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A qualitative study of baccalaureate nursing students following an eight-day international cultural experience in Tanzania: Cultural humility as an outcome.

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Abstract

Transcultural and intercultural competence through study abroad is widely recognized as a preferred teaching approach for the development of globally competent health care practitioners because of the noteworthy effects that these experiential opportunities have on students. Sparse research has been conducted to determine if controversial *short-term* study abroad trips of less than two weeks are achieving positive outcomes. The purpose of this interpretative qualitative study was to describe the nature and meanings of a short-term international cultural experience for U.S. nursing students that travelled to Tanzania over an 8-day period. The results indicated that the participants experienced culture shock, but they also gained in self-awareness, cultural empathy, and leadership skills. The data also revealed that for many participants, this international experience led to the development of cultural humility. Langer's theory of Mindfulness, and Campinha-Bacote's Process of Cultural Competence provided the theoretical framework for this study. This paper also discusses pedagogical approaches for short-term programs and outcomes.

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1. Introduction

The profession of nursing espouses the importance of a “democratic spirit which leaves color, race and prejudice behind . . . it is the aim to give the same kind of care to men, women, and children, to all colors and creeds, rich and poor, enemies and friends” (Harmer & Henderson 1939, p. 8). The American Association of Colleges of Nursing

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(AACN) recognizes that the environment in which professional nurses practice has become more “diverse and more global in nature,” and mandates “attention to diversity in order to provide safe, high quality care” (AACN, 2012, p. 6). Transcultural nursing is the humanistic and scientific area of formal study and practice that focuses on differences and similarities among cultures with respect to human care, health (or well-being), and illness (Leiminger, 1988). In transcultural nursing, people with different cultural backgrounds are not separated into “cultural” groups; rather, the nurse locates common needs and common experiences.

The Transcultural Nursing Society (2012) has found that nurses and other health care providers frequently are reluctant to, or incapable of providing meaningful care to people who are different from their own cultural backgrounds. Rather, blatant cultural clashes and practices that are ineffective or harmful are imposed on the diverse patient, ignoring the cultural needs of the individual. This is particularly apparent in the United States, where racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status disparities in health care persist at unacceptably high levels (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2010). Blacks, Asians, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Hispanics receive poorer quality care than Whites and have limited access to care when compared to Whites within the United States, according to the 2010 *National Healthcare Quality Report* and *National Healthcare Disparities Report* issued by the USDHHS Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Research by Reeves and Fogg (2006) found that only 50% of U.S. nursing graduates stated that they were comfortable providing care to individuals who were different from their own ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

One way to develop culturally responsive nurses is to provide authentic ways for nurses and nursing students to develop transcultural nursing skills. Participation in international cultural experiences can help nursing graduates become more aware of the unique needs of their patients as they consider the impact of culture, religion, and socioeconomics on health care (Banks, 1994).

2. Growing Body of Evidence Supporting International Study

Colleges and universities are searching for a variety of ways to encourage students to participate in international cultural experiences because of the measurable positive outcomes that these experiences have on students. As a result, international cultural experiences in all disciplines have increased in popularity in recent years, according to the Institute of International Education’s (IIE), *Open Doors Report* (2011). The number of U.S. students studying abroad has tripled over the past 20 years. However, this still represents just over one percent of all U.S. students enrolled in higher education, a very small proportion of the 20 million U.S. college students (IIE, 2011), and an even smaller percentage of nursing students. Whereas there are many reasons that prohibit students from studying abroad, including lack of finances, programs not conducive to their schedules, or lack of faculty and parental support; the benefits of an international cultural experience program has been well-documented in the literature (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009). Short-term programs have played a significant role in providing increased opportunities for students who wish to participate in international cultural experiences by offering flexible opportunities for students who were unable to participate in traditional long-term programs (IIE, 2012). Likewise, longer international cultural experiences are often difficult to arrange in rigorous programs such as nursing, which are bound by stringent rules and regulations of national accrediting agencies. These accrediting agencies require in-hospital and other clinical experiences on a weekly basis, limiting the amount of time students can travel abroad. If a student chooses a semester of travel, the graduation date is often delayed for a semester or an entire year, since nursing courses follow a specific sequence. A summer option exists for some, however, many students choose to work over the summer months to supplement their income.

2.1 The Need for Short-Term International Programs

Given the constraints placed on U.S. nursing programs as well as the limitations imposed by U.S. students’ financial resources and personal obligations, it is necessary to identify realistic opportunities for international experiences for nursing students. Although previous research supports the goal of increased students’ global understanding and cross-cultural knowledge through traditional *long-term* study abroad trips, limited research has been conducted to determine if *short-term* study abroad trips are achieving this goal. Some researchers have disputed the value of any program of less than two weeks. However, several studies found that it is the pedagogical approach which greatly affects learning regardless of program length (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009; Bosworth, Haloburdo, Hetrick, Patchett, Thompson, & Welch, 2006; Franklin, 2010; Green, Johansson, Rosser, Tengnah, & Segrott, 2008; Zorn, 1996; Zorn, Ponick, & Peck, 1995).

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