

Competent communication – a view of nurse experts in communication*

Comunicação competente - visão de enfermeiros especialistas em comunicação

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To perceive the meaning of competent communication to nurses who are communication-expert nursing professors. **Methods:** This is a qualitative exploratory study using the following guiding question: “What is competent communication?” Data analysis was performed by means of Content Analysis. **Results:** Competent communication is an interpersonal process that must achieve the communicators’ objectives. It presupposes basic communication knowledge, and that the individuals involved are aware of verbal and non verbal signs during interaction. It also requires clarity and objectivity, promotes self-knowledge and enables a more authentic life. **Conclusion:** These meanings for communicative competence point out the need for technical and human preparation, as well as the importance of listening and having an accurate perception of others, and the possibility of using that learning as an investment in self-knowledge and as a support for respecting those around us.

Keywords: Nursing, Interpersonal communication, Communication competence

RESUMO

Objetivo: Perceber o significado de comunicação competente para enfermeiros, docentes de enfermagem, especialistas na área de comunicação. **Métodos:** Pesquisa qualitativa exploratória tendo como questão norteadora: “O que é uma comunicação competente?”. A análise dos dados foi realizada por meio da Análise de Conteúdo. **Resultados:** Comunicação competente é um processo interpessoal que deve atingir o objetivo dos comunicadores; pressupõe conhecimentos básicos de comunicação; que os envolvidos tenham consciência do verbal e do não-verbal nas interações; exige clareza e objetividade; promove o autoconhecimento e possibilita uma vida mais autêntica. **Conclusões:** Essas significações citadas para a competência comunicativa nos remetem à necessidade de um preparo técnico e humano, a importância do ouvir e da percepção acurada do outro e possibilidade de utilização deste aprendizado como investimento no autoconhecimento e para ancorar o respeito ao próximo.

Descritores: Relações interpessoais; Comunicação; Competência profissional

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Percibir el significado que la comunicación competente tiene para Enfermeros, docentes de enfermería y especialistas en el área de comunicación. **Métodos:** Investigación cualitativa exploratoria que tuvo como pregunta orientadora: “¿Qué es una comunicación competente?”. El análisis de los datos fue realizado por medio del Análisis de Contenido. **Resultados:** Comunicación competente es un proceso interpersonal que debe alcanzar el objetivo de los comunicadores; presupone conocimientos básicos de comunicación; que los involucrados tengan conciencia de lo verbal y de lo no-verbal en las interacciones; exige claridad y objetividad; promueve el autoconocimiento y posibilita una vida más auténtica. **Conclusiones:** Las significaciones citadas para la competencia comunicativa nos remiten a la necesidad de una preparación técnica y humana, a la importancia del oír y de la percepción exacta del otro y a la posibilidad de utilización de este aprendizaje como una inversión en el autoconocimiento y anclaje en el respeto al prójimo.

Descriptores: Relaciones interpersonales; Comunicación; Enfermería; Competencia profesional

* Study performed in Brazilian Nursing Schools; locations that originate experts in communication and nursing.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is important for our growth as human beings. It is part of our previous and everyday experiences. We are relational beings and this understanding makes us pursue further understanding about concepts, principles and abilities to be acquired in the communication process.

These statements make us re-think the university's commitment in preparing teachers, making them aware of their role as communicators, essential for a flexible and updated teaching.

One of the roles of education is to form free and autonomous citizens, subjects of the educational process, teachers and students identified with their new role as researchers, in an increasingly informational and informatized world. This requires radical transformations in the educational field; theories will have to be reevaluated and strategies and practices reinvented.

In this sense, the search for competence references is necessary as an ability of acting efficiently in a certain type of situation, supported by, but not limited to knowledge. There are no competences that are not supported by knowledge. Almost all human actions require some type of knowledge, sometimes superficial, other times deep, arising from personal experience, common sense, culture shared in a circle of experts or from technological or scientific research. We build and store representations of reality along our experience and background⁽¹⁻²⁾.

We consider it important to combine competence references with interpersonal communication references, because teachers are communicators who need to arouse the students' interest and consider the psychological aspects involved in the learning process. As educators, they should not be limited to coding his message only, as it usually happens, but to make it decodable to the student. Teachers' concern with the students' reaction is important, as communicators need to be able to perceive other persons' reaction and be sensitive in human relations⁽³⁾.

Communication is a process of understanding and sharing sent and received messages and these messages influence the behavior of the people involved, confirming the fact that people are constantly involved by the interaction field⁽⁴⁾.

Subjects participate simultaneously in two existential dimensions, arising from two ways of relating with the world: an oral one, granting them a psycholinguistic repertoire, providing an exteriorization of the social being, and another non-oral one, granting them a psychobiological statute, providing an exteriorization of the psychological being⁽⁵⁾.

