

Article 5

LEARNING THROUGH DRAMA IN THE FIELD OF GLOBAL NURSING

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Abstract

This article explores how nurses (nurse educators, and doctoral and masters students) from three countries experienced learning through drama in the field of nursing education. In this era of internationalisation, there is an urgent need to prepare nurses with global perspectives. This qualitative study builds on the fourteen participants' involvement in a drama workshop and their related reflective journals, which were the subject of a quality content analysis. Two categories and five sub-categories emerged in the analysis of the participants' journals. This study has implications for nursing education and curriculum activities in nursing programs related to the preparation of nurses with a global perspective using drama as core pedagogy. Through drama, participants can access their lifeworlds and share them with one another. Drama makes the experience-based knowledge visible, and in addition develops knowledge about a certain topic depending on the group's background and contribution.

Keywords

Applied drama/theatre; drama; global nursing; international education; international exchange; learning

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Introduction

The focus of this paper is on the use of drama as a core pedagogy for intercultural dialogue in nursing education, a field that continues to respond to the demand for nurses whose training includes a global perspective in this era of internationalisation. The number of international nursing exchange programs is increasing, providing more opportunities for intercultural dialogue. Universities in Jordan and Sweden, for example, have had a long history of international collaboration through several exchange programs for teachers, nursing students and practising nurses since the mid-1990s (Halabi, Majali et al. 2011; Lepp, Halabi and Määttä 2011; Määttä and Lepp 2010). In addition to a cultural exchange component, these projects included programs that covered nursing management, practice and education. In the field of nursing education, innovative teaching and learning methods that focus on learner-centered rather than teacher-centered approaches – such as educational drama – were found to be of significant interest to all exchange parties (Halabi, Abdalrahim et al. 2011).

Nursing education has a strong theoretical and clinical practice base; however, it shows limited integration of these aspects within the social context. Integrating theoretical knowledge and clinical practice provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of professional nursing practice (Noone 2009). Currently, nursing practice takes place in multicultural societies, and therefore encompasses important and diverse cultural perspectives. The way in which nurses respond to this diversity with sensitivity and understanding remains an important issue. Cultural competence reflects upon the socio-cultural, historical and political context in which it was developed (Jirwe et al. 2009). Duffy (2001) encourages nurses to avoid stereotypical thinking and action in intercultural encounters. Becoming culturally competent is a continuing process, which initially is reliant on developing awareness of the self – either as an individual or organisation – and one's own culturally firm values, beliefs and traditions (McGee and Johnson 2004). According to Bennet, intercultural sensitivity is a continuing journey through stages from ethnocentrism towards ethnorelativism. Ethnocentrism consists of the stages of denial, defence and minimisation, which prevent the development of a global perspective on one's own education and experiences. In contrast, ethnorelativism consists also of three stages, which are acceptance, adaptation and integration. These stages characterise the learner's increasing acknowledgement of, and tuning into, intercultural differences (Bennet 1993).

Life in the globalised world presents challenges in communication, and brings nearly everyone into contact with people of other cultures who speak a variety of languages. Helping people exchange perceptions, ideas and feelings in this context requires a strong teaching methodology (Robatjazi 2008). How can we best prepare nurses to practise effectively within multicultural societies that offer a diversity of cultural perspectives? Previous studies have suggested that nursing education should be altered to support more global awareness of cultures, world-views, and ethnic diversity (Davidhizar, Dowd and Giger 1998; Davidhizar and Shearer 2005; Freda, 1998). International education projects in nursing offer excellent possibilities for multicultural healthcare workforces to achieve intercultural competence (Koskinen et al. 2004).

Background

The epistemological foundation for this study is based upon the concept of a lifeworld perspective, one that describes and elucidates the lived world in a way that develops our understanding of human beings and the human experience (Dahlberg 2003, 2008).

