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## ORIGINAL PAPER

### The Use of Video Role Play for Teaching Therapeutic Communication Skills

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#### Abstract

**Background:** Effective Communication is a fundamental skill for practice across health care settings and is a component of undergraduate nursing programs around the world. Resource materials appropriate for the teaching of communication in an Asian context are lacking.

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to evaluate the usefulness of a self-developed video using role play in facilitating teaching and learning associated with therapeutic communication.

**Methods:** Videos were produced which demonstrated the fundamental communication skills of listening, understanding, exploring and comforting/supporting, using role play. These were shown to Year 1 nursing students in tutorials over four weeks. Their usefulness was evaluated using a self-developed questionnaire. Among 74 questionnaires distributed at the end of the fourth tutorial, 72 were returned, with a 97% response rate.

**Results:** Most students agreed that the video clips provided useful examples for role-playing the communication skills (89%), helped trigger them to perform role-playing (74%), were useful to improve understanding of different communication skills (93%) and helped them learn from other students' role-playing performance (87%). Overall impression of using the videos in the tutorial teaching was very useful (27%) and useful (68%).

**Conclusions:** Most students valued the videos developed purposely for teaching therapeutic communication and recommended that the videos be used in the future. Using video role plays facilitated the teaching and learning process and enhanced undergraduate nursing students' understanding and application of communication skills. More video clips will be developed in the future, with improved quality and with a broader range of health care communication scenarios demonstrated in order to be used more widely.

**Keywords:** Therapeutic communication, teaching and learning, video, role play, students

## Background

Today all health care organisations face the challenge of accommodating increasingly diverse patient populations, making effective communication by nurses a critical aspect in the provision of safe, quality patient care (Bowles et al., 2001; Raica, 2009). The professional nurse, working from a person-centred approach to nursing care recognises the centrality of effective communication in the development of therapeutic relationships with their clients (Higgs, McAllister, and Sefton, 2008). Using communication to achieve positive outcomes for clients can lead to greater job satisfaction, yet the development of such skills takes time, commitment and practice on the part of the nurse (McGilton et al., 2006). Therefore, it is very important to provide content and practice opportunities on therapeutic communication to nursing students, prior to their first clinical practice experience.

A review of the literature on communications skills training (Chant et al., 2002) identified a broad range of teaching strategies that are used in undergraduate nursing education, including experiential techniques, simulation using standardised patients, video, lectures, drama workshops and group work. However, research investigating how, and how well, communication skills are taught in undergraduate nursing programs has received little attention (Chant et al., 2002) and the best method for developing communication skills in nursing students has not been established (Zavertnik, Huff, and Munro, 2010).

Using simulation or role play to practice patient-nurse communication skills has been shown to be more successful than lecture-based teaching methods in improving student's communication skills (Lane and Rollnick, 2007). Role play builds competence in communications through integrating students' knowledge, skills and attitudes (Askeland, 2003) while involving them intellectually, emotionally and behaviourally in the learning process (Christiansen and Jensen, 2008). Communication role play allows student nurses to rehearse real life clinical situations in which they can practice therapeutic nursing interventions, improvise and test behaviours and explore their own feelings and responses in a safe environment (Shearer and Davidhizar, 2003). Headly (2007)

showed that such practice can lead to better performance in real life communication with patients.

The effectiveness of communication skills training using role play, with and without simulated or standardized patients, has been investigated in a number of studies. Specific skills development resulting from such training includes improvement in gathering information, imparting information and clarifying goals and expectations (Zavertnik, Huff, and Munro, 2010) and reduced verbal dominance, greater use of open-ended questions, more sensitive responses to patients' emotions and increase in shared problem solving (Roter et al. 2004). Studies comparing simulation using standardized patients and role-play in the acquisition of communication skills found no difference in outcomes between the two approaches (Papadakis et al., 1997; Lane and Rollnick, 2007). Given the relative expense of training and employing standardized patients, role-play is considered to be the more cost effective of the two teaching strategies.

