RESEARCH REPORT

Analysis of a Role Lettering method performed to nursing students : first and 2nd year nursing students as the subjects

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Abstract　One of Role Lettering methods, "time-machine message" was performed to 1st and 2nd year students at a college of nursing. The contents of time-machine messages were divided into three groups : the group of the subjects who wrote questions to themselves in the future ; the group of the subjects who wrote reports about their present situations to themselves in the future ; and the group of the subjects who wrote words of encouragement towards themselves in the future.

It was suggested that writing down a time-machine message could lead to an effect of making one to think over oneself and have a positive attitude, and also to an effect of enhancing the motivation to study.

Key words : role lettering, nursing students, time-machine message

Introduction

Role Lettering is a psychological technique, developed from the field of correctional education. In this method, one stands on both of the perspectives of "oneself" and "other", and by interchanging these two roles, both of the sides mutually communicate with each other by letter[1]. Today, this method is used in areas such as clinical education and school education. The purpose of Role Lettering is to let one realize one's own problems, and it is said to have an effect of self-counseling. Thereupon, it is considered whether it is possible to apply the method as a mental support for nursing students who are learning under a tight scheduled curriculum in order to become a profession related human life. So far, there are many reports[2−9] on the high level of stress among nursing students and on their anxiety/ fatigue symptoms during their clinical practice. Also, as a way to intervene such stress and troubles, there have been reports[10−11] on teaching methods to deal with such issues and the effectiveness of the use of humor. However, there have been few researches on a method of intervention working as a mental support for nursing students. Moreover, it is hard to find a report in which Role Lettering is used for such a purpose.

In this research, in order to perform Role Lettering to nursing students for the first time, the simplest method of Role Lettering, the "time-machine message" will be employed. This method involves writing letters "from me in the present to myself in the future" and "from me in the future to myself in the present". The time-machine message method is to be performed to nursing students, and subsequently the effect of it will be considered.

Purpose

Role Lettering will be performed to 1st and 2nd year nursing students, and subsequently it will be considered

whether it has an adequate efficacy for a method of mental support.

Method

The subjects were 119 of 1st and 2nd year female nursing students at a college of nursing. The purpose of this research was explained, and then a form for time-machine message was distributed to them. This form consisted of a piece of paper, and the first half of the form was the space to write a letter "from me in the present to myself in the future" and the last half was to write a letter "from me in the future to myself in the present". The subjects were explained "write a letter to yourself in the future, and then reply to that letter by getting into the role of you-in-the-future". Twenty minutes were set for the writing task. The age of the-subjects-in-the-future and the content of the letter were not restricted. After writing a time-machine message, the subjects were asked to describe their impressions of having done the task, and the ages and occupations of the subjects-in-the-future.

As an ethical concern, the followings were explained : the time-machine messages would remain anonymous ; cooperation was voluntary and there would be no disadvantage for not participating ; the contents of the research were to be processed so that a particular participant would not be identified. On the top of that, the nursing students who had agreed to cooperate were asked to submit the completed form of time-machine message. The KJ method was employed for analysis.

Results

The collection rate was 85.7% (102 nursing students). The valid number of the messages was 96 (the valid answer rate of 94.1%).

1. The ages and occupations of the subjects in the future to whom the letters were written by themselves in the present.

The ages of the subjects-in-the-future to whom the letters had been written were as shown in the Table 1. The most selected age was 30, as 22 of the subjects

chose. Also, the total of 29 of the whole subjects chose to write to themselves-in-the-late-20s. The occupations of the-subjects-in-the-future to whom the subjects in the present wrote a letter were as shown in the Table 2. The largest number of 70 of the whole subjects selected their future occupation as nurse. There were 7 of the subjects who wrote their future occupation as "can't imagine".

2. The contents of the time-machine messages

The written contents of the time-machine messages were classified by the KJ method and divided as shown in the Table 3.

(1) The group of the subjects who wrote questions to themselves in the future (Table 4).

The most written questions were respectively : "What do you do?" (28 of the subjects), "Do you work hard as a nurse?" (22), "How are you?" (17). As the replies to these questions, the most written messages

Table 1　The chosen ages of the subjects in the future to whom letters were written

Age : No. of the subjects		
23 : 8	29 : 8	36 : 1
24 : 4	30 : 22	40 : 4
25 : 12	31 : 1	42 : 1
26 : 4	32 : 2	More than 50 : 8
27 : 8	33 : 1	
28 : 9	35 : 2	Not answered : 1

Table 2　The occupations of the subjects in the future to whom letters were written

Occupation : No. of the subjects	
Nurse : 56	Student : 2
Public health nurse : 7	Nursing teacher : 1
Midwife : 7	Medical staff : 1
Can't imagine : 7	Unemployed : 1
YOGO teacher : 6	Others : 1
Housewife : 4	Not answered : 3

Table 3　The contents of the time-machine messages

1. The group of the subjects who wrote questions to themselves in the future.
2. The group of the subjects who wrote reports about their present situations to themselves in the future.
3. The group of the subjects who wrote words of encouragement towards themselves in the future.

were : "I am happy now as my dream has come true" (19), "If you don't study now, you will face many difficulties in the future" (17).

