



Influence of a Cultural Immersion Experience on Healthcare Student's Spirituality

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Background

- Spirituality was identified as a significant theme during an initial cultural immersion experience (Rickabaugh, Hartman, Allison-Jones & Clark, 2009).
- Healthcare providers are expected to provide spiritual care to their patients as a part of holistic patient-centered care.
- Persons with a heightened sense of their own spirituality value the integration of such care into their own professional practice.
- Limited opportunities exist for students to develop competency in providing spiritual care to patients.

Literature Review

- Limited research examining healthcare students' spirituality and teaching strategies to enhance spirituality.
- Challenges to teaching spirituality to nursing students have been identified (Lemmer, 2002).
- Strategies suggested for teaching spirituality include the use of real life experiences (Kazer et al, 2008). Cultural immersions can be viewed as an example of a real life teaching strategies.
- Reflective journaling has also been an effective teaching strategy during cultural immersions experiences and in coursework concerning spirituality (Lemmer, 2002; Fletcher, 2003)

Cultural Immersion Experience

- Three nursing students and two health psychology students were chosen to go on the trip.
- Students and faculty participated on a 9 day cultural immersion mission to Honduras.
- Basic medical care, health education, eye exams for glasses, and parasite eradication were provided for 2000 Hondurans living in remote mountain villages.
- Additional activities included visits to nearby cities, shopping at the market, trips to parks and lake, and time to interact with villagers.

Methods

- Mixed methodologies were utilized to identify the influence of a cultural immersion experience on spirituality and spiritual well-being of healthcare students.
- Five baccalaureate healthcare students from a professional health science college completed daily reflective journals on sacred moments experienced during a cultural immersion trip to Honduras.
- Students also completed the Spiritual Well Being Scale prior to and upon returning from the cultural immersion experience.
- Journals were analyze using content analysis and theme identification. Wilcoxon signed-rank test was utilized to compare the differences in pre and post test scores on SWB.

Definitions

- **Spirituality-** that most human of experiences that seek to transcend self and find meaning and purpose through connection with others, nature, and /or a Supreme Being which may or may not include religious structures or traditions (Buck, 2006).
- **Sacred Moments-** connection or support from a higher power, connection with others, a sense of purpose and a sense of gratefulness, compassion or inner peace (Underwood, 1999).
- **Spiritual Well Being-** sense of relatedness or connectedness to others, a provision for meaning an purpose in life, the fostering of well-being and having a belief in and a relationship with a power higher than self (Hawks, Hull, Thalman & Richins, 1995).

Themes

- Connection with Team Members
- Connection with Hondurans
- Connection with Higher Power
- Meaning and Purpose in Life
- Beauty of Nature

Connection: Team Members



“At this point we are sharing happiness, anger, sadness and excitement. It feels good to know you are surrounded by people who truly love and care about you.”

“The blessing of the hands ceremony really affected me. It just hit home how we were all in this together.”

Connection: Hondurans



“She had true faith in me to be able to treat her. She hugged me, shed a couple of tears, thanked me and was gone. I totally felt that instant connection.”



“Words cannot even describe what it is like to connect with someone you can’t even properly communicate with.”

Connection: Higher Power

“Sitting under the gazebo also made me feel more in touch with God. It made me think back to church this morning when the Honduran man thanked me for helping the country and the people and brought tears to my eyes when he said ‘we are all serving the same God.’”

“I am reminded of how awesome God’s love is through another person. It is amazing to witness the power of God and adoration for his wonders in person with people of a totally different lifestyle, culture and language.”



Meaning and Purpose in Life

“I know that this trip and experience will help me to realize even more about myself and the life I live and help me understand other people even better.”

“It was brought to my attention for the first time that we cannot save everyone or change everything. I do still think we are making an impact, no matter how small, and that we are doing all that we can to make things better.

“All I could think about was the wonderful journey my life had taken me on this past week, not only spiritually but mentally, physically, and personally.”



Beauty of Nature



“We went to a park that had the most amazing waterfall. I have seen many falls in my life, but I am not sure the beauty could be compared. It made me think about how beauty can be found in unexpected places.”



“Taking in the beauty of the lake reminded me of how God really does exist and bless everyone; even if it is through things we take for granted, like nature.”

Spiritual Well Being Scale

- Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) is a 20 item, 6 point Likert scale which takes 10-15 minutes to administer.
- Scores given for overall spiritual well-being (SWB) as well as two subscales, religious well-being (RWB) and existential well-being (EWB).
- Students completed the scale 2 weeks prior to departure and within 2 weeks of their return.
- Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was utilized to compare the overall score and two subscales.

SWBS Results

- Over half of the participants scored in the high range of all three scales prior to the trip. The remainder scored in the moderate range.
- Although the individual scores and mean scores increased on all three scales, these results were not significant.

	Mean Before	Mean After	<i>P value</i>
SWB	104.8	107.8	.104
RWB	52.6	53.6	.854
EWB	52.2	54.2	.223

Conclusions

- Limitations included small, convenience sample and perspectives were limited to those researchers who also participated in the cultural immersion experience.
- Reflective journaling continues to be a valid tool in nursing education. Content included in students' journals were not limited to sacred moments.
- Cultural immersion as a transformative learning experience can provide opportunities for students to enhance their own spirituality.

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