ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Active methodologies as strategies in nursing teaching: Raising awareness towards healthy habits

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Abstract

Objective: To identify how the use of active methodology may influence healthy habits in nursing students.

Method: A qualitative Assistential Convergent Research, undertaken with 43 students of the Nursing Graduation Course, at a Federal University in Southern Brazil. Data were collected with a semi-structured tool, from May to July 2008. Data were organized into categories and analysed according to scientific publications in the area.

Results: Three study categories raised from the study: Characterization of Nursing Students from the study, Contributions of teaching-learning active methodologies in raising awareness towards healthy habits, and Healthy habits: feeding and physical exercising. They recognize healthy habits and practice it in their routine, it was detected that 16% are overweight, do not exercise regularly, consider their food, leisure, sleeping patterns and self-image to be adequate.

Conclusion: The use of active methodologies may unfold new possibilities towards healthy habits practices.

Key words

Habits, Students, Nursing education, Nursing

1 Introduction

Nowadays, teaching and learning process have been guided by the changes of globalized education. In this respect, education in nursing also underwent changes in the ways of teaching and learning to care. According to educator Paulo Freire (2006) the process of learning may hold two possibilities: a traditional one and another changer-problematic [1], where both look for improvement in the student learning process.

Therefore, educational technologies need to compose an universe of meanings and paths, thus active teaching methodologies allow learning to learn, ensure learning by doing and establish democratic relationships within teaching and service rendering institutions, taking into consideration students subject of the teaching-learning process and citizens [2]. These methodologies allow students a learning that will raise awareness towards the search of knowledge and at the same time hold an important role in their lives, especially so that they can take on their daily paths.

In the academic context, observed in the study of Kestenberg et al [3] when the student enlarges self-awareness and is able to recognize the singularity of the other, he is becoming abler to understand the human dimension of Nursing care. However, it is important to note that in order to take care of the other, the nurse should be healthy. In this perspective, health in the worldwide morbidity-mortality scenario has changed in the last few years, considering the change of the epidemiological profile of diseases. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) [4], "4.9 million people die every year from tobacco consumption, 2.6 million for being overweight or obese, 4.4 million from high cholesterol total levels and 7.1 million from high blood pressure", as it also "considers that lack of physical activity is related to at least three of these factors: overweightness and obesity, high cholesterol total levels and blood pressure [5]."

In order to contribute in the process of care and maintenance of people's health integrity, Brazil, through the General Coordination of Food and Nutrition Policy (CGPAN), and the Department of Basic Attention/Health Attention Secretariat at the Ministry of Health implements direct action regarding aspects linked to food and nutrition of all Brazilian citizens; this programme aims at ensuring quality of food consumed in the Country, as well as the "promotion of healthy eating practices and the prevention and control of nutritional disturbances as well as the stimuli to inter-sectorial actions that will allow universal access to food [5]. "

The concern of people's health, as well as the maintenance of healthy habits in life includes, amongst other issues, special attention to proper feeding, regular physical exercises, as these habits help prevent overweightness and obesity.

In this study, the ruling question is: how does the use of active methodology of teaching learning have influenced raising awareness towards healthy habits of nursing students? From which the following objective was raised: to identify how the use of active methodology may influence healthy habits in nursing students.

2 Methods

Assistential Convergent Research (ACR), described by Trentini and Paim (2004) [7] as a research that does not propose itself to generalizations, but it is conduced to find realities, to solve specific problems or to introduce innovations in specific situations, under certain context of assistential practice. It keeps, throughout its entire process, a close relationship with the social situation, with the intention of finding solutions for problems, in making changes and in introducing innovations; therefore, this kind of research is compromised with the improved social context it researches. According to the authors, ACR is characterized by distinct phases: Conception Phase; Instrumentation Phase; Analysis Phase and Interpretation Phase. One of ACR's characteristic is that the theme of research needs to emerge from the researcher daily professional practice and, obviously then, the problem situation is practical [7].

The study was developed with 43 students, 18 to 28 years old, from the Nursing Graduation Course, at a Federal University in Southern Brazil. Meetings were held with students; data were collected through a semi-structured tool with questions referring to healthy life habits, during May 15th to July 15th, 2008 and each meeting lasted approximately two hours.

Data were organized into categories according to Bardin [8] and analysed according to referential from the World Health Organization, Brazil's Ministry of Health, as well as literature released in the area.

Resolution Nr. 196/96 from Brazil's National Council - which deals with research in humans being, preserving anonymity of participants – was followed.

