

A Qualitative Study on the Therapeutic and Educational Effects of Calligraphy Experiences for Nursing Students

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explored the therapeutic and educational effects of calligraphy experiences on nursing students and sought to gain a deeper understanding of how this arts-based learning affects students' emotional stability and internalization of professional values. **Method:** A 120-minute calligraphy program was conducted with 156 first-year nursing students at K University, and qualitative content analysis was employed. Data were collected through triangulation, including students' calligraphy works, verbal statements about their experiences, and the researcher's observation records. **Results:** This study categorized the students' experiences into four core categories; "emotional liberating and self-healing", "enhancing self-efficacy and motivating", "recharging through aesthetic immersion" and "expanding of empathetic relationships and reflecting professional identity". **Conclusion:** Calligraphy experiences were found to have a healing function that relieves students' stress, as well as educational effects that embody the values of empathy and care and cultivate professional identity. This suggests that calligraphy can be an effective arts-based educational strategy for nurturing nursing talent that combines scientific knowledge and artistic sensitivity. Therefore, further research is needed to systematically introduce art-based programs into nursing education curricula and verify their long-term effects.

Keywords: *Calligraphy, Nursing Students, Art-Based Learning, Healing, Educational Effects.*

Introduction

Nursing is complete when scientific knowledge and the artistic sensitivity of human care are in harmony [1]. Florence Nightingale's concept of "the art of nursing" emphasizes that nursing is not just a technical act, but a creative practice based on a deep understanding and empathy for human beings [2]. In this context, modern nursing education is focusing on arts-based learning, which integrates the arts and the humanities to support students' holistic growth [3]. Arts-based learning is an effective educational strategy that helps students develop empathy, self-reflection, and critical thinking skills by actively exploring and expressing their emotions and experiences [4]. Artistic activities in a medical setting can support personal growth, give meaning, and promote cooperation between patients and medical staffs, alleviate symptoms such as stress and anxiety, improve communication, and strengthen patient-centered care [5].

Building on the advantages of such expressive artistic activities, this study seeks to explore the therapeutic and educational effects of calligraphy, an artistic activity that expresses the mind through brush and ink, on nursing students. Calligraphy was chosen among various art media because it requires minimal tools, allowing anyone to easily begin, and can be completed in a short time, providing a sense of accomplishment—making it an efficient activity for busy nursing students. In particular, the process of focusing on each stroke to calm the mind is known to have excellent meditative and healing properties that contribute to stress reduction and emotional stability [6].

This study is based on the premise that the artistic characteristics of calligraphy can be deeply connected to the essential values of nursing. The process of immersing oneself in the tip of the brush is similar to the attitude of focusing entirely on the patient, and the process of creating balance and rhythm in the letters is similar to the creative problem-solving process of finding harmony in the complex situations of patients. Furthermore, the process of expressing one's emotions through calligraphy is directly linked to the self-reflection and emotion control skills required of nurses, and the act of

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conveying comfort to others through meaningful phrases can be seen as an act of empathy and care. Therefore, this study aims to explore the healing effects of calligraphy experiences on nursing students and investigate whether such artistic healing experiences lead to educational effects that deepen their understanding of the “artistry of nursing”.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study is a qualitative content analysis research that explores therapeutic and educational effects of calligraphy experiences on nursing students. Inductive qualitative content analysis was used to deeply understand the subjective experiences of the participants, and the derived results were interpreted in connection with the essential value of nursing.

Research Participants and Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with 156 first year nursing students at K University in Gangwon Province who voluntarily agreed to participate. This study was designed to capture the diversity of immediate responses experienced by a large group through a single session of artistic activity, and to derive patterns of common experiences rather than the experiences of a small group over multiple sessions. All the participants were informed of this study's purpose, procedures, guarantee of anonymity, and written consent was obtained. All data will be destroyed three years after this study's conclusion.

Data Collection

The data was collected through a calligraphy program conducted for approximately 120 minutes in June 2021. To increase the reliability and validity of this study, triangulation was used to obtain the following multifaceted data.

1st-round data (participant-generated materials): 125 calligraphy works created by participating students on the theme of their current emotions (156 students participated, but 31 works were excluded from the analysis because they were not submitted, the meaning of the text was difficult to understand, or they were expressed as simple drawings).

2nd-round data (participant verbal statements): 24 statements about their impressions of the activity and the meaning of their works after the program ended.

3rd-round data (researcher observation records): 15 researcher observation records capturing participants' non-verbal expressions and immersion processes throughout the activity.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed according to the three stages of inductive content analysis (preparation, organization, and reporting) proposed by Elo and Kyngäs [7]. In the first stage (preparation), all data were read repeatedly to extract meaningful passages (open coding). In the second stage (organization), the codes were compared and analyzed to group them into subcategories and categories. In the final stage (reporting), core themes were named based on the derived categories, and the results were presented based on the actual statements and works of the participants to increase the reliability of the results.

