 2005). Watson (1988) suggested that in order to meet the needs of society, nursing education must be based on human values and concern for others. Caring outcomes in practice, research, and theory depend on the teaching of a caring ideology (Watson, 1988). At the end of the last century, caring was endorsed as a core value in nursing education and practice (Tanner, 1990; AACN,

1998). Many studies argued that caring is a process and a behavior that can be taught and learned (Cronin and Harrison, 1988; Tanner, 1990; Paterson and Crawford, 1994; Wolf et al., 1994). Strategies relating to caring group, role modeling, narrative pedagogy, dialog, reflection, journaling, simulations and projects of applying caring skills outside the classroom, among other things, are tested and found effective in teaching caring to nursing students (Fahrenwald et al., 2005; Weissmann et al., 2006; Lee-Hsieh, 2003; Lee-Hsieh et al., 2004, 2007; Birx et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2008; Raholm, 2008; Eggenberger and Keller, 2008).

### Caring Education in China

Parallel with the enhancement of the quality of human life in China has been the call for a more people-oriented nursing profession. It is imperative that efforts be undertaken to improve the caring character of Chinese nurses. In Chinese culture, caring is called benevolence which indicates that doctors and nurses should *shi bing wu qin*, which means one treats patients as kindly as one treats his family. Although caring has been regarded as an objective of nursing programs in China for the past decade, it remains elusive due to the lack of knowledge about the caring framework in the Chinese context. In a Chinese study, Meng et al. (2011) examined the framework of caring in the

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Chinese context and revealed that the caring framework comprises four caring attributes, namely attitude, knowledge, ability and perception. This finding may be interpreted as a list of teaching objectives that provide guidelines for constructing a curriculum and teaching pattern in the Chinese context (Meng et al., 2011). We have found very few studies relating to caring teaching model (CTM) that works as an integrated approach for teaching caring in nursing curricula. This study is intended to offer a feasible and effective CTM for teaching caring in nursing curricula, underpinned by the framework of caring in the Chinese context, and to test the effectiveness of the model by a quasi-experimental study.

## Background

### *Overall Caring Model in Nursing Education*

A literature review revealed that models of nursing education in Western countries are grounded in a variety of perspectives and the majority of those models are centered on nursing education and practice in healthcare institutions. Sheston (1990) developed a caring model for nursing education grounded in interpersonal caring processes, caring consciousness, caring mutuality, and caring exchanges. Dragich (2001) developed a personal model of caring within nursing education from a feminist perspective through an autobiographical narrative study. Conway (2001) presented a curricular model for nursing education from a Christian cultural perspective, believing that caring is rooted in knowing God and demonstrating values of compassion, competence, and daily commitment. Picard and Mariolis (2002) developed a model of praxis based on Roach's (1992) philosophy of human caring which reflects the concepts of mirroring presence, self-reflection, appreciation of meaning and pattern, and creative approaches to student learning. Sumner's (2004) caring model of quadrangular dialog was developed for educating nurses in clinical teaching situations that encourage students to be observant of both others and self in order to reflect and learn. Purnell (2006) developed a model of nursing education grounded in caring (MONEC), underpinned by the theory of nursing as caring, the metaphor in the theory of the dance of caring persons as organizing pedagogy, and intentionality in nursing with its transformative aspect of esthetic knowing, recounting and illuminating the essence of caring in nursing situations through the use of story. Summarizing the Western caring models in nursing education, we found that these models mainly focus on mutual relationship, reflection, esthetic knowing, cultural perspective, and underpinned theory.

### *Theoretical Basis of the CTM*

Boykin (1994) argues that "it is not possible to live a caring-based curriculum if the foundation for the program is anything other than caring" (p.11). According to Meng et al. (2011), the perceptions of caring for people and being cared for by others are the trigger point in developing caring character and the caring attitude is the key point of caring character. The knowledge of the humanities and social sciences and the ability to care are fundamental factors in caring character. The ability to care may be enhanced through caring practice and the caring attitude may be gradually internalized during the process of caring practice. Therefore, the CTM should be designed to cultivate the four attributes of caring character mentioned above, emphasizing on caring perception and caring practice.

Besides, we used Chinese traditional pedagogy for reference to design the CTM. Confucius, a great educationist in China in ancient times, established Confucian educational ideologies, *Analectes*, which suggest that learning mostly depends on physical experience and spiritual inspiration. Through them, people understand the principle thoroughly and perform it willingly. In light of this, a consideration not found in the literature of the Western models of caring education but deemed essential in the CTM, was the value of creating caring

situation which would stimulate students' physical experience and spiritual inspiration.

In caring pedagogy, esthetic knowing is transformative and creative (Purnell, 2003), influencing physical and metaphysical dimensions of the teaching–learning experience (Purnell, 2006). As Phenix (1964) declares, esthetics is one of the general kinds of meaning corresponding to the distinctive human functions of expressing and communicating. Carper (1978) states that nursing knowledge can be best understood through four patterns of knowing: empirical, ethical, personal and esthetic. Boykin et al. (1994) point out that esthetic knowledge in nursing is the creative experience in a nursing situation, expression of the experience, and appreciation of it through encounter. Thus, inspired by the points mentioned above, we regarded creating esthetic situation involving caring elements as one aspect of the CTM assisting students in learning caring.

There is also a concern that skills are only understood superficially without the experiential aspect of learning; knowledge may increase, but behavior does not change (Brunero et al., 2010). In this study, therefore, another aspect of the CTM was supposed to be creating experiential situation in which experiential learning styles including role playing, games and case scenario-based experiential work, among other things, were conducted, assisting students in learning caring.

Therefore, the CTM was designed theoretically with two mainlines of creating esthetic situation and experiential situation that characterized the model. Students appreciated the esthetic situation or practiced in the experiential situation, and then generated caring inspiration, with caring character developed. Teachers and students interacted closely in this teaching and learning situation, demonstrating reciprocal caring and sharing experiences. Teaching strategies such as situated learning, narrative, simulation, care journaling, role modeling, and caring group were used (Fig. 1).

To construct a teaching model, we also needed to study related theories which underpinned the teaching model. In nursing education, caring is an evolutionary, transpersonal process between educators and students (Bevis and Watson, 1989). Watson's (1996) theory of Transpersonal Caring serves as a guideline for both the discipline and professional development of nurses. Transpersonal caring in nursing education occurs when nurse educators use teaching moments as caring occasions (Bevis and Watson, 1989).

## The Study

### *Aim*

The aim of this quasi-experimental study is to test the effectiveness and feasibility of the CTM based on the caring framework in the Chinese context.

### *Design*

We adopted a quasi-experimental, non-randomized, one group, pre- and post-test design for this study.

The CTM was applied to the teaching of a Fundamental Nursing course for verification and revision. The course continued over two semesters (32 weeks), totaling 240 credit hours (7.5 credit hours per week). The course consisted of theoretical lessons, laboratory lessons, and clinical practice, with 80 credit hours for each type of lesson. In clinical practice, the students worked for five clinical days per week as student nurses. Participant class observation was used to record the instructors' behaviors and students' responses during class.

The procedure of the CTM can be generalized in four steps: creating esthetic and experiential situations, appreciation, practice, and inspiration (Fig. 2). Before class, the esthetic or experiential situations were created integrated with caring elements such as instillation of

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