

Sociopolitical Knowing in Caring for a Disabled School Age Child

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Abstract

The authors describe how they employed the perspectives of two extant nursing theories, Roy and Orem, in understanding the complex needs of a school-age child who required tube feeding during school. In addition, they explain how sociopolitical knowing was skillfully used by the school nurse to effect positive change in both the health and the school experience of the school-age child.

Case

Danielle is a 12 year-old girl whose condition required her to have a feeding tube. She has limited verbal capacity and is confined to a wheelchair. She attends a regular school that also accommodates children with very mild to more severe disabilities. Although Danielle is not able to actively participate in many school activities, attempts were made to include her in classroom activities such as lessons, stories and games. She is also helped to join other children for recess, art, and library time. The school nurse worked hard to give every child an equal chance at having or at least being exposed to normal school experiences. One milestone the nurse accomplished was arranging for Danielle to eat lunch in the cafeteria with all of her peers, where previously she was taken somewhere else to be fed in privacy. Eating with her peers proved to be a very positive experience for both the child with the disability and for her peers.

Both Roy's and Orem's theoretical models provided guiding perspectives for our nursing actions. Callista Roy's (Roy & Andrews, 1999) theory was applicable because it discusses the person-environment interaction in reference to "the human ability to adapt" (Haynes, Boese & Butcher, 2004). An adaptation goal for Danielle involved assisting Danielle's assimilation into the school environment by helping her to participate in daily activities with her peers, while still meeting her special needs. The school nurse used available resources to help Danielle adapt and have as close to normal school experiences with her peers as possible. Dorothea Orem's (2001) Self-Care Deficit theory also fit with our case study because it deals with people who are unable to fully care for themselves. Orem's framework of nursing engagement as a "partly compensatory system" provided a perspective for offering the patient physical and psychological support while guiding, doing for, and creating an environment that supported Danielle's development.

However, providing for a supportive environment for Danielle could not have been accomplished without the use of the nurse's *sociopolitical* pattern of knowing (White, 1993), given the controversy over mainstreaming disabled children. Once it was determined *empirically* that it could be beneficial (Martin & Bat-Chava, 2003; Thomson & Lilli, 1995), and *ethically* that the child should be taught in normal learning environment despite some risks, the nurse used sociopolitical savvy to effect this change in school procedure. The nurse had to

educate and negotiate with various social groups (school personnel, parents, students, general community, and Danielle herself) about disabilities to facilitate Danielle's successful integration into the school environment.

The focus of this case study was particularly sensitive and complex due to the impact the nurse's actions had on the school environment as well as on the individual client's well-being. Facilitating a smooth transition that met the needs of all individuals and institutions involved was accomplished by the nurse exercising her knowledge not only from theoretical and empirical sources, but from ethical and sociopolitical patterns of knowing as well, while always keeping Danielle's adaptation and self-care needs front and center.

References

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