

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN NURSING IN THE LIGHT OF JÜRGEN HABERMAS

COMUNICAÇÃO EFETIVA EM ENFERMAGEM À LUZ DE JÜRGEN HABERMAS

COMUNICACIÓN EFECTIVA EN ENFERMERÍA A LA LUZ DE JÜRGEN HABERMAS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reflect on effective communication in the light of the Theory of Communicative Action, by Jürgen Habermas. It is a reflective study conducted by the question: how is the effective communication characterized in the light of the Theory of Communicative Action, by Jürgen Habermas? The study is built on the theoretical pillars presented by Habermas and discoursed in the session: effective communication in nursing and the interface with the communicative action of Habermas. In conclusion, the concepts of effective communication in nursing reveal theoretical faces consonant with the assumptions of the communicative action. Effective communication is, therefore, intertwined with mutual understanding; the cooperation of actors; understanding of the individual contexts; and the positioning of the receiver before the act of speech.

Keywords: Nursing; Philosophy, Nursing; Communication.

RESUMO

Objetiva-se refletir sobre a comunicação efetiva à luz da Teoria do Agir Comunicativo, de Jürgen Habermas. Trata-se de estudo reflexivo conduzido pela questão: como se caracteriza a comunicação efetiva à luz da Teoria do Agir Comunicativo, de Jürgen Habermas? O estudo é construído a partir dos pilares teóricos apresentados por Habermas e discorrido na sessão: comunicação efetiva em Enfermagem e a interface com o agir comunicativo de Habermas. Concluiu-se que as concepções sobre a comunicação efetiva em Enfermagem revelam faces teóricas consoantes com os pressupostos do agir comunicativo. A comunicação efetiva, portanto, é entrelaçada ao entendimento mútuo, cooperação dos atores, compreensão dos contextos individuais e ao posicionamento do receptor frente ao ato da fala.

Palavras-chave: Enfermagem; Filosofia em Enfermagem; Comunicação.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio busca reflexionar sobre la comunicación efectiva a la luz de la teoría de la acción comunicativa de Jürgen Habermas. Se trata de un estudio reflexivo llevado a cabo con la siguiente pregunta: ¿cómo se caracteriza la comunicación efectiva a la luz de la teoría de la acción comunicativa de Jürgen Habermas? El estudio se basa en los pilares teóricos presentados por Habermas y expuestos en la sesión: comunicación efectiva en enfermería e interfaz con la acción comunicativa de Habermas. En conclusión, los conceptos de comunicación efectiva en enfermería revelan facetas teóricas en consonancia con los presupuestos del acto comunicativo. Por lo tanto, la comunicación efectiva se entrelaza con la comprensión mutua, la cooperación de los actores, la comprensión de los contextos individuales y la postura del receptor ante el acto del habla.

Palabras clave: Enfermería; Filosofía en Enfermería; Comunicación.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is the expression of linguistic signs. This act requires that subjects, through co-participation and co-intentionality, to understand the “signification of the meaning”, an aspect that pervades the transfer and expression of knowledge. It is a process of reciprocity, dialogue, intercommunication between the subjects, criticality and relationship between “thought-language-context/reality”.¹

In the field of health, one can highlight the term “communication and health”, which explains a way of seeing, acting, understanding and consolidating bonds. This conception reveals the existence of competing discourses, constituted by relations of knowledge and power.² Thus, communication transforms health practices – especially those of nursing – into “live-in-work”, that is, that based on light technologies.³

Still in the health scenario, the term “effective communication” emerges as a product of the expansion of discussions about patient safety and, consequently, by the understanding that it represents a tool that permeates all the care provision and makes it possible to minimize the occurrence of adverse events.⁴

For this reason, the World Alliance for Patient Safety, in 2005, highlighted the effective communication among health professionals as one of the priority areas for action.⁴

Effective communication, therefore, is conceptualized as a dynamic, reciprocal process that relies on verbal, non-verbal, written, telephone and electronic forms, in addition to permeate all care.^{5,6}

In view of the above, it is fundamental to broaden the discussions about effective communication in health/nursing as a determining component of patient care and safety.

In order to deepen these discussions, the reference of the Theory of Communicative Action, by Jürgen Habermas, will be used as a strategy to reach an understanding of effective communication in the professional practice scenario of nursing.

The communicative action is an act that aims at mutual understanding, through cooperation among the actors, and corresponds to a mechanism for other actions. It develops from a circular process, in which the actor is *initiator* and *product* of the process.⁷ These conceptions intertwine with those of effective communication and, therefore, make it possible to work on reflections.

Thus, it is delimited as a guiding question: how is the effective communication characterized in the light of the Theory of Communicative Action? In order to answer it, a reflexive study was developed with the objective of reflecting on the effective communication in light of the Theory of Communicative Action, by Jürgen Habermas.

ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHER JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Jürgen Habermas is one of the most important current thinkers. He is a philosopher, sociologist, journalist and univer-

sity professor. In his studies, he emphasized the role of reason and public opinion (the communicational source of reason), in addition to delineating a communicative theory.⁸

His assumptions are based on the inter-paradigmatic character, with contributions of the functionalism, phenomenology, Marxism and critical theory of Frankfurt.⁹

In the Theory of Communicative Action, the philosopher discusses aspects that underlie the understanding of the mutual understanding and the interface between the social world and the action ruled by norms (Figure 1).⁷

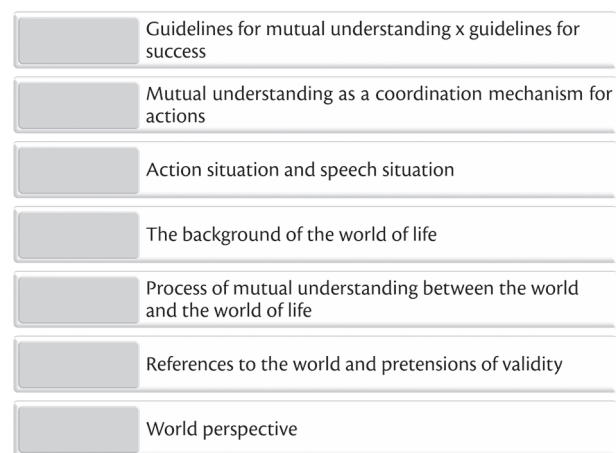


Figure 1 - Theoretical pillars of the Theory of Communicative Action, by Jürgen Habermas, Natal, 2017. Source: adapted from Habermas⁷.

The seven pillars shown in Figure 1 are summarized conceptions, from the perspective of the communicative action, presented in the work “Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action”, by Jürgen Habermas.⁷

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN NURSING AND THE INTERFACE WITH HABERMAS’ COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

The reflections on the effective communication in nursing and the communicative action were constructed/adapted based on the theoretical pillars shown in Figure 1.

In this study, the reflections are woven from six theoretical pillars: a) guidelines for mutual understanding *versus* guidelines for success; b) mutual understanding as a mechanism for coordinating actions and references to the world and pretensions of validity; c) action situation and speech situation; d) the background of the world of life; e) process of mutual understanding between the world and the world of life and perspectives of the world.

GUIDELINES FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING VERSUS GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESS

The Habermasian principles show that social interactions are relatively stable, cooperative, and simultaneously conflicting and unstable, which will depend on the degree of interest of the participants. In such a way, once the actors are directed towards *success*, that is, towards the consequences arising from their actions, the desired objectives are achieved.⁷

In line with this aspect, it is observed that effective communication is an essential tool for the professional nursing practice and, through this perspective, the desired success is the one that aims at improving care, therapeutic help, identification of the needs of the user, the relationship between nursing professional-user, multiprofessional nursing professional and health education.¹⁰

The concretization of effective communication involves actors and, as presented in the communicative action, demands their interest and cooperativity. The understanding of these two aspects must precede, also, that of the co-responsibility of action.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AS A MECHANISM FOR COORDINATING ACTIONS AND REFERENCES TO THE WORLD AND PRETENSIONS OF VALIDITY

The communicative action is established in the acts of mutual involvement and aims at an agreement based on “[...] rationally motivated assent to the content of a utterance”, that is, it seeks to obtain common convictions.^{7:165}

Effective communication in the light of the communicative action makes it possible to elucidate the importance of obtaining common convictions. However, this process will not only present agreements. When one of the actors, like the receiver, rejects what is contained in the speech, it is understood that the utterance did not fulfill at least one of the following functions: representation of the states of things, of the interpersonal relationship and of the manifestation of experiences.⁷

Thus, communication, in order to be effective, presupposes that nursing professionals and other actors conduct it in a clear, objective and understand shared ideas and forms of expression.¹¹ It is imperative that in this process there is the criticality and the non-appreciation of the crystallized conceptions, since the objective is to establish a rational assent.

Associated with this, the communication strategies need to be adaptable to the recipient's level of knowledge or their specific needs – such as those due to visual and auditory disabilities – and value the cultural context. These considerations are not restricted to interactions between users, but they expand to those among members of the nursing or multiprofessional team.

In the scenario of interaction with the user, for example, the non-verbal communication reflects their reactions and feelings, often expressed in an introverted way.¹² For the mutual involvement, the nursing professional must be attentive and receptive to these expressions.

