Transformational Processes in Developing Cultural Understanding: Nursing Students’ Experiences in Swaziland

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Disclosures

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Conflicts of Interest: This project was completed following an overseas study program at Indiana University. No sponsorship or commercial support was provided.

Objectives:

At the completion of this presentation, the learner will be able to:

- Describe a model of transformational learning and how it works to advance growth and change in students’ cultural understanding.
- Analyze his/her own educational program for ways in which the principles discussed can be applied.
What is Culture?

Culture encompasses the dominant beliefs, attitudes and values of a group of people.

Culture may be found alongside ethnicity - but it is not tied to it.

Diverse belief systems are as prevalent within racial or ethnic groups as between them.
This project interviewed nursing students following a 3-week, service-learning placement in Swazililand, Africa.

Students provided hands-on care in both hospital and community settings.

Following the program, the students were individually interviewed, and the data were analyzed for common themes.
Description of the Overseas Study Activity:

Experiencing Healthcare in Swaziland, Africa
The Kingdom of Swaziland

Population: ~1.2 million
Size: 5 major cities. 69% of the country is rural.

Demographics:
5% over age 65-years
33% under age 15-years
Median age 19-years.

Income: Agricultural, Subsistence farming, Mining in South Africa.

Governance: Monarchy plus a Democratic government.
Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital, Manzini, Swaziland
Inside Labor and Delivery: Nurse-Midwife with Students
Pediatrician Dr. Pawelos lectures on Childhood Malnutrition

Inside the Intensive Care Unit
Community Health Clinics

Over 340 children and adults were assessed and treated at five sites around Swaziland.
Clinic at a preschool in Nhlambeni, Swaziland
Clinic at a public primary school for Grades 1-7
Home Visits

The students made several home visits to do health assessments.
The HIV/AIDS epidemic has left thousands of orphaned children to be raised by grandmothers (Gogo’s) throughout Swaziland.
Data Analysis

• The students were interviewed one month after returning to the United States.
• Audio-tapes were analyzed for common themes and categories.
• The final analysis was returned to the students in a process of member checking. All agreed that the findings were consistent with their own perception of the experience.
# Findings from the Study

## A Model of Transformative Cultural Education

- **Transitions**
  - Language & Communication Issues
  - An Emotional Journey

- **Perception**
  - Healthcare Systems in the US and SZ
  - Nursing Culture in the US and SZ

- **Internationalization**
  - Transformative Learning Processes:
    - Meaning Making through telling stories
    - Comparing and Contrasting
    - Reflection
    - Reframing

- **Incorporation**
  - Personal Growth
  - Professional Growth

Murray, B.A. (2014)
Community health work required interpreters as English is taught in schools - but many poor or rural persons have little education (18% of girls and 21% of boys complete secondary school).

“Even when you do have a translator, they have different terms. Like, what did they call an ulcer? Like ‘blood pumping.’ So the translator would tell you in English but you wouldn’t know what that meant.”
Transitions

An Emotional Journey

“I’ll never forget that family that had 5 kids, the five orphans, and their grandmother’s taking care of them and all the kids are complaining of a stomachache and I’m trying to ask all these questions to understand what’s causing the stomachache and I realize it’s ‘cause they’re hungry. They’re asking me for food and the only thing I have is an apple. I mean, I gave them the apple, but I don’t know what to do... That was a hard, hard thing to deal with.”
Healthcare systems were seen as having a pronounced lack of resources, and the resources were perceived as being of poor quality or were rationed.

Students recognized the ingenuity of the Swazi people in “making do” with the resources that they have and in wasting very little.

Providers in the US were increasingly seen as wasteful and complacent in trying to find more economical ways of providing care.
Perceptions

Nursing in Swaziland

- The students felt strongly that accountability for the patient in the US defaulted to the nursing staff, while in SZ this remained with the family.

- Patient education stood out to the students as lacking in importance in comparison to what they were being taught in the US.

- Students had concerns about safety and infection control issues in the hospital setting.
Nursing in Swaziland

- Nurses in SZ were perceived by students as demonstrating less empathy as compared to what they were being taught.

“The lady that I was with, the patient, she was threatened by a nurse. She was told that she was going to slap her if she didn’t get off the floor, she was, I guess, misbehaving, she was in a lot of pain and she was crawling on the floor and the nurse threatened to slap her a couple of times.”
Internalization

Transformative Learning Processes

- Students used story-telling to make sense of their experiences and to interpret the actions of others:

  “I didn’t expect to meet a girl who had been left at the hospital because her parents didn’t want to take care of her anymore. That was very [pause, silence]. I didn’t expect those kinds of things.”

- In this story, the student was saddened and shocked by her perception that parents would abandon a sick child in a hospital and that there could exist a system that allowed this to occur.

  This challenged the student’s own core cultural beliefs in family and social values.
Internalization

Transformative Learning Processes

• Comparing/Contrasting – comparing social issues, health care systems, educational systems, etc.

• Reframing – seeing things in a new, normalized way

“In the US having a baby is an event and it’s kind of like it’s cushioned. You get your epidural and your family is all there and it’s lovey and great. Then you go somewhere in Africa and it’s like, what you’re supposed to do as a women and a wife...it’s natural, it happens naturally.”
Internalization

**Transformative Learning Processes**

- **Reflection** – closely examining one’s own discomfort, which often arises out of challenges to personal values, beliefs or attitudes.

- Reflection is achieved through discourse (discussions), journaling, writing, observations and meditation (thinking) on events:

  “I think time will tell just how much it will teach me.”

  “You don’t really realize how much you learn [until later].”
Personal Growth

“It’s made me so much more open and I feel like I have a more broadened perspective of health care and public health and seeing things differently, the problems that people are having in a different country.”
Incorporation

Professional Growth

“One of the biggest things I learned while I was there is that there is more than one way to tackle a problem.”
Discussion

This study was consistent with other research published on the value of overseas study as a curricular tool in teaching cultural understanding.

Experiencing mild hardship and cultural dissonance activates coping strategies within students that enable change and promote cultural understanding.
## Application

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<th>Curricular Planning</th>
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| **Transitions**              | • Schedule orientation sessions.  
• Use photos, guest speakers, etc. when planning an experience  
• Give reading assignments beforehand  
• Use interpreters when needed  
• Have a plan for emotional reactions  
• Schedule frequent debriefing sessions during and after the experience |
## Application

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| **Perceptions**               | • Anticipate culture “shock”  
• Help students to process what they are seeing and experiencing  
• Educate to social and political realities of the site  
• Discuss values orientation of the students  
• Encourage journal writing |
# Application

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| **Internalization**           | • Encourage story-telling - verbal or written - about the experiences  
                               | • Help students to try and make sense (make meaning) out of experiences  
                               | • Encourage comparisons and contrasting  
                               | • Give assignments that require critical reflection  
<pre><code>                           | • Ask student to see things from the perspective of others (empathize) |
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| Incorporation                 | • Explore & evaluate areas of personal growth  
                                | • Utilize students who have gone through the experience in training other students  
                                | • Explore & evaluate areas of professional growth through surveys, assessments, other means of evaluation |
Challenge for Educators

➢ To find ways to challenge students’ underlying cultural belief systems without the financial barriers.
  - Planned cultural dissonance experiences
  - Anticipate and permit mild hardships

➢ This may be possible by assigning students to service-learning activities that are outside of their comfort zone but are not as physically distant as another country.
Final Thoughts or Questions?
References


• Uys, L.R. (2013). Chapter 1 Nursing in Africa: An introduction. The State of Nursing and Nursing Education in Africa: A country-by-country review. Indianapolis, IN: Sigma Theta Tau International