Faculty who have responsibility for preparing nursing students in the skills of therapeutic communication need to keep abreast of new approaches that facilitate such skill development (Tait et al., 2008; Zavertnik, Huff, and Munro, 2010). Video and computer assisted learning are two technologies increasingly being used in teaching of communication and other skills for clinical practice (Brown et al., 2009; McConville and Lane, 2006) and role play, using simulated patients, is commonly employed as a teaching-learning technique in education programs. In an early study Napholz and McCanse (1994) found video role play enabled undergraduate nursing students to achieve therapeutic communication skills more quickly. McConville and Lane (2006) developed a series of on-line video clips using role play and simulation to teach students to communicate comfortably and effectively in challenging situations. Critical thinking skills (Chau et al., 2001), management of critical care patients (Tait et al., 2008) and working with older people (Edwards et al., 2008) have all been successfully taught in undergraduate nursing programs using video and on-line role play as a strategy.

Role play is an effective technique for teaching communication skills to health care students and video is a useful technique for engaging students

with role play scenarios and the method of role play (McConville and Lane, 2006; Headly, 2007). In a preliminary evaluation of the use of role play to teach therapeutic communication, He (2008) reported that students enjoyed this method of learning and regarded role-play as being the most favoured method. However, some students stated that it was difficult for them to come up with role-play scripts or to role-play the scenarios, due to unfamiliar context or interpersonal inexperience. A search of available resources revealed there were no contextually appropriate instructional videos demonstrating core communication skills using role play.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the usefulness of a self-developed video using role play in facilitating teaching and learning associated with therapeutic communication. The research questions were as follows:

1. What was the students' opinion of the quality, content and relevance of the videos?
2. What was the students' opinion of the usefulness of these videos in learning the skills of therapeutic communication?
3. What recommendations did the students have for the use of these videos in the future and for their further development?

## Method

### Development of the Videos and Use of These Videos in the Tutorials

Communication scenarios reflecting a variety of culturally relevant interactions between nurses and patient/family members were written by the teaching team, with each scenario focused on one of four core communication skills, namely listening, understanding, exploring and comforting/supporting (Stein-Parbury, 2005). This was an exploratory study, and to keep costs of production to a minimum, voluntary students were asked to role-play the scenarios, which were recorded between May and June 2008. The editing of the video clips was completed in August 2008.

Tutors involved in teaching the communication subject were briefed on the use of the videos and provided with detailed guidelines on how to use each video to facilitate student discussion and role play. The videos were shown to the students in four consecutive communication tutorial classes between

February and March 2009. Each viewing was followed by discussion of the communication skills used in the video and then students were required to develop and present their own role-play scenarios, using the demonstrated communication skills.

### Questionnaire Development

A descriptive, exploratory questionnaire design was used. The questionnaire was designed to determine students' opinions of the usefulness of the video role play for enhancing their learning of communication skills. Development of the questionnaire was guided by the review of literature and expert knowledge. Experienced academics were asked to review the questions and revisions were made based on their recommendations.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of four sections. Section 1 asked about quality, content and relevance of the videos; section 2 evaluated students' perceptions of improvement in skill and confidence; section 3 focused on students' recommendations for future use of the videos; and section 4 was an open-ended question asking for suggestions on improving the videos. The answers to Sections 1, 2 and 3 were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". Chronbach's alpha coefficient was used to analyse the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The alpha values for sections 1 2 and 3 were 0.93, 0.87 and 0.77 respectively, which indicated moderate to strong internal consistency of the questionnaire (Burns and Grove, 2005).

### Sample Selection

A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants for this study. All first-year students of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing programme at the XXX University who were enrolled in the Communication subject were invited to participate in this study. Although enrolment in the subject and attendance at the tutorial classes was compulsory, participation in the study (completion of questionnaire) was not.

