



## Nursing Students' Intercultural Learning via Internationalization at Home: A Qualitative Descriptive Study<sup>☆</sup>



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### 1. Introduction

Nursing graduates worldwide are expected to be culturally competent to provide quality care to an increasingly diverse population. With the growing emphasis on internationalization in education, many learners have studied abroad as exchange students (Baernholdt et al., 2013). While not all students are able to take part in overseas exchanges, it is possible for them to achieve cultural capability through the use of technology within the concept of Internationalization at home (IaH) (Trahar and Hyland, 2011). Earlier studies on cross-cultural learning through video conferences (Iwasiw et al., 2000) and pedagogical tools (Lepp et al., 2003) focused on nursing practice as an outcome. Chan and Nyback's (2015) study revealed the development of cultural sensitivity and competencies in nursing students through the use of web-based technology and a final Skype meeting. Nursing literature on the topic of intercultural learning through communication and interaction is limited. Language learning or practice has been the main focus of such studies, which have not solely been about intercultural learning (Çiftçi, 2016).

Intercultural learning is defined as the development of an understanding of and appreciation for one's own culture and that of others (Hollinderbäumer et al., 2013). Kohn (2013) asserted that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of different languages and cultural backgrounds. ICC is considered key to the success of virtual forms of interaction (Helm and Guth, 2010), and is seen as "an acquired quality" (Kupka et al., 2007). Hence, it is important not to assume that all of the misunderstandings in the students' online exchanges are related to the interface of "cultures" (O'Dowd, 2007). Internationalization at home (IaH) blends the concepts of self, strangeness, and otherness (Teekens, 2006). When technology is adopted, a "third space" is created (Bhabha, 1994) for the participants' cultural learning. This third space is

a space between cultures, wherein cultural differences are negotiated with the awareness that other perspectives exist in the world besides one's own. Given the growing use of interactive technology, Macharaschwili and Coggin (2013) argued that more research is needed to determine if learning through an understanding of the way by which intercultural communication takes place in this environment is indeed a new way of accessing cultural knowledge.

The digital environment on which this study on the intercultural learning of students is based is that of Skype (Morgan, 2013). Skype is a user-friendly voice over internet protocol (VoIP) software that allows users to make video and voice calls (Michels and Chang, 2011). It is free, easy, and accessible. Blau and Caspi (2008) examined the differences between audio conferencing (using Skype with an audio-only component) and traditional face-to-face learning. While the learning that took place was the same in both groups, the emotional-experiential aspects of learning favored face-to-face communication. Through its synchronous feature, Skype can simulate a face-to-face environment and allow students to participate from a distance.

In this paper, the authors will explore the process of intercultural learning between nursing students from Hong Kong and those from Sweden through their intercultural communication, interactions, reflections, and their perceptions of the process via Skype.

### 2. Methods

Since the research team was interested in direct descriptions of the students' perceptions of their intercultural experience of interactions in a virtual learning environment, the methodology that was adopted was the qualitative descriptive approach (Sandelowski, 2000). Using this method, the research team described the students' reports of their experiences and encouraged the students to provide explanations of their behaviors.

#### 2.1. Ethical Considerations

This project was approved by institutional research ethics boards at Malmö (no. 2014/836) and PolyU (no. HSEARS20141216001). The students were briefed about the project and informed that their participation was voluntary.

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## 2.2. Sampling and Setting

A convenience sample of a total of 20 undergraduate students, 10 from Hong Kong and 10 from Sweden, was recruited. There was no attrition during this study. The participating third year nursing students (in a five-year program) from Hong Kong were between the ages of 18 to 20. The participating third year nursing students from Sweden (in a three-year program) were older, from 23 to 30, as many were returning students. An understanding of interactions between different profiles of students may provide a fresh approach (Çiftçi, 2016). Apart from acquiring knowledge about theories on cross-cultural and trans-cultural nursing in class, actual encounters and interactions with peers in different countries, through technology, may promote intercultural learning among students. As the emphasis in intercultural learning is on the degree of interaction among students, the students made use of both the visual and audio features of Skype to discuss their nursing practices.