(2) The group of the subjects who wrote reports about their present situations to themselves in the future (Table 5)

The most written reports were respectively : "I am worried about my future" (11), "I am doing my best to get close to my dream" (9), "I feel discouraged as the study is hard" (6), "As the specialized study has started, I am feeling a mixture of expectation and anxiety" (6).

Table 4　The contents of the time-machine messages
　　　　－The group of the subjects who wrote questions to themselves in the future－

【From the subjects in the present to themselves in the future】
　　・What do you do? (28 of the subjects)
　　・Do you work hard as a nurse? (22)
　　・How are you? (17)
　　・Are you married? If so, have you got a child? (13)
　　・Have your dream come true? (11)
　　・Have you become a fine nurse? (10)
　　・Are you happy? (6)
　　・Do you work hard? (5)
　　・Do you get used to your job? (4)
　　・Is your work tough? (3)
　　・Do you try hard? (3)
　　・Do you still go about with the same boyfriend as the one I am with now? (2)
　　・Have you become and behaved like a grown-up? (2)
　　・Does your experiences in your school days help you? (1)
　　・Do you have a happy family? (1)
　　・Have you grown up? (1)
　　・Have you become a midwife? (1)
　　・Have you become a public health nurse? (1)
　　・What kind of person have you become? (1)
　　・What kind of grandmother have you become? (1)
　　・Don't you worry about small things? (1)

【From the subjects in the future to themselves in the present】
　　・I am happy now as my dream has come true. (19)
　　・If you don't study now, you will face many difficulties in the future. (17)
　　・It will be good to have a variety of experiences. (11)
　　・Try hard no matter what difficulty lies. (4)
　　・Enjoy the time of your youth. (3)
　　・I am fine. (3)
　　・I owe my happiness to you in the past, thank you. (2)
　　・Please be an honest person. (2)
　　・I work vary hard. (2)
　　・Now I am used to what I do. (1)
　　・I have become a midwife. (1)

As the replies to these reports, the most written messages were the followings : "You may find difficulties in your school days, but you will realize when you look back in the future that those days are the best period when you can do many things" (17), "Study hard and also play hard" (10), "Think carefully about the course of your life, and do what you have to do" (9), "Please have a variety of experiences" (8).

(3) The group of the subjects who wrote words of encouragement towards themselves in the future (Table 6)

The most written encouragements were respectively : "Please try hard to be a fine nurse" (7), "Please do your best for a happy life" (6), "Please take care of yourself and do your best" (5). As the replies to these, the most written messages were : "Please have done as much study as possible" (11), "I would like to express my thanks to you in the past" (2).

Table 5　The contents of the time-machine messages
　　　　－The group of the subjects who wrote reports about their present situations to themselves in the future－

【From the subjects in the present to themselves in the future】
　　・I am worried about my future. (11 of the subjects)
　　・I am doing my best to get close to my dream. (9)
　　・I feel discouraged as the study is hard. (6)
　　・As the specialized study has started, I am feeling a mixture of expectation and anxiety. (6)
　　・For now, I so often get surprised and make mistakes. (2)
　　・Now I feel that the study is very hard. (1)
　　・I want to be a far nicer person than I am now. (1)
　　・I am overcoming difficulties. (1)

【From the subjects in the future to themselves in the present】
　　・You may find difficulties in your school days, but you will realize when you look back in the future that those days are the best period when you can do many things. (17)
　　・Study hard and also play hard. (10)
　　・Think carefully about the course of your life, and do what you have to do. (9)
　　・Please have a variety of experiences. (8)
　　・Please live your days with all your might. (4)
　　・Please be a nurse who put oneself in a patient's place. (2)
　　・Now I yearn toward the old days when I was dreaming. (1)
　　・I thank you for your efforts which have made me what I am. (1)
　　・Don't be discouraged. (1)

Table 6　The contents of the time-machine messages
　　　　　－The group of the subjects who wrote words of en-
　　　　　couragement towards themselves in the future－

【From the subjects in the present to themselves in the future】
　・Please try hard to be a fine nurse. (7 of the subjects)
　・Please do your best for a happy life. (6)
　・Please take care of yourself and do your best. (5)
　・Please work hard. (3)
　・Please have a fulfilling life which can satisfy you. (2)
　・Keep on doing your best. (2)
　・I believe your dream have already come true, so do your best on anything with pride. (1)
【From the subjects in the future to themselves in the present】
　・Please have done as much study as possible. (11)
　・I would like to express my thanks to you in the past. (2)
　・It is necessary to make efforts to become a nurse. (1)
　・Try to do things that you can do only now. (1)
　・Please live your life with thoughtfulness. (1)
　・I am worried about you. (1)