The lifeworld concept was first described by Husserl (1954) as a central theme in phenomenology and later in hermeneutics. Lifeworld is defined as the world of our lived experiences and the world of our natural everyday life (Bengtsson 2005; van Manen 1990). Lifeworld theory is about human beings and their existence in the world. We exist and coexist in a context or a world of different cultures, history and traditions. Another theme of lifeworld theory is that existence is a bodily experience. That is, we are our bodies, and we experience and perceive others and our various lifeworlds through bodily experiences (embodied and lived). Merleau-Ponty (1968) highlights developing knowledge as an embodied process where the body is the dwelling place of human beings' existence in the world.

To exist with others also means sharing each other's lifeworlds. Togetherness constitutes meaning in our lives (Dahlberg et al. 2008). We belong to the same world, but we are at the same time in different worlds. Despite our uniqueness and varied histories, culture and lifeworlds, we nonetheless share a common world. Gadamer emphasises that to understand each other we have to bear in mind that we are always part of a history and traditions (Bengtsson 2005). One way to share each other's lifeworlds is to communicate, and therefore language becomes an essential tool – both verbal and non-verbal. Language provides access to others' lifeworlds, and helps us to both engage meaningfully and share experiences.

In this study, drama is used as the main language to communicate and share each other's lifeworlds. Drama includes group activity in imagined role-play, where the participants can learn to explore issues, events and

relationships. Drama can be described as the pedagogy of experiences (Bagshaw et al. 2007). Participants in drama must be willing to deal with issues not only on an intellectual level, but on the physical and emotional levels as well.

Drama activities can be understood in three phases: initiation, experiences and reflection. Initiation is the stage of preparation – for example, in role-play there is dramatic enrolment or rehearsal. The playing and the reflection together create the experience. Reflection may follow the drama or be interwoven within the drama itself. It may include group enactment, re-enactment or performance, but is nonetheless a crucial phase.

Learning arises from the experience itself, and also through the reflection related to that experience (Bagshaw et al. 2007). Reflection can be described as the ability to explore one's own actions, thoughts and feelings, and think purposefully to gain new insights, ideas and understanding (Newell 1992). For example, drama for reflective supervision in nursing education was found to be suitable for use in a holistic educational perspective (Ekebergh, Lepp and Dahlberg 2004). Another way to enhance reflection is to use reflective journaling, which is understood to contribute to achievement in higher education by providing insight into academic difficulties, changes in performance and improved student responsibility for learning (Patterson 1995). One outcome of using reflective journaling is the recognition that the exploration of the professional and personal self is both a cognitive and emotional process (Banker 2004; Hiemstra 2001; Kerka 2002). For example, Swedish and US nursing students found that journaling for reflection spurred them to reflect upon themselves, their transition and their profession. This study was unique in using journaling with nursing students from two different countries in a shared international experience (Lepp et al. 2002).

Learning in drama occurs by acting in fictional situations that create meaning in our inner imaginary worlds. However, feelings have to be connected to make teaching and learning effective. Drama means an approach to learning that integrates feelings, thoughts and actions. It is a mode of learning that involves participants' active identification with various roles and lived situations, and thus drama works with two worlds simultaneously. A central concept in the learning potential within drama is metaxis, or seeing from two worlds at the same time (Boal 1992). Human beings are in two social contexts at the same time – real life and dramatic playing – and therefore their perception of the world is dual (Bolton 1992). Furthermore, metaxis stands for an enhanced state of awareness and the double capacity to be in role and at the same time reflect on oneself in the role (Bolton 1984). To take a role and shift perspectives through changes of role occurs both in drama and in theatre, and is considered the basis for the development of empathy and understanding for others.

Aim

The aim of this study was to explore how nurses (nurse educators, and doctoral and masters' students) from three countries experienced learning through drama in the field of nursing education.

Method

The Project

This is a qualitative study, building on the participants' involvement in a drama workshop and their related reflective journals. Initially, the research team from Sweden wanted to create opportunities for international collaboration and learning about nursing. A long-term collaboration was already established between the three participating universities. An open letter of invitation was distributed to nurse educators, and doctoral and masters students, in the field of nursing education from the three participating universities to participate in a two-day program. Hence, in May 2008, an international, collaborative, interactive educational conference, called 'Drama and Learning Across Borders' (D-LAB) was born. Participants met in Sweden and participated in the two-day program. The first day of the program consisted of a drama workshop and the second day comprised research presentations and academic work involving further collaboration.