### Data Collection

Students were shown the videos in their scheduled tutorial classes and participated in the tutorial activities based on the video role plays over a four week period. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire following viewing of all four video

role play clips. Seventy-four questionnaires were distributed and 72 were returned, giving a response rate of 97%. All returned questionnaire were included in the final analysis.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study was approved by the university Institutional Review Board. All participants were informed at the beginning of the semester and before starting the survey that their participation was voluntary and that they could change their mind at any time while completing the questionnaire. Students were told not to write their name and student ID number on the questionnaire and that all answers and comments would be kept confidential. Participants’ verbal informed consent was obtained.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analysed using SPSS Version 18.0. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse results in Sections 1, 2 and 3 while the open-ended question in section 4 was analysed using content analysis.

**Results**

**Description of the Participants**

All participants were year one nursing students who had completed secondary school education. The students’ age ranged from 19 to 26 years (mean = 20, SD = 1.3). Sixty-five (90%) of them were female. Students had limited clinical experience having completed only a two-week community-based clinical attachment at the end of the previous semester.

**Students’ Evaluation of the Content, Quality and Relevance of the Videos**

As shown in Table 1, most of the students (96%) strongly agreed/agreed that the content of the videos was related to the theoretical knowledge taught in the lectures with greater than 95% of students strongly agreeing/agreeing that the scenarios reflected the communication concepts of listening, understanding, exploring and comforting, supporting and enabling. In terms of quality, 89% of the students strongly agreed/agreed that the picture quality was good.

**Table 1 Students’ evaluation on the quality, contents and relevance of the videos (n = 72)**

Evaluation of the videos	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)
The volume and sound quality are appropriate.	14(19)	40(56)	9(13)	9 (12)	-
The picture/image quality is good.	15(21)	49(68)	7(10)	1(1)	-
The length of the videos is appropriate.	15(21)	48(67)	9(12)	-	-
The pace of the role-playing is appropriate.	14(19)	52(72)	5(7)	1(1)	-
Language is used appropriately.	13(18)	54(75)	5(7)	-	-
Narration is effective and appropriate (e.g. pacing, clarity).	12 (17)	44(61)	12 (17)	4(5)	-
The contents of the videos are closely related to the theoretical knowledge taught in the lectures.	25(35)	44(61)	2(3)	1 (1)	-
The scenarios reflect the concepts of communication skills:					
listening	25(35)	44(61)	3(4)	-	-
understanding	23(32)	46(64)	3(4)	2(3)	-
exploring	20(28)	48(67)	2(3)	1(1)	-
comforting, supporting and enabling	22(31)	47(65)	2(3)	-	-

**Students’ Evaluation of Using the Videos in Therapeutic Communication Tutorials**      **Students’ Recommendations for Further Development and Future Use of the Videos**

Overall, students found using the videos to be very useful (27%) or useful (68%). Table 2 shows that a majority of students found the videos improved their understanding of the communication skills they were learning to use (93% strongly agreed/agreed). Eighty nine percent of the students strongly agreed/agreed that the videos provided useful examples for role-playing of communication skills and 74% stated that the videos were a useful trigger for their own role playing. Students also felt that the videos helped them learn from other students’ role playing (87% strongly agreed/agreed).

As shown in Table 3, most of the students suggested that these videos be used in future teaching in therapeutic communication (90%). The majority of students (96%) suggested that more video clips need to be developed in the future to show the use of different communication skills in different nursing contexts.

Analysis of open-ended questions revealed that two-thirds of the students (n= 49, 68%) thought there was no need to revise the videos as they considered them to be ‘good, clear, understandable, relevant, concise, reflecting communication skills’.

**Table 2 Students’ evaluation on using videos in teaching Therapeutic Communication tutorials (n = 72)**

Evaluation of using the videos in Teaching Therapeutic communication tutorials	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)
The videos provide useful examples for role-playing the communication skills.	21(29)	43 (60)	8(11)	-	-
The videos help trigger me to perform role-playing using different communication skills.	14(20)	39(54)	16(22)	3(4)	-
The videos are useful to improve my understanding of different communication skills.	22(31)	45(62)	5(7)	-	-
The videos help me to learn from other students’ role-playing performance.	16(22)	47(65)	8(11)	1(1)	-
The role of the tutorial tutor on guiding students to make use of the videos is very important.	20(28)	43(60)	9(12)	-	-
My overall impression of using the videos in Therapeutic Communication tutorials teaching is very useful.	19 (27)	49(68)	1(1)	3(4)	-