Based on studies performed on teaching-learning in communication and nursing, we notice the importance

of the perception and coherence of the oral and non-oral behaviors of the nursing teachers in the communication process⁽⁶⁾. As developing this communication competence was our questioning, leading issue originating this work.

OBJECTIVE

- to perceive the signification of competent communication for nursing teachers who are acknowledged experts in the communication field in Brazil.

METHODS

This is an exploratory study with a qualitative methodology, developed at public and private Brazilian Universities, as these are the places of origin of the teachers, experts in nursing communication.

The study subjects were thirteen Nurses, Nursing Teachers with accumulated experience in teaching and communication in Nursing, located by publication surveys or references in Nursing teaching and communication within the last ten years.

Data collection procedures

Initially, this research project was submitted to the Ethics Committee at Paulista State University at Botucatu Medical School, State of São Paulo, and received a favorable opinion.

The procedure chosen for data collection was the interview and the Nurses, selected according to previously established criteria, were contacted by phone or e-mail, when we explained the project and its objectives and, depending on their availability, we scheduled interviews that were recorded after the authorization and signing of the Informed Consent Form.

During the interviews, the following leading question was submitted to the thirteen Nurses participating in the study: - In your opinion, what is a competent communication?

After the completion of data collection, the interviews were transcribed and resent to the subjects for them to validate the content.

Data Management

As the scientific method for data management and analysis, we used Bardin's Content Analysis⁽⁷⁾, which is a set of techniques for communication analysis, aimed at obtaining, through systematic and objective procedures to describe message contents, markers, either quantitative or not, which permit the assumption of knowledge related to the production/reception conditions (assumed variables) of these messages.

RESULTS

The meaning the subjects ascribed to competent communication were classified in theme categories, described below:

Category 1- Competent communication is an interpersonal process

For the interviewed subjects, competent communication assumes that people are worried about the others' understanding and that the ideas are understood and shared.

"Competent communication is an interaction, it shares ideas, takes the ideas for granted; when the other understands me and I understand the other." (E 2)

"It is where there is an interaction between two people..." (E 8)

"Where there is willingness to be with the other, to understand the other, to participate..., there is a fluidity of the message between the sender and the recipient." (E 10)

"Is the one where there is a connection between human beings regarding the ideas and the achievement of their purpose." (E 12)

Category 2- Competent communication reaches the communicators' objective

In this category, the subjects are based on the principle that every relationship has a purpose, even if this purpose is not explicit.

"It reaches the communicators' objective, i.e., transmits exactly the idea, the message the communicator wants." (E 6)

"It is communication reaching its purpose." (E 9)

"It is where the sender and the recipient understand the message sent." (E 11)

"It is where I can reach the other, things make sense, are meaningful to the other." (E 3)

Category 3- Competent communication assumes basic communication knowledge

The subjects understand the search for knowledge and the preparation of the Nurse as a requirement to act in the field.

"It is when I have basic knowledge of general and human communication concepts and, more deeply, of therapeutic communication." (E 2)

"It is when the professional is prepared and knows what he is doing." (E 5)

"It is when the communicator is aware of all communication process elements and of how they work..." (E 6)

"It is when the sender knows what he wants to communicate, dominates the techniques and communication means." (E 12)

Category 4- In competent communication, there is an

awareness of the oral and non-oral in the interaction

The interviewed subjects report the need to heed the forms of expression involved in communication and emphasize the need to consider the other, his/her differences, in interpersonal relations.

"It is when you are aware of the oral and non-oral, i.e., to be aware of what the sender says and also of what he expresses." (E 4)

"The recipient will receive my global communication (oral and non-oral) and give it meaning according to his previous experiences, regarding myself or other similar situations." (E 13)

"It is the ability to communicate with attention and intention for the messages to have a meaning and to be correctly interpreted, decoded." (E 1)

"It is to verify, validate, check if it was understood or not..." (E 6)

"It is when the message is decoded from the other's perspective" (E 12)

"It is to perceive the other's reactions and to know how to identify the moments when I must be silent and those when I must proceed" (E 13)

Category 5- Competent communication requires clarity and objectivity

The subjects interviewed express that clarity and objectivity are important for communication to be effective, i.e., communication or information must be able to be interpreted and decoded. From this point of view, the ideas must be organized to be understandable to the recipient.

"It is when the other understands me and I understand the other." (E 2)

"An understandable language and clear and objective organization of ideas are required." (E 13)

"It is a set of objective, dated, located practices, producing senses, meanings and effects..." (E 7)

Category 6- Competent communication promotes self-knowledge

In this category, the study subjects report personal growth resulting from the knowledge acquired in communication.