Context

The study was performed at the University of Borås, in western Sweden. The two other participating universities were the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan and the University of Witten/Herdecke in Germany. All universities had nursing programs at undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels.

Participants

The participants were all registered nurses (RNs). In addition, five were nursing teachers (faculty members and researchers), four were doctoral students and five were masters students. They were all within the fields of nursing and caring sciences related to a faculty of nursing at their respective universities. The participants, three males and eleven females, represented three countries: Germany (seven participants), Jordan (two) and Sweden (five). The average age was 43 (range 25–65 years). Although English was not their native language, all participants could speak, read and write in English.

The Drama Workshop

The drama workshop was conducted in a classroom cleared of tables – a large, open space that provided plenty of room for movement and performance. The workshop lasted for one day. It started with participants sitting in a circle (presentations and expectations were shared), followed by warm-up games, stories of participants' names and life histories (in pairs), and image theatre performances in groups related to themes such as caring, suffering, curiosity, anger and hope. The term 'forum-play' is used, as explained in the DRACON project (Bagshaw et al. 2007). Forum-play is inspired by Boal's (2000) Forum Theatre. In forum-play, situations are drawn from the participants' own stories and from their lifeworlds. For example, to discuss conflicts or ethical dilemmas in health care, the scenes are improvised and illustrated. Forum-play utilises an open-ended dramatised story to invite participants' reactions to change – for example, the process of the conflict – or to explore and possibly reduce it through various actions. The participants in this study responded positively to this model. Three forum-plays were performed, and the three situations from the forum-plays were used for further exploration and discussion as follows.

Situation 1

Conflict between a physician and a nurse about a patient in pain. The question for the nurses was how to convince the physician to give more pain relief to a patient in deep pain. The conflict related to inter-professional communication and difference in power related to hierarchical health care organisations where physicians traditionally have more status and power than nurses.

Situation 2

A teacher and a nursing student had a negative encounter. The student was disrespectful to the teacher during the class in front of other students. The questions raised were: How do you create a learning environment as a professional teacher and at the same time satisfy every student's need for attention? How should or could the teacher have responded instead of getting angry? And why did the teacher become upset in the first place? The conflict related to teacher–student relationships and negative interaction in the classroom.

Situation 3

A teacher and a student were complaining about the negative workplace environment at the director's office. The questions related to how to get your voice heard and your needs taken into consideration at work and in your studies. The conflict concerned relationships in a hierarchical organisation.

All three scenarios were recognised by all the participants as common situations that did happen in their countries as well.

Data Collection

Journaling was used as a method for data collection and as a pedagogical tool for reflection. Journaling can be explained as a form of diary, often handwritten, in the individual's authentic voice (Kerka 2002). Hence the participants were asked to reflect and write about their drama experiences directly after the workshop. The majority wrote in English and some in German. The German journals were translated by one of the researchers and a teacher who were fluent in the German language.

Data Analysis

All the journals from the fourteen participants were subjected to a quality content analysis (Graneheim and Lundman 2004). The first step was reading all the journals to get an overview of the data. Two of the authors then independently read each of the journals to get a comprehensive view of the data. The second step was to find meaning units, which were related to the participants' experiences in the workshop. The meaning units were then condensed to codes. Thereafter, two authors jointly compared their analyses of meaning units and codes by returning to the text across all the journals. From these analyses, some of the meaning units were rearranged and the categories were changed. Finally, two distinct categories and six sub-categories emerged from the journal data. These categories were then re-examined by the other three authors, who had assigned the codes, meaning units, sentences and quotations to the original categories.

Validity

Validity reflects the extent to which the findings represent the participants' conceptions and are not simply a construction made by the researchers. In addition, creating and adhering to an analytic procedure or a coding scheme will increase trustworthiness of the study (Graneheim and Lundman 2004). To ascertain inter-rater reliability, two of the authors conducted the main analysis and the three other authors tested this result by comparing the categories with the participants' statements with the first analysis. Agreement

between the two groups was unanimous. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), this is one way to increase validity.

