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The power of parasocial learning: Nurses' experiences of learning through entertainment-education in the online learning environment

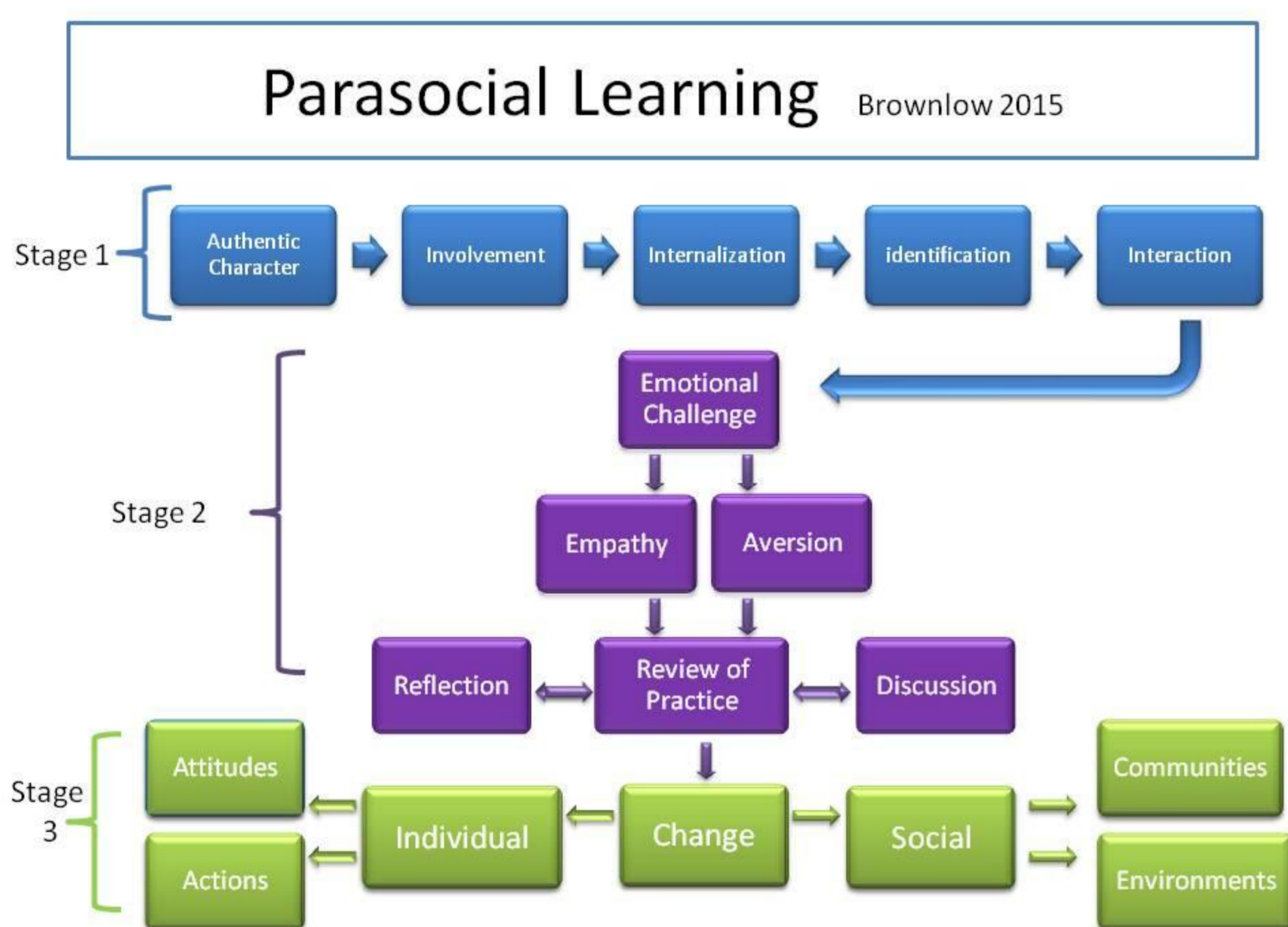
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Introduction

Entertainment-education is a pedagogy commonly used in the sphere of public health to transmit educational messages via mass media such as TV and radio dramas. By exploring nurse learners' experience of online entertainment-education dramas I discovered, learning through entertainment-education for them is a dynamic, emotional and transformative experience. I called the associated learning process parasocial learning.

Findings

Parasocial learning is an active, reflective response to an emotional encounter between a learner and an entertainment-education character leading to discovery of meaning and personal or social change.



Stage 1 Parasocial Interaction:

Nurse learners experience interactions with online entertainment-education characters as if they are real people.

Stage 2 The Emotional Challenge:

The parasocial interaction stimulates empathy or aversion and prompts a review of practice.

Stage 3 Learning and Change:

A reframe of ideas and personal transformation takes place in response to emotional challenge.

Example

Mandy (Cardiac risk assessment nurse) showing empathy promoting a reframe of her views on working with patients with depression: *“Deidre, the one with depression, was really interesting. Very often with depressed people they are just hard work aren’t they? I know I’m hard work if I’m depressed. What was great about that is remembering, coz we went through it with her, is she actually got better. And if you proactively engage, it’s not like that forever.”*

Conclusions

Nurses in higher education learn parasocially through entertainment-education in the online learning environment. They interact with online characters as if they were real people, experience the same emotional and cognitive challenges and engage in the same reflective and discursive processes. Emotion is a key stimulus for learning.

Learning parasocially enables nurse learners to reframe difficult emotions in a safe online environment where the nurse learner and patient are free from harm.

Implications

With the need to provide learning experiences for nurses that ensure patient safety (Berwick Report 2013) and the numbers of nurse learners set to rise in the near future (Share of Caring Review 2015) pressure on placements in clinical practice increasing, Entertainment-education can be used to create meaningful parasocial learning experiences as a safe, viable alternative to placements in practice settings.

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