

International Experiential Learning for Research Design and Global Health

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Abstract – Collaboration between nursing programs at an international university and a state university assisted undergraduate nursing students with nursing research design and increased awareness of global health. Baccalaureate nursing students used classroom and online activities and group components to develop research projects comparing the US and Irish Health Care Systems. Students were immersed into both health care systems through classroom and health care experiences in both countries. This experiential learning course met student learning objectives and reinforced global health perspectives. An overview of this pilot strategy for innovative education is discussed.

Keywords – International Education, Experiential Learning, Global Health.

I. INTRODUCTION

Challenges facing nursing faculty with nursing research courses have included innovative teaching strategies to assist students in the comprehension of research fundamentals and the importance of research to nursing practice. In learning the fundamentals, undergraduate students struggle with the components of research methodology (August-Brady, 2005). This struggle may result in loss of interest in pursuing research. As a result, most nursing students do not participate in nursing research until they progress to graduate or doctoral study or become involved with research in clinical practice. The challenge is teaching theory that is usually not applied until after graduation from a baccalaureate program.

In an effort to make nursing research more palatable and tangible to undergraduate nursing students, a collaborative Evidenced Based Practice Project between a public university in the United States of America and a public university in Ireland was developed. Through this collaboration, students would learn the fundamentals of nursing research within a hybrid nursing research course (NRSE 303 CIE), as well as an experiential learning opportunity through an international health perspectives course (NMHS 32380).

II. BACKGROUND

A. State University, United States

As part of a state-wide university system, students are encouraged to participate in programs which promote global educational opportunities with an emphasis on student diversity, academic achievement and social awareness. The university supports international travel through its Center for International Education Department (CIE) and provides scholarships to qualified students interested in pursuing international experiences (Mission

Statement, 2011). Through its promotion of educational objectives, students are able to become meaningful contributors to their surrounding communities through broad access to quality degree programs and educational programs (Mission statement, 2011). The university offers both a four year baccalaureate nursing program and an RN-BSN Program through its Nursing Department. Nursing Research is a core course in both programs. In addition, the university requires all students to have at least two courses with international designations. Thus, CIE was instrumental in developing the itinerary and accommodations for both faculty and students with the international university in Ireland. Nursing faculty who team taught the nursing research course also communicated regularly through email and telephone with the international university staff to facilitate a positive experience and adequate preparation for students.

B. International University, Ireland

As the oldest and largest school of nursing and midwifery in Ireland, the international university offers learning experiences for international nursing students through their School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems. The university promotes a friendly and collegial atmosphere through faculty who are committed to research and scholarship for educational excellence, as their vision is to be a leading provider of education, research and professional practice to improve health care. Its mission is the promotion and protection of health, wellbeing, and dignity of patients across the lifespan. The university is known for its global engagement with a network of health service partnerships, academic affiliations, and faculty who hold joint appointments in health care and academics (Vision and Mission Statement, 2015).

III. EDUCATION APPROACH

State university faculty were committed to providing students with a learning experience that was considered an effective learning strategy for nursing education (Bastable, 2014). Using adult learning strategies, students would accomplish learning by drawing on their own experiences, and discussing it with others to develop new understanding. Students would then develop their research topics and move towards problem-solving, critical reflection, and recognition of power influences on health care systems (Kolb, 2015; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner 2007).

A. Global Health Perspectives

Upon review of the literature, faculty were mindful of the need for nursing students to be prepared with a global health perspective and that the use of immersion was considered an effective means of promoting cultural

sensitivity (Burgess, Reimer-Kirkham, & Astle, 2014; Easterby, Siebert, Woodfield, Holloway, Gilbert, Zoucha, & Turk, 2012; Stone & Petrick, 2013). Combining the two courses allowed the nursing students to achieve both nursing research learning outcomes, international educational credit on global health taught by international nursing faculty, and the experience of collaboration and partnering. In addition, participants from other nursing programs within the United States attending this international course were able to collaborate and develop presentations on global health issues through a two week immersion process in Dublin, Ireland. Some of the countries examined for international health systems were from Australia, Europe, Asia, and North America. As outlined in the Global Competency Model, collaboration and partnering are one of the essential domains in becoming globally competent (Wilson, Callender, Hall, Jogerst, Torres, & Velji, 2014).

B. Research Course with International Component

Using adult learning theory as the framework, faculty developed a hybrid nursing research course (NRSE 303-CIE) for the Spring, 2015 semester encompassing a two week international experience in June, 2015. The hybrid course consisted of direct classroom in the United States, and a two-week immersion course in Ireland. The course was offered to pre-professional baccalaureate students, as well as practicing nurses pursuing a baccalaureate degree. The hybrid course was taught by three faculty members stateside, and students developed group projects comparing health issues through the lens of the US Health Care System compared to the Irish Health Care System.