Ethical Considerations

At the time of the study, ethical review was not required according to Swedish law. However, standard ethical principles were followed. The participants received full disclosure about the intended use of the data. The participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without explanation or consequences. Furthermore, they were assured that all data would be handled confidentially. All quotes from the participants are referred to by numbers (P1–P14) and not related to any country or gender, to avoid revealing information about the specific participant.

Results

Two categories and five sub-categories emerged in the analysis of the participants' journals (see Table 1); each of these categories and sub-categories is described below.

Table 2: Experiences of learning through drama

Category	Sub-category
Creating a learning environment	The role of the drama teacher A universal caring language in action
Opening doors	On a pedagogical level On a group level On a personal level

Category: Creating a Learning Environment

This category consisted of two sub-categories: the role of the drama teacher, and a universal nursing language, which covered statements related to how a learning environment is created and how to communicate in the field of nursing education.

Sub-category: The Role of the Drama Teacher

The role of the drama teacher, the facilitator or workshop leader is described as 'an engine' that creates a learning environment. Furthermore, the teacher also is considered an agent for raising questions that highlight the connections between theory and practice in the played situations. This helped the participants to integrate theory and practice. The teacher also had an important function in balancing humorous and serious subject-matter according to the participants. This role is about creating a mixture in learning, such as leading the group and giving time for independent learning, as one participant described it: 'It's important to have an experienced leader, which we had; if not, things could end up totally wrong, and the connection to theory can be lost.' (P1) Although there were intimate encounters, the structure was light: 'Lively, personal, even intimate encounters between participants, but in the same time astonishingly light structure, especially in respect to the time limitations.' (P9) The drama was also described as having a non-conventional structure that created a good learning environment.

Sub-category: A Universal Caring Language in Action

This sub-category describes drama as going beyond verbal languages by using body language and non-verbal communication in action. Drama is experienced as a universal language, as it goes beyond nationality. The participants stated that no specific cultural differences that arose surprised the group. It was all about meeting people and being human. The participants recognised that some of the differences they did perceive were related to how health care was organised in each of their countries:

Nearly at once, we forgot that we were people from three different countries. It is all about [being] human and a human being. In addition, it is only when we look at things such as the organisation of education and health care, that we can see the differences. Otherwise, nationality is not important. (P11)

The event stimulated the wish to meet not only other people, but people from other cultures who had different experiences in nursing: 'The drama event increased my desire to meet other people from other cultures.' (P12) However, participants also acknowledged that there were situations in their professional lives that were not easy to solve:

The forum-plays were constructed situations that participants had experienced in their professional life on a daily basis. Sometimes, finding solutions to the problems we face is not always easy. (P4)

In this specific context, drama seems to be a language in which international nurses can communicate and understand each other, independently of cultural or language differences, according to the participants' statements.

Category: Opening Doors

This category is described on three levels: a pedagogical level, a group level and a personal level.

Sub-category: Pedagogical Level

This sub-category describes drama as a way to open doors by using, and with a focus on, sophisticated pedagogical methods. Some of the participants described it as an educational revolution and 'a firework of impressions' (P4). Drama was also described as a democratic process of learning, as it created feelings of equality independent of profession within the group, making the environment feel more collegial and less hierarchical: 'I felt equal as an individual together with professors, research students, and other students.' (P2)

According to the statements, the dilemmas in the forum-play revealed that there were many similarities among the participants from the three countries, and only a few cultural differences. According to the participants, they took away ideas about how to use drama outside this context: 'The drama event gave guidance in how to use the method in other contexts and situations. (P1)

Drama increases the ability to be prepared to act in the future. It also helps individuals to see new possibilities: 'I was astonished at the amount of problems and scope of solutions that were discussed.' (P6) Earlier experiences from drama were described as similar to a hermeneutic process, as you do learn more and more: 'It was a pleasant day, even if I have worked with drama before. But I think that I still can learn from drama, a little more each time.' (14)

