

Guided Discussion and Activities in English for Future Health Professionals: Relationships between Nursing and Community Design

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Recent interest in community design has become evident in medical circles. Relationships between a community's design, its function, and citizens' health are an increasing concern for people who care about the quality of human life. Among these people, an influential group is health professionals. They can play a great part in how a community can be constructed or (re)designed to afford better living conditions in society. To develop a sense of the importance of involvement in community planning and clarify the health needs of citizens, and to rethink ideas about responsibilities of health professionals, medical education should provide classes, seminars, lectures and activities to give students chances to explore possibilities of direct involvement for creating a healthy community. At the Tottori University Faculty of Medicine, a seminar was held for 3rd-year nursing students and faculty members on community development and design as related to health. The main lecturer explained how trends in various diseases and increases in obesity in the United States are directly related to how communities are designed. Although the lecture was in English, translation into Japanese was provided with a question-and-answer period at the end. In preparation for the lecture, students were given two questions on the relationship between nursing and community design. As this lecture occurred at the end of the year, further study could not be done. This paper presents ideas for giving future health professionals opportunities to explore a new direction. Class activities are outlined with an emphasis on English language teaching and learning techniques.

Key words: community, educational techniques, group discussion, neighborhood, teaching methods, training activities

For a long while in the United States, health officials have become increasingly concerned about the health problems of Americans. These problems take on many forms but one of the greatest concerns facing Americans now is obesity. The fact that obesity is the cause of other severe health problems is common knowledge. Recently, the

ratio of overweight people has grown dramatically revealing that people are in greater danger of various health problems such as heart disease and hypertension. Of course, weight problems can partly be attributed to food. There are various theories as to why people become overweight, i.e. from bad eating habits, but it is clear that fatty

foods, overeating and lack of nutrients play a large part in this trend. It's also evident that obesity is not an isolated problem, not one which is unrelated to other sources of trouble, but pervasive and connected to so many other factors which contribute to lifestyle. Lack of proper physical activity is one of these factors. It's true that anyone can run down to the gym once or twice a week to work out. But if communities were organized in such a way as to allow people natural opportunities to get enough exercise (walking, for example) would going to the gym be necessary at all? Some researchers have suggested that the very organization of society plays a big part in why people do not exercise. They claim that because society has spread out into urban areas, and has basically become a "car" culture, that people have less need to walk and must depend on their own transport. Not only have people become less active, but their relationships to their neighbors, the closeness of the neighborhood when people knew each other well and supported each other in need is becoming a thing of the past. This isolation can also contribute to feelings of loneliness, separation and depression. Along with a lack of responsibility toward the community comes the impersonality of dealing with each other as "objects", and in this way we may suffer even further.

Of course, all citizens share some responsibility for how their community will be shaped and how it will function. In the various areas of society, education, business, agriculture, government, etc., people can take a part in creating a nice environment for themselves, their neighbors and their children. As health plays a major part in the proper functioning of any community, the responsibility of how healthy a community is lies partly in the hands of health professionals. So, it is important to educate future health professionals and provide them with the skills to tackle health problems not only on an individual scale (with patients) but on a wider scale (for the community).

In Japan, where many of the problems the United States and other countries face have not yet become fully developed, offering students the opportunity to discuss health problems on a

community level may be just in time. Asian communities, and specifically those in Japan, have developed differently than those in America, so urbanization as it occurs in Japan, while creating similar problems to the United States, may cause the development of other as yet unseen dangers. These need to be thought out and discussed for possible solutions and one of the best places to start doing this is in the schools.

Participants and Teaching Methods

Ninety-three 3rd-year nursing students and 7 instructors from the School of Health Science, Faculty of Medicine at Tottori University attended a lecture on community design and development by an American professor. Dr. Kevin M. Leyden spoke for an hour using a PowerPoint presentation and translation assistance by Dr. Tamiko Mogami.

The lecture focused on urbanization in the United States and Dr. Leyden explained how this has been a large part of the reason for current common health problems: high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, various mental disturbances and so on. But on a positive note he has said that "[a] growing number of researchers agree that social networks and community involvement have positive health consequences. Persons who are socially engaged with others and actively involved in their communities tend to live longer and be healthier physically and mentally" (Leyden, 2003). The problem is that if communities are allowed to urbanize and expand into larger impersonal living arrangements, the need for more automobiles and thus the slow decline of physical activity in terms of walking, riding bicycles and so on will occur (Leyden, 2003). Also, a wider, spread-out community where the housing is pre-fabricated and built quickly to accommodate those who are basically long-distance commuters and their families, thus creating so-called "bedroom communities", will greatly increase the chances of neighbors being strangers to each other and this can lead to a decline in basic community values and family-oriented life in general (Leyden,

2001). This sort of arrangement can lead to alienation and isolation which can thus lead to mental instability. Dr. Leyden then showed possible solutions to the problems of urbanization by offering a new look at what a healthy community should be – more neighborhood oriented facilities, smaller shops and stores within walking range, more trees and parks in local areas, bike and walking paths, long term community arrangements where families will want to stay for a number of years and possibly even pass the house on to future generations, etc. This should not be seen as an blind regression into the past but a rethinking of past values, accepting the good parts and applying them to newly designed areas where people can lead healthy lives.