Ensuring the Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of this study, four criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln [8] were followed. To ensure truth value, the researcher cross-analyzed three types of data and had some participants' confirmation of the analysis results. To enhance applicability, the specific circumstances and procedures of this study were described in detail. To ensure consistency and neutrality, a reflection journal was kept throughout the research process to minimize the influence of the researcher's subjective bias.

Research Results

An analysis of nursing students' calligraphy experiences revealed that the core elements of the experience can be summarized into four categories ; “emotional liberating and self-healing”, “enhancing self-efficacy and motivation”, “recharging through aesthetic immersion” and “expanding of empathetic relationships and reflection on professional identity”. This demonstrates that calligraphy was not merely

a simple experience but a comprehensive process that explored, healed, and fostered the inner growth of the students.

Table 1. Category-Topic Collection-Topic Classification

Categories	Theme Collection	Themes	Sample phrases
Emotional liberating and self-healing	Emotional Expression and Relief	Laughter	Let's live with a smile.
		Ending the day	Have a nice day.
		Encouragement	You worked hard today.
	Emotional Comfort	Self-comfort	Everything will be okay.
		Warm messages	May this moment become a page that you can look back on again.
		Recovery and hope	I want present a warm spring to you living in a cold winter.
	Peace and Rest	Leisure	An afternoon with a cup of coffee.
		Small pleasures	The happiness of everyday life.
	Self-Healing	Organizing your thoughts	Healing the heart with writing.
		Emotional release	Stroke by stroke, emptying stress.
	Hope and Positivity	Positivity	You don't smile because you're happy; you're happy because you smile.
		Hope	Tomorrow will be better.
Enhancing self-efficacy and motivating	Self-Confidence and Positive Reinforcement	Confidence	I can do it
		Self-acceptance	I am who I am, and I like it. That makes me happy, doesn't it?
		Self-love	I am a lovable person, and life loves me.
	Motivation and Hope	Hope	Everything will be fine, just like it always has been.
		Will to challenge	Opportunities don't just happen, they are created.
	Goal Orientation and Sense of Accomplishment	Setting goals	Don't just work hard, work smart. Fear failure. Your grades will save you. Aim for an A+.
		Growth orientation	You did well, and everything will be fine.
Recharging through aesthetic immersion	Expression of Aesthetic Sensibility	Sensory beauty	Vivid colors and a sixth sense.
	The Aesthetics of Nature and the Seasons	Natural beauty	When spring blooms,
		Memories and seasons	it was summer.
	Artistic Immersion and Creative Expression	Aesthetic immersion	When writing, time stands still.
		The Joy of Creation	You are so beautiful, you might as well live as a flower.
Expanding empathetic relationships and reflecting professional identity	Empathy and Caring	Empathy for Patients	May your end be glorious.
		Warm Care	I want to give you, who has become a cold winter, a warm spring.
		Growth and Identity	I am blooming.

	Internalization of Professional Values	Sense of Mission	I am a nurse.
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Emotional Liberating and Self-Healing

For participating students, calligraphy served as a healing channel to safely express suppressed emotions and comfort minds exhausted by academic stress. Many students experienced self-comfort by writing positive and hopeful phrases. They comforted and healed themselves by writing positive phrases such as “Good job today” (Participant 15) and “It’s okay, everything will be fine” (Participant 32). These experiences were also specifically reflected in the participants’ reflections after the activity. One participant said, “As I focused on each stroke of the calligraphy, I noticed that other distracting thoughts had disappeared, and my mind felt calm” (Participant 41), while another participant expressed, “I think I understand what it means to heal the mind through calligraphy. It felt like I was letting my emotions flow through the tip of the brush” (Participant 78). The researcher’s observation records also noted that students who were initially tense gradually adopted more relaxed postures, occasionally smiling or exhaling deeply as they relaxed. This suggests that the calligraphy-based writing process served as an effective mechanism for expressing inner emotions outwardly, thereby alleviating psychological stress and achieving inner stability.

Enhancing Self-efficacy and Motivating

Calligraphy activities became a source of motivation for students, strengthening their belief in themselves and giving them a positive attitude toward the future. Students expressed their goals and resolutions in powerful calligraphy, thereby increasing their self-efficacy. By writing phrases such as “I can do it” (Participant 08), “Toward an A+” (Participant 55), and “Don’t give up” (Participant 91), students reaffirmed their resolve. One student, in particular, wrote, “Opportunities are not given; they are created” (Participant 112), demonstrating their determination to take charge of their future rather than passively waiting for it to happen. Through the small success of completing their own artwork, the students gained confidence in their abilities, which could translate into a willingness to take on challenges in their studies and future clinical practices. According to the researcher’s observations, the students also provided positive feedback to each other, such as “Wow, your writing is beautiful!” and “That phrase is really great!” while viewing each other’s works. This mutual support played a crucial role in restoring confidence and enhancing self-efficacy.

