

An innovative service-learning project to develop cultural competency in undergraduate nursing students



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Abstract

A service-learning opportunity was implemented with fundamental nursing students in an associate degree program to develop cultural competency. Research has supported service-learning as an effective teaching modality. It is the responsibility of undergraduate nursing programs to prepare their nursing students with adequate cultural skills to care for ethnically and culturally diverse populations. © 2016 Organization for Associate Degree Nursing. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Registered nurses work in a multicultural society with profound health disparities among minority groups, often attributed to complex cultural and environmental factors (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2011; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007). The current population in the United States is approximately 30% minority, and this number is anticipated to grow to over 50% by 2050 (U.S. Census, 2012). However, less than 25% of minorities are represented in our nation's nurses (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, 2013).

A nurse can expect to care for patients with differences in race, ethnicity, religion, historical experiences, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, socioeconomic status, geographical locations, limited English proficiency, language barriers, and low literacy. Research has shown that a majority of nurses feel that they lack relevant knowledge about immigrants' cultural backgrounds and therefore feel incompetent to provide patient care (Momeni, Jirwe, & Emami, 2008). Furthermore, the Institute of Medicine (2002) indicated that cultural barriers, a

lack of cultural competence training, and stereotypes and biases held by health care providers contribute to health disparities among minorities. The National League for Nursing (2009) and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2008) identified that cultural competency is a core curriculum standard. Nursing curricula that have typically focused on the knowledge and theory of cultural competence rather than the practical development of culturally sensitive skills have been ineffective in producing nursing graduates with culturally competent attitudes (Bond, Kardong-Edgren, & Jones, 2001). Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, and Day (2010) stated that there is a need for nurses who understand the "lived experience" and a "learned perspective." Because prelicensure nursing programs are inundated with content and have limited access to clinical sites, it is important for nursing faculty to be creative and incorporate innovative strategies for teaching cultural competence. A service-learning experience with nursing students and holocaust survivors was developed to foster cultural competencies in an associate degree nursing program.

Literature Review

Nursing students need both theory and clinical experiences that encompass cultural development. Recent research by

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several scholars claimed that service and experiential learning was an effective teaching strategy for students to develop cultural competence (Amerson, 2010; Axtell, Avery, & Westra, 2010; Bentley & Ellison, 2005; Nokes, Nickitas, Keida, & Neville, 2005; Sensenig, 2007). Service-Learning projects involving cultural encounters upon entry and throughout the nursing program are innovative approaches to enhance competent nursing care for diverse populations (Bentley & Ellison, 2005). A quasi-experimental study by Chen, McAdams-Jones, Djin, and Packer (2012) conducted research on the impact of service-learning on cultural competence among nursing students at the associate degree level. The research revealed a statistically significant increase in cultural awareness and knowledge among the experimental group. These basic skills are required for cultural interactions, and students may be more inclined to engage and collaborate with diverse populations. Chen et al. results supported the service-learning project's ability to develop the students' cultural competence. Even though, Chen et al. study does not demonstrate the application of cultural skills into clinical practice, it does reveal the impact of service-learning as an effective teaching strategy. Despite this research, the majority of nursing curricula infuse cultural competency via theory in the classroom, (Brennan & Cotter, 2008) rather than on service-learning (Kardong-Edgren et al., 2010). Service-Learning bridges theory to practice and prepares health professionals for real-world encounters (Association of American Medical Colleges and Association of Schools of Public Health, 2012). Smith-Miller, Leak, Harlan, Dieckmann, and Sherwood (2010) reported that cultural competence is an ongoing developmental process requiring multiple experiences to integrate the constructs of cultural competency and the need for nursing programs to seek creative approaches to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Experts in cultural competency, academia, health care, and accrediting agencies support cultural competence education at the undergraduate level in all health professions as a key element to provide culturally competent patient-centered care (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, & Park, 2005; Joint Commission, 2010; Mareno & Hart, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health [OMH], 2011). Furthermore, the Joint Commission, has put into effect as of July 2012 a set of new and revised national standards for culturally and linguistically appropriate services as part of an initiative to advance the issues of effective communication, cultural competence, and patient and family-centered care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, OMH, 2013).

The design and implementation of the service-learning project utilized the Campina-Bacote Cultural Competence Care Model as the framework. Campinha-Bacote (2003) defines *cultural competency* "as the process in which the health care provider continuously strives to achieve the ability to work effectively within the cultural context of a client, individual, family or community" (p.54). There are five constructs to her model: cultural awareness, skill, knowledge, encounter, and desire. Cultural awareness indicates the need to look at one's own

biases, prejudices, and culture. Cultural skill relates to the opportunity to conduct cultural health assessments. Cultural knowledge means that the students are educating themselves about other cultures and worldviews. Cultural encounters examine the need to have the necessary cross cultural interactions with patients. In the final construct, cultural desire states that the student nurses have the need or the want to learn about cultures different from their own (Campinha-Bacote, 2003).

Description of the Service-Learning Project

Three clinical groups of beginning nursing students pursuing an associate degree at a diverse community college participated in service-learning by interviewing elderly, Jewish holocaust survivors on their cultural views of health, illness, and death. Each clinical group had seven–eight nursing students and interviewed holocaust survivors for approximately 90 minutes using a structured interview format provided by the faculty. The service-learning project has been instituted by the same faculty member once a semester to a different clinical group over a span of three semesters. The purpose of the project was for beginning nursing students to gain a cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity during a one-on-one encounter, conduct an individual cultural assessment, and begin to plan appropriate nursing care according to the clients' cultural needs. Interviewing a holocaust survivor provided a unique opportunity for the nursing students to explore the cultural domains of religion, nationality, ethnicity, age, immigrant status, and historical experiences, along with its impact on health beliefs. The project facilitated attainment of the basic course objectives of cultural competency development, communication, and assessment in the first semester. It also provided a platform for the nursing students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for patient-centered care and interview experience with culturally diverse individuals. The campus' holocaust center was used as a nontraditional clinical site, convenient, and readily available for the nursing students. Many schools lack such proximal resources (Long, 2012) and struggle with securing traditional clinical sites.

The service-learning project's outcomes were for the nursing students to

- a) demonstrate effective cross-cultural communication skills;
- b) conduct a self and cross-cultural health-related assessment;
- c) demonstrate the desire to explore the elements of cultural awareness, empathy, and sensitivity with one cultural encounter;
- d) create an individualized nursing care plan, integrating the interviewee's cultural perspective; and
- e) describe the importance of providing culturally competent nursing care to help achieve positive health outcomes among culturally diverse individuals.

The director of the holocaust resource center coordinated the date and time each semester with the survivors after

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