Previous to the lecture, the students were given two questions to answer about community design and health. The main goal of offering the students these questions was to help them become familiar with the term “community design” as a new concept in relation to health. Through some discussion in class, it was fairly clear that few of the students had any experience in the field, many of them unfamiliar with the term “community design” even in Japanese (*machi-zukuri*). It was also clear that most of them had no idea how to answer the questions posed to them: i) What do you think the relationship of nursing to community development is? and ii) What role does nursing play in the planning of a community? Most answers for both questions were short and to the point. And although no great answers were expected out of the students, all of them answered positively – they all saw the relationship as something interesting and necessary. But some answers showed that a portion of the students misunderstood the question. A few students said that they would like to be community nurses in the future but gave no real explanation. Some said that nurses played a great part in the community but gave no details. On the other hand, many of them generally stated that because nurses know about the health of patients intimately, they know the factors that would create a good life for citizens and that they should play a large part in planning. Incidentally,

although the nursing course is considered a special course under English for Special Purposes – Medicine (ESP-M) the techniques described here and used in the class follow basic EFL (English as a Foreign Language) theory.

Unfortunately, as this lecture was held on the final class of the year, further study on the issues of community design could not be realized. But for future reference, we would like to offer some ideas for class discussion through group work in English classes. These ideas can be applied to any course in nursing or other medical fields but we felt that because English can be taught through a variety of contexts, the freedom to experiment without harm to the education of future health professionals (nurses) could be done more easily. Medical English courses focusing on conversation often use group work and guided discussion as common techniques for teaching intermediate to advanced level English. With group work, some individual activity in the form of preparation may be necessary through the internet in English and/or Japanese (although the attempted output will be in English).

Initially, students need to be prepped on the goals of their discussions. One good way to do this is to have them observe, think about and brainstorm the good and bad effects of community on health. Questions like, “What do you see in the community that may be good or bad for citizens’ health?” “Is there anything that is not readily apparent which may affect the health of people in a community?” Students should make a list as they recognize or imagine these factors. This can be done individually or in groups.

Then, in group meetings, students can present their ideas and compare them with each other, adding, modifying and strengthening their points of view. Once this is done, students can then select some of the most important health problems that exist in communities related either to poor design or activities such as pollution from factories or noise pollution from airports and traffic which can have a real direct affect on people. From here, a number of group activities can be imagined: role plays, presentations using Power-

Point, debates, etc. Of course, the output of these activities will be in English although the more difficult parts of discussion, preparation and writing may be in Japanese. Also, the focus of every activity will involve the students' viewpoints as nurses. Generally, questions like "How would a nurse think about this?", "What would a nurse do or how would a nurse act in this situation?" should be kept in mind the entire time the discussion or activity is occurring.

Following are two outlines of possible role plays that students can perform. One involves the participation of nurses in a town council session where the discussion will focus on health in the community and the effect of heavy traffic on citizens. In a role play like this, long range and short range ideas should be considered. Another role play centers around a family sitting around the dinner table, the father complaining about driving 20 km to work and the mother worrying about the children walking to school on heavily trafficked roads where there are no sidewalks.

It's obvious that the possibilities for considering nursing influence in community design are open ended. The problem for the teacher is to make sure students keep the project on track as this is a short term project (2 or 3 classes). Students should be encouraged to use English for speaking as much as possible but if struggling to speak in English causes the discussion to bog down Japanese can be used. Above all, students should enjoy learning about a new field and new possibilities in nursing and have fun pushing themselves to speak a few useful English phrases whenever possible.

Discussion

As most medical education courses are specialized, it is difficult to include lessons on community design unless the course is specifically tailored for it. For this reason, English courses can be used part of the time to present content in English on social (that is, health) problems along with usual language skill development. In the

course of teaching medical vocabulary, grammar for writing, reading, listening and speaking along with some cultural information, students can participate in some specially designed projects which can help them to realize goals set up by the teacher. In cases like these, the teacher will not have a strict agenda and will allow the students to find their own answers to the problems set before them and encourage them toward a rather flexible goal. Goal setting and realization can even become part of the lesson plan. In the case of community design, students should learn what goals are important to consider and work out the details to achieve those goals. Of course, the main goal of nursing is to assist in creating a healthy community and a healthy society. So, basically the students will have to ask what makes a healthy society and what is "unhealthy". From this, they should be encouraged to continue asking questions which lead them to discover for themselves how they can help their communities at large. One of the focuses on considering the community at large will be to look at how medical professionals (nurses) can get involved in community design while keeping health concerns of citizens in mind.

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[Appendix]

Discussion Guide for Nursing Students Interested in Community Design

Make groups of 4 or 5 people. One person can be the representative of the group and consolidate all ideas of the group into a summarized text.

When discussing, you need some words and phrases to help you speak in English.

General words and phrases

What do you think?

I think so (too). I agree.

I don't think so (either). I don't agree. I disagree.

Why do you think so? Please explain.

Why don't you think so? Please explain.

That's interesting.

Wow.

Really?

That's hard to believe.

I don't believe that.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

Vocabulary and information

Do you have a (new/another) vocabulary word? What (new) vocabulary word do you have/did you find?

What's your vocabulary word? How do you spell it?

What does it mean? (Can you translate it to Japanese? Can you explain it in English?)

What did you find on the internet?

Can you share (some of) your ideas with us/me?

Specific questions

What is community development? What is community design?

What should life in a community be like? What is the best (healthiest) way to live?

Why have so many people grown overweight? Why are so many people getting overweight?

Is this a big problem in Japan? What is a big health problem in Japan?

Why are people not more active socially?

Why don't people get more exercise?

Is there such a thing as a community development nurse? What would be the qualities of such a person?

What other considerations on a social-wide scale would be important concerning health? (Not only community design but Police relationship, types of food available,

Write your own questions, either more specific or general, and phrases on the back of this paper.