C. Experiential Learning

The two-week international experience included direct contact classes, online tutorials of global health care, guest speakers, observation of local health care facilities, and interaction with other health care students. During the international course, students learned from a variety of guest lecturers on global health, and were assigned a collaborative presentation on global health care with health care students throughout the United States.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

NRSE 303 CIE: Nursing Research provided to students stateside was taught in a hybrid format. Research groups were randomly selected and charged with conducting research to compare and contrast specific nursing/health practices in the United States and in the Republic of Ireland. Topics from three research groups covered evidenced based practice on maternal care, palliative care, and pediatric care. Course grading incorporated both aspects of the nursing research course – 75% from NRSE 303 CIE comprised of online assignments, one examination, and a poster presentation; and, 25% from NMHS 32380 comprised of group work, group presentations, and a research paper. Students were required to present research posters for NRSE 303 CIE at a Nursing Open House, which was attended by nursing professionals, university personnel, and undergraduate nursing students. Students were also required to present

their findings of comparative health systems during their final NHMS 32380 class attended by stateside and international faculty involved in the international course.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Experience in the United States

Although excitement abounded for the travel to Ireland, the students still were faced with meeting learning objectives, assessment of nursing research fundamentals, and collaboration for poster preparation in the NRSE 303 CIE hybrid research course. The students were challenged by assigned readings and effective time management. Stateside faculty were confronted by changes in the directorship of the international program due to unforeseen circumstances, and, as a result, communication at times regarding the effective integration of both courses was not always optimal. Future consideration for international experiences should involve regular communication between universities and better integration of course content for seamless student learning.

B. Experience in Ireland

While abroad, the students and faculty had full use of university services and planned cultural activities to provide a social and historical context. This access facilitated cultural experiences that enhanced students' learning and the collaborative experience. Students were challenged with assignments and assessments with the international course. International faculty teaching global health perspectives used teaching styles different from stateside university faculty. The use of pedagogic methods and less student interaction was noticed by state university faculty who utilize andragogic methods in nursing education. As a result, students were asking their stateside faculty mentors to assist with comprehension of international course requirements

VI. EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY FINDINGS

The objective to assist students with research fundamentals was met. The ability to offer an international component to a nursing research course was well received by both students and faculty. Students had an opportunity to learn and experience cultural differences between educational offerings and health care practices in Ireland and see how their research projects in NRSE 303 CIE contributed to their comprehension of global health care practices. Course faculty for NMHS 32380 were welcoming and supportive in providing a positive learning experience to the students, and provided the framework for student collaboration between nursing students from other universities. Incorporated into NMHS 32380 were guest speakers who gave overviews of the Irish Health Care System and its current challenges in providing health care. Further course work allowed students to gain and validate perspectives on global health care systems through research on select global health systems, as well as through numerous group presentations given at the conclusion of their two-week immersion experience. Additionally, students were assigned a formal paper

synthesizing their research findings on global health. These papers were submitted electronically and assessed by the international nursing faculty teaching NMHS 32380.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Collaborative efforts between both universities provided valuable experiential learning to undergraduate nursing students who may not have had the opportunity for travel or obtain international college credits within their educational programs. Students and faculty were able to experience Irish culture and glimpse the international educational offerings at the largest, well-known university in Dublin. Visits to local health care facilities were coordinated for both students and faculty in the areas of mental health, palliative care, and long term care. Students were provided valuable insight on global health practices, health care delivery, and health care accessibility, which they can reflect on to enhance their nursing careers. First hand perspectives from health care professionals, education on other health care delivery systems and the inherent struggles faced by global populations will serve to enlighten students on cultural issues they may not have had a chance to experience within a regular nursing curriculum. In addition, narrowing the focus on research topics that students will encounter within their future nursing careers served to make the research course more meaningful with the end result allowing students to participate in evidenced-based practice.

Nursing faculty hold the expectation that students' learning of research and global health through this international collaboration will prepare them to advance in academic pursuits and clinical practice. The stateside nursing faculty will continue to pursue international nursing education for opportunities to enrich student learning.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

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The author earned a Doctorate in Nursing Practice in 2013 from Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT, USA. Received a Master Degree in Public Health in 1991 from the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT, USA. Received Bachelor's in Nursing in 1981 from the State University of New York in Albany, NY, USA. Received an Associate Degree in Nursing in 1974 from Quinnipiac College in Hamden, CT, USA. The author's major area of study is in nursing education concentrating on the use of simulation.

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Dr. Konieczny is a member of Sigma Theta Tau International and the American Nurses Association. She is the recipient of the Nightingale Award for Nursing Excellence and Ruth M. Olson Excellence in Nursing Education from the Connecticut League for Nursing. Dr. Konieczny has twice received the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges Merit Award in 2006 and 2013

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She is has been teaching Bioethics at the college level for over 25 years, and has held Bioethicist positions at local hospitals. She has been teaching nursing at the university level for over ten years in BSN and RN-BSN education. Her current research is on relocation stress syndrome and elders.

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