## 2.3. Procedure

The research team constructed a patient illness journey from admission to discharge for the students to discuss their plan of care. The assessments were based on the students' reflective journal on intercultural learning in the nursing management of a patient and his wife. Guidelines were given to students for their reflective writing (Appendix A). Students from both ends were also given a set of guided questions to use in discussing their plan. Students initiated the first Skype session through introducing themselves to each other as instructed in the guide, and faculty members didn't interact during the

Skype sessions. There were three online Skype sessions on the students' discussions. The research team decided that to encourage the more open expression of views the international and home students should undergo a separate local debriefing after each session and participate in a separate final focus group meeting. However, the students were encouraged to email each other after the first session. The entire project lasted for two months, from October 8 to November 23, 2015.

## 2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the study came from the Skype seminars, the post Skype debriefings, the focus group discussion, and the reflective journals of the students. The discussion was conducted in English because the courses were taught in English. English proficiency for the students was assessed to meet the standard English admission requirement upon their matriculation.

The transcriptions were analyzed and coded using inductive and comparative methods to uncover common themes (Bradley et al., 2007). Then, frequent discussions were held within our local teams and with the overseas research group through Skype meetings. Initial codes were created, and revised as needed with the uncovering of new data. Data triangulation from different sources was conducted by comparing and connecting related data for a more comprehensive understanding. Similar codes were sorted and grouped into categories. Themes were then identified with reference to the categories and the data set (Table 1). Through the practice of reflexivity, the researchers acknowledged personal experiences and assumptions that might have influenced their collecting and analyzing of the data. The authors defined, named, and discussed the themes until they reached a consensus.

**Table 1**

Examples from the process of analysis.

Note. We used abbreviations to indicate our sources of data: seminar is represented with the use of S, debriefing with D, focus group with F, and reflective journal writing with R. Pseudonyms were used to indicate the Hong Kong students, and numbers were used for the Swedish students.

Verbatim quotes	Categories	Themes
Ceci stated, "So would you also address the anxiety of the wife? Let's move on to the subject of diet." (S)	1a. A close-ended discussion	
"My experience is ... okay, we have a patient with cardiac failure, what nursing interventions can we suggest, what do we want to discuss? However, I felt that the students from Hong Kong more or less gave us a lecture." (F student 3)	1b. Differences in focus	1. Failure of the students to interact with each other
Pun commented, "our lack of ability to respond may relate to the very structured way that we learn in Hong Kong." (F)	1c. Teacher-dependent and task focused with anxiety vs learner-centered with relaxation	
"It felt as if the students in Hong Kong regarded the Skype sessions as their assessment and examination in some way; they wanted to perform and express what they knew. We were more laid back; of course it is course work and we get credits for it, but nevertheless it felt more relaxed at our end." (F Swedish student 1)		
"In Sweden we seem to be more restrictive with this kind of obvious display about the patient's condition. Maybe we have different ideas about patient privacy." (D Student 10)	2a. The shift in focus from factual to experiential knowledge	2. Students' perceptions of enablers to intercultural learning
Tracy stated, "I thought the Swedish students were very attentive in their patient care as they would regard the public display of a fall risk sign for a patient as an issue of privacy, and this information would only be found in their documentation. I think this practice is quite good." (D)		
"I at first found it hard to start the discussion as the students from Hong Kong took charge and read their answers to the questions. However, after a while, it felt more relaxed and we started to discuss and ask each other things, which was fruitful to our discussions." (F Swedish student 10)	2b. A relaxed attitude with more questioning and deeper learning	
Ming stated, "During these two meetings, I [was more relaxed] and learnt that it is vital for us to have a deeper exchange, and I clarified my understanding through questioning, which improved my cultural learning." (R)		
Jan stated, "I was initially worried about my English but after listening to my Swedish peers, I felt more comfortable about speaking, as their English level seems to be the same as mine." (R)	2c. A sense of comfort arose through a perceived similar level of English competence	2. Students' perception of the enablers to intercultural learning
A Swedish student said "To practice our English to express what we really want to express, can enhance our communication" (F student 7)		
Ching commented, "[Given what I have learnt from our Swedish peers], I will feel confident about working in Sweden when I am more experienced after working for a few years in Hong Kong." (D)	2d. Confidence developed from perceived commonalities	
"[It's] hard to give everyone an equal chance to talk, but it was an advantage that we could see each other. We had eye-contact and that made it easier, with body language." (F student 8)	2e. Facilitation of intercultural communication in the virtual environment of Skype	
One thing that usually annoys me with Skype, but that I found to be an advantage here, was the sound delay, which meant that everyone really needed to pay attention and listen to each other. (F student 2)		

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