Nursing teachers’ reflections on their own norm-critical competence

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Background: Nursing education in Sweden generally lacks norm-critical perspectives, even though this could help unveil normative judgements of patients in nurses’ daily work. To pursue work-integrated learning about norm criticism for nursing teachers at a small university college in Sweden, all teachers involved in nursing education were offered the course Norm-Aware Caring.

Aim: To describe how norm criticism in nursing education is constructed by nursing teachers’ discussions.

Methods: After the course Norm-Aware Caring, 20 of the participating 33 nursing teachers were interviewed in five focus groups about their reflections on their new knowledge. The interview transcripts were analyzed on the basis of Fairclough’s discourse analysis, in which words and social practice are seen as mutually constituting each other.

Results: Discursive constructions related to teaching, caring and learning were seen in the text. Norm critical teaching was constructed as a practice of much consideration not to insult any student. Norm criticism as a basic caring value was closely related to person-centered care. Their own, personal learning was expressed as fear to use their new knowledge in a wrong way. The teachers themselves considered norm-criticism as something to learn in order to improve the understanding of people who does not fit into majority norms. This perspective of tolerance was consistent in the construction of all discourses.

Discussion: It appears that the teachers’ social practice is influenced by a perspective that divides the “normal” from the “deviant”. This may prevent an internalization of norm-critical knowledge, a perspective that aims to question categorizations of normality. Therefore, it is important to continuously scrutinize and reflect over the role of social norms as part of work-integrated learning for nursing teachers.

References


