



Promoting cultural understanding through pediatric clinical dyads: An education research project



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SUMMARY

This project explored the experiences of six undergraduate nursing students, three American nursing students and three nursing students from the Sultan of Oman, who participated in a faculty initiated education research project as part of their pediatric clinical practicum. Students were placed in dyads, with one American-born student and one Omani student in each dyad. Omani students also were paired with American nurse preceptors. A transcript-based content analysis was used to analyze data generated from qualitative focus group student interviews and student journals. The analysis generated three themes that described how myths were dispelled, cultural barriers were broken down and knowledge gained from another cultural perspective. The nurse preceptors were surveyed at the conclusion of the program. The survey findings suggest that preceptors gained a different cultural perspective of nursing care and they were better informed of the Omani students' learning needs. There was, however, an additional investment of preceptor time in meeting the learning needs of international students. Additional faculty time was also required for preparation and time during clinical conferencing to address differences in nursing practice between U.S. and Oman while meeting course learning objectives. Overall, the educational program provided evidence of enhancing American and Omani student cultural competence and Omani student adaptation to the United States. Coupling a domestic student with an international student to form dyads from the beginning of international students' experience could be a significant enhancement to both groups of students' learning experience.

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Introduction

Increasingly international nursing students are enrolled in baccalaureate-degree nursing programs across the U.S. Although there are no specific data regarding the number of international nurses studying in the U.S., students enrolled in health professional programs reached over 29,000 in the 2011 to 2012 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2012). Further, there is limited literature regarding strategies to promote cultural adaptation for international nursing students studying in the U.S. and strategies to broaden opportunities for domestic and international nursing students' participation in peer learning.

Background

This review will address the available literature related to cultural adaptation of international students and cultural learning that occurs when domestic and international students interact.

International students enhance university campuses and classrooms by providing different cultural perspectives for domestic students who may be unable to travel outside the U.S. (Canavor, 2004). When U.S. and international students have the opportunity to interact, they gain a greater cultural perspective (Campbell, 2012; Shigaki and Smith, 1997). As a group, international students from all majors do not perform as well academically as their U.S. peers (Morrison et al., 2005). This may be related to difficulty with language (Gilligan and Outram, 2012; Sanner et al., 2002) and international students' challenges with cultural adaptation in the host country (Mendelsohn, 2002). English fluency problems have been noted to result in international nursing students' social isolation (Sanner et al., 2002) and academic barriers (Shakya and Horsfall, 2000). International health and nursing students (Gilligan and Outram, 2012; McDermott-Levy, 2011) have reported limited social interaction with domestic students, yet when there is more social engagement with U.S. students, international students adapt better and feel more comfortable with their international experience (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Rajapaksa and Dundes, 2002–2003).

Mattila et al. (2010) interviewed international nursing students studying in Finland and found that international students felt that they were part of the care team when they perceived being welcomed and supported by the nursing staff. Examination of domestic Austrian nursing students' experiences in clinical settings identified that greater nursing student confidence can result in more interactions with the

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hospital staff (Newton et al., 2009). Frequent and positive interactions between students and hospital staff have been reported to promote a rich learning environment (Newton et al., 2009).

Relationships between international and domestic students can prepare both groups of students for a global workforce (Campbell, 2012) and provide a future foundation for international professional connections (Campbell, 2012; Institute of International Education, 2012). Close interactions between international and domestic nursing students can also support nursing programs' objectives of incorporating cultural and global learning experiences into the curricula (Chavez et al., 2010; Riner, 2011; Wilson et al., 2012). These curricular objectives can support national imperatives to increase the capacity for the nursing profession to influence international health factors (Institute of Medicine, 2011; Nichols et al., 2011).

Providing an educational program that supports international student adaptation while promoting students' global health perspectives has the capacity to improve learning of both student groups. Planned educational programing, pairing international and domestic students to promote personal relationships improve international student adjustment (Campbell, 2012; Mendelsohn, 2002; Shigaki and Smith, 1997), enhance cultural perspectives including better understanding of the student's own culture, support empathy regarding the challenges of the sojourning student (Campbell, 2012; Mendelsohn, 2002), and breakdown stereotypes (Shigaki and Smith, 1997). Strategies, such as facilitating student dialogs and participation in university organizations, have been recommended to promote international nursing student learning and socialization with host country students (Gilligan and Outram, 2012; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Thompson, 2013). Shigaki and Smith (1997) developed a program for education students to promote Asian (Bangladeshi, Korean, & Taiwanese) international and U.S. domestic student interaction that included planned educational and social activities within student pairs. International students were paired with volunteer U.S. students to promote intercultural understanding between the student dyad while supporting classroom learning and reducing international students' feelings of isolation. The student pairs collaborated on assignments, reflected on cultural differences within their discipline of education, and interacted socially. Student participants kept journals of their dyad learning experience. This teaching strategy relied on peer learning by creating student partnerships to share learning and knowledge (Whitman, 1988). Peer learning has been used with U.S. domestic nursing student dyads during clinical practicums. The nursing student dyads reported less anxiety and greater confidence in their abilities when they participated in peer learning in the clinical setting (Austria et al., 2013).