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3 Results

3.1 Characterization of nursing students from the study

In order to understand how the use of teaching active methodologies influenced healthy life habits of participants' of this study, it was important to find out their life habits. To know why and how people adopt a certain life style might be a good strategy to determine adequate and more convicing measures which will contribute towards change of a certain situation [9].

Regarding academic activities, all participants affirmed to study everyday, from the 43 interviewed students, 37% work and study and 63% study only.

To arrive at University, 37% of the participants said to walk; 57% make use of public transportation; 20% use a car as transportation means. As to housing, 63% of students live with their respective families; 14% live by themselves; 8.5% share a place with friends and 8.5% share a place with others (husband, uncle/ants, godparents).

When asked about their routine, regarding self-care, most of them try to do activities such as: leisure-time, family, friends, healthy eating, water intake, personal and mental hygiene, studying and sleep, although not all of them frequently and regularly.

Another aspect related as healthy habits is happiness to life, and when asked if they were happy with themselves, 43% answered to be satisfied; 17% answered to be unfulfilled and 40% answered that only at times they are happy with themselves.

A study developed with nursing students in Brazil mentions that some factors favour life quality within university context, such as friendships established with classmates, food provided at reasonable price, participation of activities in sports centres, easy access to the university and its infrastructure [10].

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE [11] healthy habits envisage several daily behaviours such as: proper feeding, self-medication care, hygiene, proper and regular sleep, regular exercising. Being happy, amongst these habits, is considered as important, as it shows who tries to preserve a life style as well as self-esteem and self-image.

When measuring the BMI (Body Mass Indicator) of participants, 16% of them were overweight according to BMI classification by the WHO [12], showing overweight values of 25 to 29.9.

From these data, it is important to note the percentage of overweighed young people, as according to researches carried out in Brazil, by the IBGE [11] the number of overweight boys and young men, 10 to 19 years-old, increased from 3.7% (1974-75) to 21.7% (2008-09), whereas girls and young women, the overweight ratio increased from 7.6% to 19.4%. Within this panorama, the Southern region of Brazil is the region presenting the highest overweight percentages: 15.9% for males and 19.6% for females.

A study undertaken by Ahmed (2010, online) shows that 80% of overweight teenagers, 10 to 14 years old, run the risk of becoming overweighed adults, comparing to 25% overweight pre-scholar children (under 5 years-old) and 50% of 6 to 9 years old overweight. Therefore, infant and teenage obesity has been related to increased adult mortality [13].

The World Health Organisation warns that severe dimensions will take place, as the number of cases will practically double during the period 1995-2025, and from available data, it is projected that in 2030 levels of obesity could be as high

as to represent 50 to 80% in the United States of America, and 30 to 40% in Australia, England and Mauritius, as well as over 20% in some developing countries [13].

From this characterization, one may note that health habits of these students need to be observed, as with time the associated factors to these habits can result in consequences to health.

3.2 Contribution of active methodologies in teaching learning in raising awareness towards healthy habits

Ahmad (2010) describes in their study that in view increased obesity indexes in the world, the World Health Organization, together with Non-Governmental Organizations covering countries like China, Japan, Chile, Australia, Brazil, USA, Canada and Europe, created a task-force to develop prevention and management actions for this global epidemy [13].

Through active methodologies, strategies were searched to involve students so that they could express and reflect about their daily habits. Students needed to be creative during the proposed activities and understood that learning can be fun, allowing sharing moments of dialogue and learning, holding their life story as a source of inspiration. Some responses indicated that the use of active methodology in the meetings were a way of raising awareness: (...) these were relaxed moments, I always tried to keep healthy habits and after the meetings I carried on with them and even harder (M).

(...) the meetings were really pleasant and helped me think on my life habits, since as nurses, we think more of others and forget about ourselves (G).

Teaching and learning methodologies provided students with a reflection area where it was possible to express their ideas and opinions, and, perhaps provided a fertile environment as well as to review their daily life habits attitudes. A study developed in Southern Brazil shows that the use of active methodologies applied in the teaching learning process allows for the reflection of different possibilities of conducting this process and it also presents ways to approach themes developed in the classroom, enabling greater closeness between students and teachers where all take part in the process [13].

Therefore, if nursing aims at having healthy professionals taking care with quality, it needs to re-think teaching strategies that will open up dialogue, following the perspective of moments like the ones developed in this study take place frequently in teaching institutions.