Recharging through Aesthetic Immersion

Participating students explored the aesthetic elements of calligraphy and immersed themselves in the creative process, experiencing a sense of joy and emotional rejuvenation that cannot be achieved through intellectual learning alone. By writing phrases such as “When spring blooms” (Participant 23) and “You are so beautiful, you might as well live as a flower” (Participant 67), they shifted their moods and felt a greater sense of self-worth. In their post-activity reflections, one student remarked, “It felt like my brain was awakening after a long time of engaging in a creative activity. It was a different kind of sense of accomplishment from studying nursing” (Participant 82), expressing the value of aesthetic activities. The researcher also observed that the students carefully considered the texture of the brush, the concentration of the ink, and the arrangement of the characters, immersing themselves deeply in their work like artists. Such “flow” experiences helped students temporarily escape from the stresses of daily life and recharge their psychological energy through the pure joy derived from creative acts themselves. This can be interpreted as the realm of “aesthetic knowing” mentioned by Carper [9], a process of perceiving the world more richly and gaining intuitive insights through artistic experiences [10].

Expanding Empathetic Relationships and Reflecting Professional Identity

Calligraphy activities provided students with an opportunity to look beyond their own inner selves and reflect on their relationships with others, as well as the values of care that they should uphold as future nurses. By writing phrases such as “I want to present a warm spring to you living in the cold winter” (Participant 104) and “I am a nurse” (Participant 121), students were able to feel their own desire to convey warm comfort to patients as professional nurses. Through this process, the students resolved to become not merely technicians who acquire knowledge and mechanically convey it, but people who can influence others’ lives. During the reflection session, one student introduced their work titled, “May your final moments be brilliant” (Participant 45), explaining, “My dream is to become a hospice nurse, and I wanted to convey my desire to help all lives end with dignity” (Participant 45). In this way, the

students expressed empathy and compassion for patients, families, and friends through their phrases, which naturally led to reflection on their professional identity. The process of sharing each other's works and the stories within them became an opportunity to confirm shared values and strengthen camaraderie.

Discussion

The results of this study show that calligraphy can be an effective educational strategy that positively influences both emotional healing and professional growth. The effects of “emotional liberating and self-healing” are related to the mindfulness characteristics of calligraphy, which are connected to the process of training the abilities of “self-awareness” and “self-regulation”, which are core elements of emotional intelligence. “Enhancing self-efficacy and motivating” can be explained by Bandura's self-efficacy theory [11]. The experience of completing a work in a short time strengthened beliefs about one's abilities, acting as an internal resource that encouraged persistent challenges in difficult tasks.

“Recharging through aesthetic immersion” reaffirms the importance of “aesthetic knowledge”, which is often overlooked in nursing education. Calligraphy cultivates sensitivity to understand the complexity of human experience by allowing students to feel beauty and harmony beyond technical accuracy. This artistic sensitivity serves as the foundation for viewing patients not as a collection of diseases, but as holistic beings with their own unique stories. Finally, “expanding empathetic relationships and reflecting on professional identity” demonstrates the most important educational achievement that runs through this study. The experience of writing phrases of empathy while thinking about patients is a process of internalizing empathy that is felt with the heart, rather than the learned knowledge. This implies that calligraphy can serve as a medium that transforms abstract nursing philosophy into a concrete “space for practice” where students can directly feel and express it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirmed that calligraphy experience activities can be a meaningful educational strategy that provides both healing and educational effects on nursing students. Through art, students were able to reflect on their inner selves, express their caring hearts, and internalize the meaning of “human care,” which is the core value of nursing. Based on the above results, the following recommendations are made.

First, it is necessary to systematically introduce art-based educational programs such as calligraphy into nursing education curricula as regular courses or extracurricular activities, and to develop them into long-term programs to verify their effectiveness.

Second, it is important to develop empathy education programs utilizing various art media such as role-playing and art therapy, and to integrate small-group activities and reflective writing to expand students' experiences of safely expressing their emotions and forming supportive relationships.

Third, this study has the limitation of exploring a single session experience, so follow-up research is needed to objectively verify the long-term educational and healing effects of calligraphy activities through longitudinal qualitative research or mixed research.

Future nurses must possess not only specialized knowledge and skills but also a deep understanding of humanity and warm sensitivity. Art-based education is expected to contribute to the cultivation of “warm-hearted professional nurses” who combine scientific expertise and technical skills with artistic sensitivity.

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