Sub-category: Group Level

In this sub-category, drama was described as working well in an interactive way for the group. However, it demands discipline from the participants, and they have to be willing to enter the process without preparation and with an open attitude. The constitution of the group is important. According to the participants, an international group is powerful for pedagogical activities. Drama helps to show the variety of the group members as individual people, and to share their experiences within the group: 'I felt integrated in the group and felt the democratic process of learning.' (P10) Furthermore, it opens up and encourages participants to learn about each other on a level of equal participation: 'Under other, more conventional conditions I don't think it would have been possible to learn so much about each other and also that the active participation could have been so well distributed among all.' (P9)

According to the participants' statements, the student-teacher interactions were positive, and included a willingness to listen to and to learn about each other's profession. Drama opens up a willingness to share and learn from each other in the group: 'All participants had expectations and showed a willingness to share and learn.' (P5) An authentic feeling of being made welcome and a sense of trust were developed in the group, according to the participants' statements. Drama creates an uncomplicated and pleasant exchange environment for meeting new people in a group. The form of using the group in drama enhances the willingness and interest to meet other people and share experiences from their cultures.

Sub-category: Personal Level

This sub-category related to the importance of engagement in drama activities, which opens up opportunities for creativity and a feeling that there is a positive climate on a personal level. Drama also creates a willingness to expand and broaden one's own horizons, understanding, reflection and solutions. The participants stated that they gained new personal insights and perspectives about themselves: 'After all, I have not seen everything and I cannot do everything.' (P10) Relating to the participants' statements, the important thing is to be curious. The learning place on an individual level that is related to being surprised. You do surprise yourself by your own ability and feelings:

After this day, many questions are answered. All started with a real feeling of being welcome. The international group has a very high effect on me – explaining the meaning of a Christian name to a number of participants from an Islamic religion was not easy ... However, it was a basic action to confidence. (P10)

Drama helps individuals to become more daring and to move outside their comfort zones: 'My own world becomes much larger if I am positive and open to others.' (P12). Fear and uncertainty disappear when the drama performance starts: 'A wonderful mix between action, learning, relaxing, enjoying.' (P10) Furthermore, drama opens up the opportunity to share personal feelings: 'Before entering the drama I felt afraid, but afterwards I understood that this kind of work facilitates for the participants to show feelings even of intimate, shame, and suffering.' (P2)

One participant questioned whether international exchange was needed at all, as we are all alike:

or if it is this confirmation that even enhances our desire to meet people from other cultures. Or is it maybe that the resistance in form of being frightened and insecure that disappears? (P11)

The quotation relates to new personal insights and perspectives.

Discussion

This study included participants from three countries (developing and developed) who gathered to share their nursing experiences. According to the participants, many benefits may be gained by using drama in the field of nursing education. Some limitations of the study might be that it is a small-scale study and the participants did not speak, write or perform in their mother tongues. Although some cultural barriers could be presumed, none were reported.

The first category, 'Creating a learning environment', reflects the atmosphere in which learning took place. The participants did find that the methodology used in the workshop created a warm and productive environment, where learning could take place effectively. This untraditional yet productive environment facilitated learning in a way that made the participants felt safe, content and dynamic. Participants emphasised the importance of the drama teacher (the drama workshop leader) in creating such an environment. The teacher needs sufficient experience in teaching, communicating and leadership abilities, as well as patience. Since drama focuses on encouraging participants to share their life, experiences and knowledge, drama teachers should be equipped with the skills to enable them to bring all these properties

into the learning environment (Ekebergh, Lepp and Dahlberg 2004).

Participants talked about how the drama teacher set a balance between humour and formal professional work, to make the learning experience both fun and beneficial at the same time. Consequently, the teacher's role is to create a balance in any learning situation in which the learner can feel relaxed and accepted (Deeny et al. 2001). The drama workshop was also described as having a non-conventional structure that creates a good learning environment.

Learners usually feel inadequate, or possibly could have accomplished more if they had knowledge of the language of the host nation. Obviously, if language barriers are present, it is difficult to communicate. However, in this study the participants had the ability to communicate verbally in at least one foreign language – namely English. Through a foreign language, one may gain entry to a previously unknown culture in a way that will enhance one's understanding of humans, their beliefs about life issues, and their use of words to express values, feelings and needs (Pross 2005). The impact of language and communication on the social identity can be understood as a distinction between English as a second language and the mother language that defines the home environment. This home environment is central to forming the social and communicative context that shapes identity and adjustment (Kim 2005). Participants in this study described drama as going beyond verbal language, using non-verbal communication, role-play, gestures and dynamic actions that made language a universal context beyond nationality and culture.