**Table 3 Students’ recommendation on the use of videos and further development (n = 72)**

Recommendations	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)
I suggest the videos be uploaded to module website so that students can watch them again at their convenience.	21(29)	37(51)	10(14)	4(6)	-
I suggest the teacher use these videos in teaching Therapeutic Communication tutorials in the future.	22(30)	43(60)	5(7)	2(3)	-
I recommend the videos be used by other institutions, e.g. nursing schools, hospitals.	11(15)	35(49)	18(25)	1(1)	-
More videos need to be developed in the future to show the use of different communication skills in different nursing contexts.	20(28)	49(68)	3(4)	-	-

About one-third of the students (n = 23, 32%) suggested the videos needed to be improved in the areas of (i) sound quality; (ii) updated content, e.g. 'cover a wider aspect and show more examples'; and (iii) choosing better actors/actresses.

### Discussion

This exploratory study evaluated the usefulness of video role plays in teaching and learning therapeutic communication in an undergraduate nursing program in Singapore. A series of short video role plays were developed for the purpose of teaching communication skills. These were introduced to first year nursing students in scheduled tutorial classes of a therapeutic communication module and then evaluated using questionnaire.

This study demonstrated that using video role play is an effective tool for teaching communication skills to undergraduate nursing students. The combination of first seeing demonstration of role play in the videos and then having opportunity to perform role play was considered by students to be useful for developing their communication skills in the areas of listening, understanding, exploring and comforting/supporting. The video role plays showed both appropriate and inappropriate use of each of these four communication skills, which also helped students to understand how and when to apply each skill in their role playing practice. Experiential learning is considered to greatly facilitate skills development, such as communication, and it is thought to be most effective when learning occurs in all four domains of feeling, thinking, doing and watching (Nestel and Tierney, 2007; Ahsen et al., 2010). Our study's approach to using video role play gave students the opportunity to learn on the feeling-thinking-watching levels before the feeling-thinking-doing learning was required of them and this may have contributed to the positivity with which the video role plays were received by the students.

In learning to communicate with patients students typically want to know what to say to patients and how they should say it (Kotecki, 2002). While educators can provide students with lists of questions and guides for use in 'routine' interviewing and patient communication, such questions and guides are of little use in more emotionally charged and challenging situations

(Headly, 2007). Educators cannot prepare students with the 'right' words to use in every given situation because the patient-health professional encounter is so individualized, thus many graduates engage in difficult discussions with patients and their loved ones completely unrehearsed. Students can, however, be prepared with communication skills such as listening, exploring, understanding and comforting/supporting, and, through role play scenarios that mirror real clinical situations, learn how and when to apply these skills (Lane and Rollnick, 2007; Christiansen and Jensen, 2008).

Research has previously demonstrated the value of role play for teaching communication in general (Kruijver et al., 2001; Lane and Rollnick, 2007; Christiansen and Jensen 2008), for teaching communication with particular patient groups (eg cancer patients) (Back et al., 2003; Baer et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2009) and for teaching and learning specific communication skills such as counseling (Ahsen et al., 2010), gathering and imparting information (Zavertnik, Huff, and Munro, 2010) and active listening (McGilton et al., 2006). While the findings of this study show that role play was a useful teaching/learning tool for developing students' understanding of different communication skills the study also shows that there is a need for further development and investigation of the use of culturally appropriate video role play in meeting the specific communication learning needs of Asian nursing students.

While the overall response to the video role plays was positive and students recommended their continued use and wider dissemination, the participant's suggestions for improvement in sound quality, content and acting need to be considered before the videos can be used more widely.

### Conclusion

Most students valued the videos developed purposely for teaching therapeutic communication and recommended that the videos be used in the future. Using video role plays facilitated the teaching and learning process and enhanced undergraduate nursing students' understanding and application of communication skills. More video clips will be developed in the future, with improved quality and with a broader range of health care communication scenarios demonstrated in order to be used more widely.

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