"It is an interaction that leads to growth, it is to know myself very well and allow the other to know me." (E 2)

"It is when I communicate with myself, to be communicating and this implies dialogue." (E 7)

"It is when we review who we are as people and professionals." (E 7)

Category 7- Competent communication enables a more authentic life

In this category, the subjects show the possibility of gain from the awareness of this connection among human beings.

“It is a strategy that enables the promotion of a good life.” (E 7)

“It is an integrating part of life, inherent to an authentic life.” (E 12)

“It is when I am increasingly open to the other.” (E 2)

DISCUSSION

By searching, in this study, the meanings of competent communication, interviewing Nurse teachers with acknowledged experience in communication and nursing, we find results that helped us to understand that communication is competent when it is an interpersonal process, reaching the communicators' purposes; it assumes that they have basic communication knowledge; oral and non-oral awareness in the interactions; clarity and objectivity; while it also promotes self-knowledge, in addition to permitting an authentic life.

The interest in others makes the message be transmitted more clearly and understandably to the people involved in the communication process, confirming the statements that communication is competent when understood as an interpersonal process, which permeates all nursing actions, in addition to providing for the patient's well-being or not. It is an ability that may be acquired⁽⁴⁾.

All interviewed subjects state that technical and human preparation is required for this meeting, learning to hear, perceiving the other and using this learning as an investment for self-knowledge. To respect the other is one of the prerogatives for competence.

Therefore, communication competence implies different forms of growth of the subjects involved in the process, as the people are inserted in a unique interaction field, and their ability to perceive themselves in each context, to be able to share ideas, thoughts and purposes, which may even change them^(4,8-9).

We find reports supporting statements from authors considering communication as adequate when appropriate to a certain situation, person, time and reaching an established objective⁽⁵⁾.

The subjects also mention the need to acquire knowledge, confirming that competences are supported by knowledge, which is a representation of reality, which we build and store according to our experience and our background^(1,2).

An important aspect arising from the interviewed subjects' discourse to be considered in oral communication is clarity about what we want to inform, confirming that, when we interact orally with someone, we are basically trying to express ourselves, clarify or validate the

understanding of something. To know what we intend with the verbalization helps in its adequacy^(4,5).

Human communication is complex and multi-dimensional and this interaction process necessarily assumes communication, whether through words or other non-oral means, such as face expressions, gestures, body posture, distance regarding the others, etc^(5,8).

The human interaction process is marked by interferences or reactions, voluntary or involuntary, intentional or unintentional, i.e., people react to other people whom they have contact with: they communicate, sympathize and feel attracted, oppose and feel aversion, get closer, back off, get in conflict, compete, cooperate, develop affection, etc. It is continuous⁽⁸⁾.

The subjects grow based on interactions. They know and perceive their own reactions. They know the others and allow the others to know them. This growth leads to competent communication because it is produced by an opening from both parts⁽⁹⁾.

One communication function is to “know oneself”. The subjects need to know themselves well, i.e., how they think, feel, act and react upon the facts, which will make it a lot easier for them to know the other and to understand the many reactions to a same stimulus^(4,8). The interviewed subjects translate self-knowledge as a review and evaluation of communication practice, i.e., they consider themselves conscious as people and professionals in the interactions they establish.

When people know themselves and know that they may be affected by the other's behavior, they will be conscious that their behavior may also affect the other. Any competence is essentially connected to a social practice of certain complexity and a set of gestures, postures and words contained in a practice that grants meaning and continuity⁽¹⁾.

Human beings are symbolic beings. Rationality is not something isolated, but something strictly articulated with other abilities, other instruments man has to interfere in the reality and transform it. Imagination and sensitivity are part of man's humanity and cannot be ignored when talking about his realization. When talking of competence, we talk of a movement towards beauty, herein understood as something that approaches what is concretely needed for the social and collective good⁽¹⁰⁾. The beauty of “good” care.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researched scholars state that Nursing is an interpersonal process, symbolic and complex, and that the Nurse needs to be aware of the relation of oral and non-oral behaviors in interactions. They acknowledge that the emotions, expectations and stereotypes interfere in communication, as well as the senders' previous

knowledge. They believe in motivation as being essential to acquire ability in communication.

The results emerging from this study also allow us to consider competence in interpersonal communication as an essential ability to be acquired by Nurses, whether they are teachers or act in another practical care activity, and that this will make it possible for them to deliver conscious, true and transforming care.

We believe that transforming care is care that, in interaction and exchanges, sees the other, student, patient and colleague, as a whole and that, from these experiences, competent communication will provide for humanizing and constructive sociability.

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