Karen Johnson, PhD, RN has been a nurse educator for over 25 years. Her major area of expertise is maternal/newborn nursing and she has served as a staff nurse, clinical nurse specialist and nurse educator in that area. Her areas of research interests include labor support, nurses' and students' perceptions of caring, and caring in nursing education, especially how caring might impact perceived levels of empowerment and clinical decision making in nursing students. Dr. Johnson currently serves as the BSN program director at Nebraska Methodist College in Omaha, NE.
The effect of a curriculum based on caring on levels of empowerment and decision-making in senior BSN students

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Purpose of Study

• The purpose of this non-experimental causal comparative study was to investigate whether senior nursing students enrolled in a curriculum based on a theory of caring reported higher levels of empowerment and clinical decision making than students who were not enrolled in a curriculum based on a theory of caring

Purpose of Study

• The study also investigated whether there was a relationship between the levels of perceived empowerment and clinical decision-making in senior nursing students
Significance of Study

• Graduate nurses are expected to practice autonomously and make clinical decisions at a high level
• Health care is becoming increasingly complex
• Nurses must be empowered to be equal partners in health care issues
• There is little research on empowerment of nursing students

Significance of Study

• American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)
  – Nine essentials for baccalaureate nursing education
  – Asserts that nursing education is uniquely positioned to respond to challenges of health care through innovative educational strategies, including content on:
    • Caring and healing
    • Ways of knowing from arts and sciences
    • Critical decision-making

Significance of Study

• National League for Nursing (NLN)
  – Calls for “dramatic reform and innovation in nursing education”
  – Nursing content must be focused less on content and more on relationships and teaching strategies
  – Educational strategies should be based on pedagogical research
Research Hypotheses

- Senior baccalaureate nursing students enrolled in a curriculum based on a theory of caring will report higher levels of perceived learner empowerment than students enrolled in a curriculum not based on a theory of caring.
- Senior baccalaureate nursing students enrolled in a curriculum based on a theory of caring will report higher levels of perceived clinical decision-making than students enrolled in a curriculum not based on a theory of caring.
- There will be a significant positive relationship between the levels of perceived empowerment and clinical decision-making in senior baccalaureate nursing students.

Theoretical Framework

- The research was based on theories related to caring curriculum, learner empowerment and clinical decision making.
- Nursing as Caring (Boykin & Schoenhofer, 2001)
  - Interconnectedness and collegiality
  - Environment of support
- Nursing: The Philosophy and Science of Caring (Watson, 2008)
  - “Transpersonal caring moments”
  - “Human to Human dialogue”

Conceptual Model

- Empowered Learner
- Increased Clinical Decision-making Ability
- Mutual Respect
- Open Dialogue
- Inquiry
- Trust
- Creativity
- Reflection

CAREG CURRICULUM
Methodology

- Target population was senior baccalaureate nursing students in their last two semesters of study
- Subjects were recruited from a university identified as having a curriculum based on a theory of caring (university X) and a comparative university with a curriculum not based on a theory of caring (university Y)

Methodology

- Universities were identified through a search of AACN accredited universities and colleges of nursing
- Review of web site and published mission, vision and philosophy to determine if curriculum was based on theory of caring
- Deans of schools of nursing were contacted for permission and IRB obtained

Methodology

- Email sent to Deans who sent email to senior nursing students
- Email to students contained a link to online survey
Research Instruments

- Learner Empowerment Measure (LEM) (Frymier, Shulman and Houser)
  - 35 Likert scale items to measure impact, meaningfulness and competence
- Clinical Decision Making in Nursing Scale (CSMNS) (Jenkins)
  - 40 item Likert scale in four separate categories
- Demographic survey developed by researcher

Example of LEM

- I feel appreciated in this class
- I have no freedom to choose in this class
- I make a difference in the learning that goes on in this class
- This class is not important to me
- I have a choice in the methods I can use to perform my work
- The tasks required in this class are a waste of time

Example of CDMNS

- I mentally list options before making a decision
- I have little time or energy to search for information
- If a benefit is really great I will favor it without looking at the risks
- A random approach to looking at options works best for me
Example of Demographic Survey

- Demographic information
- Open ended questions on most common learning activity in classes
- Opinions on respect, encouragement to express opinions, creativity, mutual trust between faculty and students, faculty interest and support of students, and faculty receptiveness to ideas of students

Selected Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>University X (n=31)</th>
<th>University Y (n=31)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19-25 years</td>
<td>24 (77.4%)</td>
<td>19-25 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>7 (22.6%)</td>
<td>26-30 years</td>
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</tr>
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<td>36-40 years</td>
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<td>36-40 years</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2 (6.5%)</td>
<td>&gt;40 years</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Previous Degree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5 (16.1%)</td>
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</table>

Mean Responses for Perceived Caring Behaviors
Results

• LEM
  – Individual scores can range from 0 to 140 on total empowerment measure
    • University X ranged 87-140, mean = 122.55
    • University Y ranged 100-140, mean = 122.07
  – \( t \) tests were done on total empowerment and on each of the 3 subscales
  – No significant difference was found between the two universities

• CDMNS
  – Potential range of scores 40-120
    • University X ranged 105-138, mean = 120.42
    • University Y ranged 104-133, mean = 120.62
  – No significant difference in means on total CDMNS
  – 4 subscales potential range of scores 40-100

Results of means of subscales
Correlations

- Pearson correlation tests were done to determine any relationship between LEM and CDMNS and all subscales
- No significant relationships were found between total LEM and total CDMNS or any subscales
- Numerous significant relationships were found between statements related to caring and LEM and CDMNS

Conclusions

- Students in both universities reported high levels of perceived empowerment and clinical decision making abilities
- Students in both universities reported nearly equal perception of caring behaviors exhibited in their schools of nursing
- The specific structure of a nursing curriculum may be less significant than the caring environment of learning

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Three research instruments were used which may have resulted in some students not completing the entire survey
- The study sampled only two public universities and the sample was very homogenous
Recommendations

• Continued research into the concepts of empowerment and clinical decision making in nursing students using larger sample size and more diverse populations
• Further research to explore more fully characteristics that students perceive as caring and the impact on empowerment and clinical decision making

Selected References


