

Feelings and behaviours

TABOO

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Most people are aware of a gap or dissonance that sometimes exists between what they are feeling 'inside' and what they are saying 'outside'. This activity examines this gap and explores the student's response to it. It focuses on how the student handles taboo subjects.

The activity also concerns the student's view of learning. How do beliefs, feelings and actions influence openness to learning?

Method

The practice teacher and the student work individually, spending about 10 minutes reading *Taboo* and thinking about each discussion point in turn.

Discuss each point together and make brief notes.

Consider actual situations which have aroused difficult feelings.

Ask the student for feedback about the usefulness of the activity and discuss any residual feelings that the activity has aroused.

Variations

Taboo can easily be translated into other possibilities; for example, reversing the races (black patient / white doctor) or introducing gender or age factors as the significant differences. The activity has the greatest impact when the account is told so that the student can identify closely with the patient. The example in *Taboo* is from the point of view of a white woman.

This activity deals with difficult material, so we recommend that it is used with particular care and by a practice teacher/student pair. However, two or more pairs can get together later to compare their discussions.

Feelings and behaviours

TABOO Activity

A white woman is admitted to hospital after a climbing accident on holiday. She is conscious, but unable to move without racking pain, and feels extremely vulnerable and dependent. These feelings of pain and vulnerability are new and somewhat shocking to her, because she is usually healthy, strong and independent.

When the doctor comes in for the examination, the woman looks up and sees that the doctor is black. For a split second, her reaction is negative - feelings of vulnerability and dependency increase.

The next split second, she feels ashamed, guilty and horrified by these feelings and is determined to try to overcome them, and not to show any trace of them to the black doctor.

Discussion points

Was the patient's reaction racist?

Was the patient's reaction "normal"?

How could you explain the patient's initial feelings?

The patient has previously expressed anti-racist views. In the light of this, how do you view the patient's first reaction to the doctor?

How do you view the patient's attempts to hide the initial feelings by covering them up?

If you were the doctor, what would be important to you?

If you were the doctor what would you *do* in this situation?