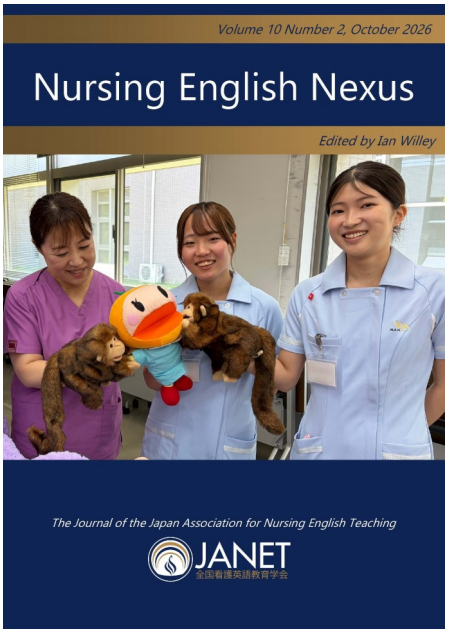
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Incorporating Psychological Inference and Characterization into Nursing English Classes

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***Abstract**: Children often express their emotions indirectly through behavior, facial expressions, play, or silence rather than through explicit verbal communication. Consequently, pediatric nurses require the ability to interpret children's psychological states as well as communicate effectively. The present report describes a nursing English educational framework presented at the 2026 conference of the Japan Association for Nursing English Teaching (JANET). The framework integrates literature, films, memory activities, and English role-play to stimulate psychological inference and characterization skills in undergraduate nursing students. Watching such feature films as the Harry Potter series, Maleficent, and Home Alone, students explored emotional neglect, attachment, resilience, family relationships, and alternative caregiving while practicing English communication. Memory activities encouraged students to recognize the importance of understanding each child as an individual, and English role-plays integrated pediatric communication with basic cognitive assessment. Rather than focusing solely on language acquisition, the educational activities cultivated empathy, reflective thinking, and patient-centered perspectives. The present report suggests that integrating familiar stories from films and books with reflective learning activities provides an engaging educational approach for developing psychological inference skills that are essential for communication with pediatric patients.*

Keywords: characterization; empathy; narrative medicine; pediatric nursing; psychological inference

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Communication is a fundamental component of pediatric nursing, but children do not always express their feelings, fears, or concerns directly. Depending on their developmental stage, personality, health condition, or emotional state, they may communicate through behavior, facial expressions, play, or silence rather than through explicit verbal explanations. Nurses therefore need to interpret these indirect forms of communication while building trusting relationships with children and their families (Hockenberry et al., 2019, pp. 86–87). Understanding children's emotional experiences is particularly important for providing compassionate and patient-centered care.

As reflected in commonly used nursing English textbooks (e.g., Inoue & Sato, 2022), nursing English education often focuses on areas such as medical terminology, reading comprehension, and spoken communication in healthcare settings. These areas provide an essential foundation for developing the English language skills that nursing students may need in their future professional practice. At the same time, nursing English classes can also provide opportunities to connect language learning with broader aspects of psychology, interpersonal communication, and human relationships.

This possibility may be particularly valuable in pediatric nursing, where effective communication involves understanding not only what children say but also what they may be feeling, thinking, or unable to express directly. English does not necessarily need to be taught as an isolated subject; it can provide a meaningful context in which students engage with these interpersonal dimensions while developing their language skills. This is not to say that English classes should be required to incorporate the teaching of psychological or clinical skills, but that nursing English can be viewed as a potentially valuable interdisciplinary space in which students observe characters, infer emotions and intentions, consider different perspectives, and communicate with sensitivity.

Narrative medicine provides a useful perspective for considering this possibility. Charon (2006, p. 11) describes narrative competence as the ability to recognize, absorb, interpret, and respond to the stories of others. In pediatric nursing, children's personal stories may be conveyed through actions and relationships as well as words. Imaginative literature and films can therefore provide opportunities for students to practice interpreting emotions, motivations, and interpersonal relationships before encountering comparable situations in clinical practice (Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1999, p. 50).

However, the integration of psychological inference and characterization into nursing English education remains relatively under-explored, particularly in relation to pediatric nursing. There is therefore scope to consider how English classes might incorporate these interdisciplinary elements without shifting their primary focus away from language learning, and how such approaches might connect English communication with empathy, perspective-taking, and patient-centered understanding.

Educational Framework: Developing Psychological Inference through Literature, Films, and Reflective Learning

The educational framework presented here encourages nursing students to consider the interpersonal meanings underlying communication with children. Throughout the English course, students were guided by three fundamental questions: "What might this child be feeling?"; "What evidence supports this interpretation?"; and "How should a nurse respond?" These questions provided a basis for psychological inference and guided the classroom activities.

Familiar literary works and films were incorporated to support this process. The Harry Potter series, Home Alone, and Maleficent were selected because they are familiar and engaging films for students and, more importantly, because each offers opportunities to examine children's emotions, relationships, family backgrounds, and responses to challenging life experiences. Analyzing fictional characters allows students to maintain a degree of analytical distance while considering how children's behavior and communication may reflect underlying emotions and psychological needs. The films therefore provided accessible contexts for examining children's experiences from multiple perspectives.