ACTION SITUATION AND SPEECH SITUATION

The action aims at dominating fragments of the world from the perspective of a specific theme - situation. The *theme* is inherent to the interests and objectives of the actors. In this way, the *action plans* of the individuals highlight the *theme*, that is, the action coincides with the speech situation.⁷

From these premises, effective communication, in the context of nursing, is based on legal manuscripts, such as those that underlie the Code of Ethics in Nursing.

Among the topics mentioned in the Code of Ethics in Nursing are the commitment to individual and collective health, the guarantee of the principles of public policies, respect for life, dignity and human rights.¹³

When discussing individual and collective health care, attention must be paid to the need for health paradigms that foster understanding of the different contexts of life, to see them as citizens and to understand health as a synonym of quality of life.

Thus, it can be elucidated that a practice based only on the individual and on the disease, for example, will produce *themes* that do not value the living conditions and, consequently, the effective communication.

In other words, the *theme* that leads the training and practice of nursing professionals can provide the effectiveness of communication.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE WORLD OF LIFE

The communicative action is a cyclical process in which the actor is *initiator* – dominating the *situations* – and the *product* – product of traditions, arising from the process of socialization. The actor is based on a world of life composed by *context* and *resources*, which enable the *mutual understanding*.⁷

In the process of effective communication, the nursing professional develops a practice that goes beyond the inflexibility of routines and techniques and approaches the other – user and team – in order to find mutual understanding.¹⁴ This attitude, in the user's scenario, values their life contexts and inserts them into the caring process.

When approaching the other, from the effective communication, the nursing professional promotes the humanization of care and, consequently, consolidates the bond and trust among those involved.¹⁵ However, humanizing the care

is a challenge because it requires the actors to understand the importance of their role in this process.

Regarding the nursing professional, the teaching and health institutions are responsible for this process as co-responsible for the training and improvement, aiming to transform knowledge and cultural elements favorable to the humanization of care.

PROCESS OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE WORLD AND THE WORLD OF LIFE AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE WORLD

For the accomplishment of the *action plans*, the actors of communicative action must be guided by a *common situation* and, at the same time, understand about *something in the world*.⁷

Thus, the participants need to grasp the references of three worlds: a) *world of the object* - these are references that pervade the representations or presuppositions of events and state; b) *social world* - represented by interpersonal relations; and c) *subjective world* - referring to self-representation.⁷

Still on the understanding of the *something in the world*, Habermas highlights the *decentralized understanding in the world*, which allows the speaker to differentiate between the *world of life* and the *world*. That is, it distinguishes between the unquestioned, determined intersubjectively and inherent to the participant, and the constructed by contents of communication.⁷

This differentiation allows dissociating explicit wisdom from implicit certainty. The contents of communication, in turn, gain space to be validated and considered in knowledge based on reason.⁷

On these precepts, at the moment when one tries to interpret the world from a specific perspective, the interaction between the actors is impaired and a simple, ineffective communication is concretized.¹⁵ From the apprehension of *something in the world* and of *their off-center understanding* the communication becomes effective (Figure 2).

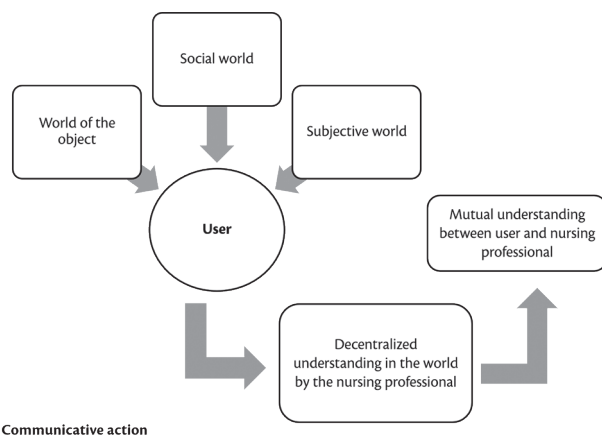


Figure 2 - "Process of mutual understanding between the world and the world of life" in the user-professional binomial of nursing, Natal, 2017. Source: adapted from Habermas⁷.

Figure 2 shows the elements of the communicative action among users and nursing professionals as a way to consolidate effective communication. Nursing professionals value the users' subjective, social and subjective world references and develop an understanding of them.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The conceptions about effective communication in nursing present theoretical faces according to the assumptions of the Theory of Communicative Action, by Jürgen Habermas.

Effective communication is intertwined with communicative action, since this action requires mutual understanding, the actors' cooperation for a common product – the safety of the patient, for example -, understanding of the individual contexts, from the three worlds and the positioning of the receiver regarding the act of speech.

Due to these characteristics, it is essential to deepen the discussions about effective communication in nursing, understanding that it represents one of the basic principles of care, as presented in this reflective study. Thus, scientific efforts to construct and socialize studies are necessary.

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