Although participants came from three different countries and cultures, this did not prevent them from interacting and sharing experiences as if they were from one country with a unified language. In this specific context, drama seems to be a medium whereby international nurses do communicate and understand each other independently of cultural or language differences, according to the participants' statements. It is all about meeting people and being human.

It is interesting to note that although all participants in this study had considerable experience and qualification, drama significantly influenced their perceived confidence in the methods used and enabled them to express their potential for disclosure when working together with participants from different countries; this appeared to relate indirectly to the level of understanding of what they were experiencing. In addition, participants spoke of the humanistic side of being a learner in the drama program. They felt that often they did not only belong to a certain team, country, ethnic group or culture, but rather shared the feeling of belonging to what can be called a 'culture of nursing'.

Confidence and competence in verbal communication using English could be developed from appropriate methods of teaching (Bailey 2005; Songsiri 2007). The drama gave the participants opportunities to talk about their problems in the clinical setting in a safe space. The drama took them away from the stress of trying to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue.

In the second category, 'Opening doors', the participants envisioned drama to be a way of opening doors using sophisticated pedagogical methods, seeing it as enjoyable for both learners and teachers. The participants found drama to be a method that promoted a sense of equality among the learners. Drama also breaks down cultural and language boundaries between learners. The participants also perceived drama to be a method that opened doors to group work, as well as helping them to be part of a team. Drama was described as an efficient method to facilitate group interaction, mainly in a multicultural setting. The mixture of the group was stated as important. Internationalisation of the learning process enriched the group members' experience through sharing common concerns and problems raised in nursing education (Freda 1998). Participants shared situations from real life, yet they felt safe sharing and talking about feelings of anger and resentment that arose while they were discussing effects of the situation on patients, nurses, teachers and students. The participants discussed and listened actively to each other, contextualised and improvised the situation within the field of nursing profession. They eventually came up with alternatives and solutions that were highly related to nursing education.

Internationalisation in higher nursing education is addressed as unclear, vague, ambiguous and difficult to understand, and therefore has not become clearly conceptualised in educational practice (Wihlborg 2005). According to the participants, drama creates an uncomplicated and pleasant exchange of thoughts and raised emotions. It enhances a willingness to meet other people and share experiences from their cultures. Strengthening teamwork in the learning setting is called for to increase effectiveness of communication (Moriizumi and Takai 2006). This is supported by the participants, who reported a decrease in feelings of anxiety, and a positive impact upon their learning abilities, when the 'drama teacher' and other members of the group were friendly and approachable. Intercultural learning involves learning about social phenomena and global changes, and involves a flow of understanding among people. On a global level, this involves cultures being connected to a complex collective whole – a form of collective consciousness. Intercultural learning should take a form of transnational meaning, understanding and experience (Wihlborg, 2005).

The final sub-category relates to how learning through drama influences the self and personal characteristics. It seems that nurses and teachers view drama as a useful source that opens up doors to creativity and enhances their willingness to expand and broaden their own horizons. It facilitates

understanding, reflection and finding alternative solutions. The learner may develop new insights and perspectives on the personal level – drama may even move the learner up to a higher level of self-actualisation. The learner may forget their own social and cultural background and that of others, and focus on the joy of sharing experiences and burdens.

Conclusion

This study shows that forum-play can be related to life experiences, and therefore become an experience-based pedagogy. The use of drama in this study seems to help participants overcome different barriers among professions, cultures, language, experiences, social status and academic status. Drama makes the experience-based knowledge visible, and further develops knowledge about a certain topic – depending on the group members' background and contribution. In this study, the participants expressed 'caring elements' as 'universal connections', regardless of their mother language, culture or experiences. This study has implications for nursing education and curriculum activities and development. However, future studies are recommended to further develop the use of drama in international nursing education in general, and clinical nursing in particular. Moreover, the meaning of drama in education across cultures is a research area that needs further investigation.

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