Since 1994, a mid-sized northeastern U.S. private, faith-based university has provided a baccalaureate-degree program for diploma-prepared nurses from the Sultanate of Oman (Fitzpatrick, 2004). Oman is an Arab Muslim country on the Arabian Peninsula of the Middle East. The Omani students' faculty advisor had attempted to promote U.S. and Omani student interaction by hosting social activities such as bowling or multicultural pot-luck dinners. The activities were attended by the Omani students with sparse U.S. student attendance. Given our past experiences, it was determined that to promote sustained Omani-domestic student relationships, planned activities must be tied to curricular objectives with required student assignments, similar to those developed by Shigaki and Smith (1997). The purpose of this educational research project was to explore the personal, cultural, and clinical experiences of six baccalaureate nursing students, three U.S. nursing students and three Omani nursing students, who participated in a clinical dyad education research project as part of their pediatric clinical practicum.

Clinical Dyad Design

Three students from the Sultanate of Oman were registered for a seven-week clinical practicum in pediatric nursing as part of their

program of study along with several U.S. students. The enrollment of domestic and international students in this practicum provided an opportunity to implement a structured peer learning educational exchange project. Omani students were given an explanation of the project and agreed to participate. A request for three U.S. student volunteers to participate in the project was emailed to domestic nursing students who were enrolled in the College's accelerated baccalaureate degree program. A robust response was received to participate in a structured educational program and the first three students who responded to the call were included in the study. All participants were female. The Omani women were all Muslim, born in Oman. Two of the Omani students were 27 years old, and one was 30 years old. The U.S. students were born in the U.S. and Christian, with two students 24 years old and the third was 21 years old.

The clinical practicum took place in an internationally recognized tertiary care children's hospital. It was supported by an already established nurse preceptor program (Cantrell and Murkowski, 2010). Eight nurse preceptors from the pediatric hospital participated in this project with the Omani nursing students. This allowed the Omani students, to work closely with practicing U.S. pediatric nurses, while the U.S. students had a typical clinical practicum with the clinical faculty member. Unlike their U.S. nursing student dyad partner, this was only the second clinical practicum in a U.S. hospital for the Omani students. Therefore, the Omani students worked directly with nurse preceptors so they could gain a better understanding of the delivery of U.S. nursing care and develop greater confidence during their U.S. clinical experience. The clinical instructor oriented the nurse preceptor to the goals of the program and the specific learning needs of the Omani nursing students. Both student groups were also given an explanation of the purpose of the clinical dyads and that they were participating in a research study. The Omani–U.S. student dyads made rounds on all their patients, consulted one another about their patients, and assisted one another in providing nursing care throughout their clinical practicum.

Planned dyad academic assignments, clinical post-conferences, and social opportunities were developed for the student dyads to facilitate peer learning and develop personal relationships. As part of the clinical practicum requirements, the students were expected to write a weekly journal that was shared with the clinical faculty. Each student pair presented a clinical post-conference topic about a specific pediatric patient clinical problem. The presentation included the U.S. and Omani cultural and practice perspectives in nursing care. The dyad also wrote a formal paper about their post-conference topic. Additionally, the clinical faculty member arranged for two "field trips" after the clinical day: one to a national tourist site and another to a popular restaurant. In addition, the Omani dyad participants shared their culture by preparing a traditional Omani meal at one of the Omani student's apartment for the U.S. dyad partners.

Evaluation and Analysis of the Clinical Dyad

Institution Review Board approval was obtained from the investigators' institution and all students and nurse preceptors signed a written consent to participate in the study. At the conclusion of the clinical dyad program, the student participants and nurse preceptors participated in a brief program evaluation survey. Two separate focus groups were held; one with the Omani student participants, the other with the U.S. students. Focus group methodology was chosen rather than individual interviews because focus groups supported Omani collectivistic cultural practices; Omani students are accustomed to working and learning in group settings. Separate focus groups were planned so that the Omani and U.S. participants would feel free and willing to share both positive and less positive experiences with the dyads without concern in slighting the other. The focus groups were conducted to ascertain the students' dyad experience and what they learned from participating in the dyad program. The audio recording of each focus

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