After the meeting to raise awareness and care, students individually reflected on their life style: (...) these meetings made me analyse the life style I was carrying and to realize that there was no use knowing how to take care of oneself without putting it into action (P.) (...) the meeting allowed me to better analyse the way I take care of myself. I see that today it doesn't make a difference but in the future it might contribute towards having some diseases. Of course that, especially in the profession we want to follow, taking care of one is necessary to be able to take care of the other. And, taking care of oneself starts with healthy habits (A).

From the statements above, it can be noticed that these moments also allowed for a group social support network, as, by observing the difficulty of the other, the student reflected about his/her own life. According to a study developed by Canesqui and Barsaglini, social support may be understood as a kind of help rendering that lays, in one hand in interchanges, obligations and reciprocity patterns amongst individuals, groups, families and institutions, carrying meaning to all actors involved, in their respective daily experience and contexts, which can give, receive and return support, influence and are influenced by economic, social, political and cultural changes that affect modern societies transformations [14]. By giving students a moment of reflection, it can be perceived that they hold an understanding of their healthy habits, but to talk of daily facts is as important as to learn how to be a nurse. In this sense, training of a nurse in the university context needs to be besides a space of learning of content, a space that allows students and teachers moments to share knowledge and to exchange experiences, creating an environment of social support.

Ashby et al (2012) developed a study on healthy habits of Australian health professionals, and identified that there are factors that can act as barriers in professional practice, as well as methods that can facilitate its practice. These methods developed by health professions by caring and guiding patients about overweight were affected by factors like education, personal characteristics, organizational support available, taking into consideration in the study that personal and professional initiatives are needed in order to implement a guiding programme to overweight patients, firstly preparing the professionals who will act in these actions so that they can effectively contribute towards their improved life style [14].

3.3 Healthy habits: food and physical exercise

During the raising awareness and care meetings, students reported their life habits, and when approaching the issue of healthy eating some of them self-evaluated and others justified their behaviour to the group, showing in a light manner that they took care of their food diet: (...) we try to eat well most of the time when there it time, M. and I we got to the gym everyday… and R. and C. do yoga (F). (...) we work hard and arrive home late and when I am tired to prepare a healthy meal, but I eat lots of fruit...(C). (...) the girls from my group and I, we exercise… and we try to eat but sometimes we can't… we rush too much. Well, today I had ice-cream before coming here…(R).

Eating habits may vary from person to person, however these students emphasize that the daily demand complicates the maintenance of a balanced and healthy diet. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, a proper eating standard is one supplying biological and social needs of individuals, in line with different life stages. It is convenient to point out that food must be physically and financially accessible, wholesome, varied, colourful, balanced and safe as to sanitary aspects. According to the same Brazilian document, eating habits need to respect the cultural diversity of each of the country's region, making the best use of regional healthy food (like vegetables and fruits), taking into consideration behavioural and affective aspects related to eating habits6.

In the statements below we can gather that eating habits are different amongst the participants. For some, food means pleasure and to others is linked to health maintenance. (...) Food means great satisfaction to me. (A.) (...) let's say that healthy is no only eating salad and diet food, drinking lots of water, but also exercising and we also have to have fun, to go out with the boyfriend, to eat chocolate… Actually, we ended up discussing in group that any overdoing is harmful, right? (R.) (...) I try to take care of what I eat, I have lots of fruit and vegetables, and small portions. Thus I can control my weight. (S.) (...) By taking care of eating I try to eat well sometimes [...] but when I can't I am careful as to eating fat, but I don't skip meals. (P.)

The Brazilian Ministry of Health recognizes that eating involves a set of values and meanings, belonging to a cultural, psychological, social and symbolic order and that the relationship between food and pleasure is rather close. Thus, it is indispensable that an eating routine is created [15].

Regarding physical exercise habits, it was noted that the associating academic routine of students interviewed with physical exercises was difficult to take place, given the highly demanded academic activities under a University context, justifying the difficulty of exercising. (...) I go to the gym but for not more than two months, I have a lot to read and academic works to do, so I only take care when I am feeling heavy. (A.) (...) I used to exercise, but I quit a year ago when I started studying more at the course… I used to run an hour a day, but it is really impossible now (S.) (...) to (sometimes) exercise (walking), yoga (I quit recently but hope to go back)… when the stage of the course is calmer (E.)

In a study developed with students in Brazil by Kremer et al, on exercising, it revealed that this practice can be linked to several objectives, which change according to each individual, but it highlights that exercising serves as a health modulation tool, searching to balance of the body's functions [5].

Even with the recognition of the social, psychological and physiological benefits of physical activities, many people claim not being able to exercise. The most frequent causes to deny such practice are lack of time, little information of its benefits

and on how to exercise, lack of adequate and convenient facilities, general fatigue related to long working journeys16. These findings described by Nahas meet the proposal for greater physical activities recommended by the Health Promotion policies from the Brazilian Ministry of Health [17].

