Featured Article

Fostering Academic Success among English as an Additional Language Nursing Students Using Standardized Patients

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Abstract: To reduce health care disparities among minority groups, it is imperative that nursing schools increase their enrollment and retention of English as an additional language (EAL) nursing students. However, EAL nursing students struggle academically. The aim of this study was to explore the perceived effectiveness of standardized patients (SPs) as a means to achieve academic success among EAL nursing students. Using focus group methodology, 35 EAL nursing students shared their perceptions of SPs as a teaching–learning tool. Analysis generated seven core concepts: (a) psychological safety, (b) comfort communication, (c) psychomotor skill development, (d) language acquisition, (e) change in attitudes, (f) debrief, debrief, debrief, and (g) learning takes time. SP simulation creates a supportive community of practice that enables EAL nursing students to experience a sense of psychological safety as they acquire new learning in cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains. Additionally, EAL nursing students are able to enhance their English proficiency as they communicate with patients and families. Engaging in debriefing and repeat practice sessions are instrumental to EAL nursing student learning. A strategic transformation in the delivery of EAL nursing education is needed. If EAL nursing students are to attain positive learning outcomes, they need to be immersed in a supportive and contextually-rich learning environment fostered by SP simulation that encourages them to strive for mastery.

There is an unprecedented growth in ethnocultural and linguistic diversity within United States and Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015); accompanying this growth is a marked increase in health care disparities among minority groups. The Institute of Medicine (2003) recommends increasing the diversity of health care professionals to address these disparities. Expanding student enrollment into schools of nursing by recruiting applicants from diverse backgrounds is

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considered a key strategy (Institute of Medicine, 2003); however, there are several obstacles that must be overcome. EAL nursing students, for example, experience a greater struggle for academic success than their native English speaking counterparts (Miguel & Rogan, 2011).

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Key Points
- Standardized patient simulation fosters a supportive and contextually rich community of practice for nursing student learning.
- Standardized patient simulation affects positive attitudinal change.
- Diversity in nursing may reduce health care disparities among minority groups.

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Between 1967 and 1995, the pass rate on the NCLEX-RN was 21% lower for Mexican-American nursing students who spoke English as an additional language than native English-speaking nursing students (Bosher & Bowles, 2008). English language deficiency is making comprehension of nursing terminology and abstract concepts challenging (Donnelly, McKiel & Hwang, 2009; Olson, 2012). According to the Cummins Model of Language Acquisition, contextually rich learning environments that provide learners with facial cues, gestures or concrete objects of reference, enhance learning (Cummins, 2003). Standardized patient (SP) simulation can create a rich context for learners and promote the likelihood of academic success among EAL nursing students.

A SP is "a person trained to portray a patient in realistic and repeatable ways" (Lewis et al., 2017, para 2). Implementing SP simulation into undergraduate nursing curricula may create the contextually rich learning environment that EAL nursing students require in order to excel. If, ultimately, there is a substantial increase in enrollment, retention, and success of EAL nursing students, the health care system will be better poised to deliver culturally competent nursing care. However, little is known about the teaching effectiveness of SPs among undergraduate nursing students and even less is known about the impact of SPs on the learning of EAL nursing students (Becker, Rose, Berg, Park, & Shatzer, 2006; Kurz, Mahoney, Martin-Plank, & Lidicker, 2009). The purpose of this research study was to explore EAL nursing students' perceptions of SPs as a teaching—learning tool. It was anticipated that there would be an opportunity to glean insight into strategies that may enhance the effectiveness and integration of SP simulation in nursing curricula.

Methodology

This qualitative, exploratory study utilized focus group methodology guided by Morgan (1995, 1997) and Krueger and Casey (2009) to ascertain EAL nursing students' perceptions of SPs as a teaching—learning tool and recommendations for enhancement. A focus group study entails conducting a series of discussions on a particular topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Study Setting and Sample

On obtaining institutional review board approval, recruitment commenced. Thirty-five undergraduate EAL nursing students from a Canadian nursing university in a foreign country where Arabic is the official language volunteered to participate. Participants were enrolled in a Bachelor of Nursing (BN) program (includes post-diploma option). Participants had recently taken part in a nursing course that had integrated SPs as a teaching—learning tool. Participants were enrolled in a foundational nursing course, a family nursing course, a health assessment nursing course, and/or a mental health nursing course. The exact duration or frequency each participant utilized SPs is unknown.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants took part in one of six focus group sessions that lasted approximately 75 minutes. On receiving consent, focus group discussions were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. During the focus group sessions, participants responded to open-ended questions designed to elicit EAL nursing students' perceptions of SPs as a teaching—learning tool. Transcribed data were analyzed using the analytical framework of key concepts (Krueger & Casey, 2009) to identify core ideas pertaining to EAL nursing students' perceptions of SPs as a teaching—learning tool and recommendations for enhancement.

Results

The 35 participants (female = 30, male = 5) spoke a variety of native languages including Arabic, Tagalog, Malayalam, Bengali, Afrikaans, and so forth. The majority (60%) spoke Arabic as their native language and had been speaking English for more than 10 years. Seven concepts emerged that reflected EAL nursing students' perceptions of SPs as a teaching—learning tool: (a) psychological safety, (b) comfort communication, (c) psychomotor skill development, (d) language acquisition, (e) change in attitudes, (f) debrief, debrief, debrief, and (g) learning takes time.

Psychological Safety

Participants experienced an immense sense of psychological safety as they interacted with the SPs. The SPs prepared them for the unknown, accepted them as learners,