Table 7　The impressions of the subjects after writing the time-machine messages

　・It was fun to imagine myself in the future. (19 of the subjects)
　・By writing the image of myself in the future, I could clarify my goal and feel active. (19)
　・I could recognize once again what I want to do in the future. (19)
　・My dream has swelled. (10)
　・I felt self-conscious to write to myself. (8)
　・I will do my best to become like the one I wrote down in the letter as what I would be like in the future. (7)
　・I would like to read my letter again some years later. (6)
　・It was difficult to imagine myself in the future. (6)
　・I hope my ideal life I wrote to myself in the future will come true. (6)
　・I reaffirmed my own dream. (5)
　・Now I can see what I should do. (4)
　・I was encouraged by myself in the future. (3)
　・I understand what I feel anxious about. (2)
　・I felt odd to write a letter to myself in the future. (2)
　・Now I would really like to know my future. (2)
　・I would like to treat myself more importantly for myself-in-the-future. (1)
　・I found myself relaxed by writing down my anxious feeling. (1)
　・The letter sent to me from the future turned out to be similar to what my parents always tell me. (1)
　・I felt refreshed. (1)

3．The impressions of the subjects after writing the time-machine messages (Table 7)

　The most written impressions were respectively : "It was fun to imagine myself in the future" (19), "By writing the image of myself in the future, I could clarify my goal and feel active" (19), "I could recognize once again what I want to do in the future" (19). The followings were the examples of the minority impressions : "I understand what I feel anxious about" (2), "I found myself relaxed by writing down my anxious feeling" (1).

Discussion

　The nursing students to whom Role Lettering was performed in this research were in their 1st or 2nd year at school, so that most of them were at the ages of between 18 and 20. In the ages of the subjects-in-the-future, the most imagined ages were between late 20s and 30, this implied that a large number of the subjects wrote a letter to themselves-in-not-so-far-future. Because of this, it is understandable that about 80% of the subjects imagined their future occupation as nurse. Although it was only 7 of the subjects in the research who stated their future occupation as "can't imagine", it can be interpreted that there are students who are not sure about their future.

　In the contents of the reports about the subjects' present situations to themselves in the future, it can be inferred from such reports as "I am worried about my future" and "I feel discouraged as the study is hard" that there are students who find difficult to be positive about becoming a nurse. They are in the period after 1 or 2 years from the enrollment in which more specialized courses of study need to be undertaken, and practical training is near at hand. Probably, they are in a transition from the period of expectation and delight at the enrollment to the period during which they may find difficulty in studying and feel anxious about their aptitude for their future jobs. Therefore, a possibility that it could use of Role Lettering as a screening to find out students in such a mental state was suggested.

　To the reports of the subjects' reports about their present situations, they-in-the-future gave an advice "You may find difficulties in your school days, but you will realize when you look back in the future that those days are the best period when you can do many things".

In the impressions of the subjects, it can be inferred from the impressions such as "By writing the image of myself in the future, I could clarify my goal and feel active" and "I could recognize once again what I want to do in the future" that Role Lettering can be an opportunity for them to think over themselves and a help for them to change their feeling so that they can start thinking positively.

From the impressions "I understand what I feel anxious about" and "I found myself relaxed by writing down my anxious feeling", it can be considered that they might have been able to think about themselves in an objective way by clarifying their feelings as writing. By using this function, therefore, it is considered to be possible to apply Role Lettering into self-counseling.

As the replies to the questions and encouragements from the subjects-in-the-present, the-subjects-in-the-future returned advices with the contents such as "I want you to study now". In order to enhance one's motivation to learn, it is important for oneself to realize the necessity of learning. It was suggested that motivation for learning is reinforced by employing Role Lettering. Furthermore, it was considered that the importance of studying being told by the-subjects-in-the-future who had made their dreams come true would lead the nursing students to obtain the confidence in achieving their goals and be helpful for their self-effect to be enhanced.

Conclusions

The time-machine messages written by the nursing students were analyzed. As a result, they wrote letters to themselves-in-the-future, the contents of which could be construed as "questions", "reports about their present situations" and "encouragements". In the replies to them, many of the subjects-in-the-future who had made their dreams come true gave advices on what the subjects-in-the-present should do for the future. It was suggested that there were effects of leading one to a positive feeling by letting one recognize one's future dream and think over oneself, and of motivating for studying. Also, it was considered that the imagining of oneself having achieved a goal would be possible to be a

help in enhancing one's own self-effect. Moreover, it was found that the Role Lettering method could be expected to be used as a screening to find out students who have mental problems at early stage.

Prospective future objectives

In this research, time-machine message was performed to all the nursing students together for only once, thus they seemed to be enjoying writing. However, if there is an increase in the level of stress as school grades advance higher, then it is possible that more serious and problematic situations may be written. In that case, it is necessary to consider a way to protect the privacy of the participant when writing down. Also, in this time, no feedback on the contents written by the nursing students was done. However, if Role Lettering is to be introduced in real situations in future, one of the issues is how to return advices to students. We would like to consider such issues continuously.

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