Thus, from the participants' statements, it is observed that an understanding is held as to issues related to the practice of physical activities, however it is also observed that it is rather difficult to incorporate some habits on their daily routines, considering that exercising is any body movement with energetic loss above resting levels. It is important to highlight that "physical exercise represents one manner of planned, systematised and repetitive physical activity" [16].

Findings from Franca and Colares [18] research, related to university students health habits at the beginning and end of the course, show that issues related to weight were the highest interest amongst students at the end of the course, to keep or loose weight, and exercising was the most stated action by the students to reach these results. It was concluded then being possible that the University environment together with some knowledge on health have stimulated students to exercise, although this result might also be related to a society tendency in general.

The above mention authors also state in their studies that young people tend to adopt unhealthy measures, and that other investigations show health measures incorporated during teenage and youth years can significantly impact towards future diseases. Therefore, habits at this stage (young adults) do not seem to be of great relevance, however the discussion and awareness towards the promotion of health is of extreme importance, as this moment of academic life might signify a possibility to change habits, including those regarding exercising.

In the University context, it is important that the teaching institution is aware of its not only technical but also sociocultural education role for the nursing students, and how this will reflect in the beginning of their professional career. To foster strategies that will promote healthy habits action, through the development of factors that will favour such practice, must be encouraged amongst the institution's teachers, students and staff in general, aiming at improving the conditions of facing the future's uncertainties [10].

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that these students may exercise reflection as a support measure towards the organization of their daily habits, as to incorporate them in their lives, and that the creation of healthy habits routine might signify just a great teaching towards their professional development as any academic activity.

Healthy habits are also related to self-esteem, self-image and the way students of this study lead their daily lives, however some personal potential and weakness might interfere in the ways they perceive themselves in the world. (...) to take care of the body, to exercise [...] to make love... (F.) (...) To take care of the body with alternative therapies… Massages… Sports… It is also deem important to have leisure time, to exercise, to travel a lot, to meet new people, to make friends. (B.) (...) to do what we like…To talk to friends, to be with the family, to date. (Z.). (...) to have good self-esteem, to have fun, to have sex, to be able to sleep well. (J.)(...) we also think it is important to take care of self-esteem and self-image (…). What is to take care of self-esteem? It's to live well with ourselves, to be happy and satisfied with ourselves. (M).

To promote relaxation, release of tension, increased self-assurance, self-esteem and well-being, improved sleeping patterns and increased resistance to opportunistic diseases were aspects related to university's life favourable factors prevalence [10].

According to a study developed by Mosquera and Stobäus [19] self-image is kind of an organization of the person itself, composed of a part that is more real and a more subjective one, converting into a determinant and meaningful form in order to be able to understand the environment in which it lives, trying to understand meanings previously attributed to the environment, which later becomes his/hers. Therefore, taking care of its own self-image might be considered as a manner of having good health habits, as one looks to take care of oneself [20].

It is known that changing a life style is not an easy task, but it is important to note that they may be caused by stimuli, that is, by being aware. Likewise, one of the nurse's role is to raise awareness of people towards health and a healthy living [21].

This study contributes to the pedagogical practice of nursing in order to demonstrate that this academic is vulnerable to a number of problems by his health in the period that remains in the University. Don't have careful now with your health and quality of life, in especially with sleep and rest, diet, physical activity and recreation. It is believed that when investigating such situations of vulnerability of academics, as well as using teaching strategies that allow their reflection on your life can help you in self-care. The students will be furthermore professionals health, that will certainly working with these issues in their daily and also need to be prepared.

4 Conclusion

It was shown in this study that the use of assistential convergent research may contribute for the interventions of life habits of students, allowing for reflections on their daily routine and stimulating improved eating habits, sleeping patterns, exercising, as well as mental health, towards happiness as described by them.

The use of active methodologies helps the student to propose open discussion ways, where they can manifest themselves and also reflect about their lives, resizing habits considered as non healthy and substituting them by health ones.

Overweight and obesity impact on people's lives is an inevitable reality, however there are educational strategies that can minimize their negative influence. And clearly, in nursing professional's health they can generate losses in their vital cycle and may hamper their work strength. This study presents contributions for new reflections on the reality of the Nursing students, and subsidies to innovate teaching and learning strategies to raise awareness of future professionals in the area. Therefore, it is understood that discussion with future nursing professionals to encourage healthy habits will surely be beneficial to their lives.

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