Classroom discussions were conducted in English, allowing students to use the target language while expressing and exchanging their interpretations of the characters' emotions, motivations, and relationships. Rather than viewing only selected clips, students watched each film in its entirety over several class sessions. This gradual viewing process gave students opportunities to follow the development of the child characters and their relationships over time and to consider how emotions, behavior, and psychological needs changed in response to different experiences and interactions.

The Harry Potter series (Columbus et al., 2001–2011) was used to explore childhood neglect,

resilience, and supportive relationships. Students considered Harry's experiences of growing up without his biological parents and living in an emotionally unsupportive environment. Questions such as "What kinds of people did Harry need?" and "Why were Harry's relationships with Ron, Hermione, Hagrid, and Dumbledore so important?" directed attention away from the fantasy elements and toward emotional development and interpersonal relationships. Students considered how a child's behavior might be better understood in the context of personal history and relationships, and how nurses might communicate with children experiencing isolation or insecurity.

Maleficent (Stromberg, 2014) offered a different perspective on attachment and caregiving. Aurora develops a trusting relationship with Maleficent despite being separated from her biological parents. Students considered themes of belonging, identity, foster care, adoption, and alternative caregiving. Discussion focused on how emotional security can develop through consistent care, protection, and acceptance rather than through biological relationships alone. This set of concerns also provided an opportunity to consider how nurses may encounter children from diverse family backgrounds and why each child's individual circumstances need to be understood sensitively.

A different learning activity was developed using Home Alone (Columbus, 1990). Students were shown photographs of 10 children appearing in the film, together with a separate list of their names, and were asked to match each child with the correct name. Although the exercise appeared straightforward, many students found remembering all the names difficult. This experience led to discussion about pediatric nursing, where nurses encounter many children with different personalities, developmental stages, family circumstances, and emotional needs. Remembering a patient's name was presented as only the first step toward recognizing the child as a unique individual.

Following these activities, students participated in English-language role-plays based on pediatric nursing scenarios. They assumed the roles of nurses, parents, children, and siblings while practicing communication that might occur in pediatric settings. The role-plays progressed from basic orientation questions to conversations exploring children's feelings and concerns. Students were encouraged to consider how anxiety, trust, fear, and emotional security might influence a child's responses and to adapt their English communication accordingly. Attention was also directed toward non-verbal cues and what a child might be unable or unwilling to express directly.

In such ways, imaginative literature and films provided material for observation and interpretation; the memory activity focused attention on children as individuals; and role-play offered opportunities to translate these insights into interpersonal communication. The activities were not intended to turn an English course into a series of psychology experiments or clinical training exercises, but rather to explore how language learning could be enriched through attention to the intricate dynamics of people, emotions, experiences, and relationships involved in communication.

Educational Implications

There are considerable advantages to using familiar works of fiction for reflective learning. The selected films allowed students to discuss such emotionally complex issues as neglect, attachment, resilience, loneliness, and family diversity in a psychologically safe English classroom environment. Because the characters were fictional, students could examine sensitive topics with some analytical and emotional distance while considering how similar situations might arise in pediatric nursing practice.

The gradual, sequential viewing of complete

films over several class meetings may also have educational advantages. Short clips can illustrate specific language or situations efficiently, but following the arc of an entire narrative over several sessions lets students observe how characters and relationships develop and change. Students can reconsider their earlier interpretations as new information becomes available, providing opportunities to recognize that understanding another person is an ongoing process rather than an immediate judgment based on a single behavior or interaction.

The memory activity similarly drew attention to the process of individualization. Identifying children by name is but one step toward understanding them as individuals with distinctive personalities, developmental stages, family backgrounds, and emotional experiences. When combined with role-play, the memory activity encouraged students to consider how communication might need to change according to the individual and the situation rather than relying only on predetermined questions or expressions.

These activities also put aspects of narrative medicine into practice within nursing English education. Charon (2006) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and interpreting patients' stories. By exploring children's experiences through fiction and film, students can attend to perspective, context, relationships, and meaning while simultaneously using English for discussion and interpersonal communication. In this respect, English becomes not only the object of learning but also a medium through which students can explore human experiences relevant to nursing.

This does not mean that psychological inference or characterization ought to become required components of nursing English education. Rather, this is one example of how teachers can connect language learning with the teaching of other aspects of interpersonal communication that are relevant to nursing. It illustrates how educators can create meaningful contexts for English communication that relate to students' future professional practice.

Conclusion

The key takeaway from the educational framework presented here is that nursing English classes can provide opportunities to connect language learning with the interpersonal dimensions of nursing practice. Literature, films, reflection, memory activities, and role-play can create an interdisciplinary space in which students use English while considering how children may think, feel, behave, and communicate. Psychological inference and characterization are therefore not proposed as additional competencies that English teachers are required to teach, but as potentially valuable skill sets through which language learning can be connected with empathy, perspective-taking, and patient-centered communication.

Future research might identify optimal combinations of literature, film, memory work, and role-play that improve English communication skills in ways that also develop psychological inference skills and deepen understanding of pediatric patients. The mechanics of such research could include student reflections, pre- and post-course evaluations, and longer-term follow-up in current and wider arenas. Research might also explore how the classroom framework proposed here could be adapted to other areas of nursing in which understanding patients' perspectives, backgrounds, and unspoken concerns is particularly important.

Integrating language learning with the exploration of human experiences thus represents one possible way to widen the scope of nursing English education while retaining the core focus on language learning.

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