Background
Given that the nature of nurses’ work takes place in diverse and complex care settings, the use and application of standardized patient (SP) Methodology is essential in the transition to practice. Although SPs have been used in many disciplines to engage students in experiential learning it is a novice methodology in nursing education. Given the limited research studies associated with SP methodology in nursing education, the study explored the experiences of undergraduate nursing students with this form of simulation and how it could be best applied within a teaching learning milieu.

Significance
The use of SPs has shown to contribute to the systemic development of experiential education (EE) by providing novice health care providers with the opportunity to learn in safe, risk free environment offering faculty the flexibility to provide students with realistic clinical situations that often do not match the textbook portrayal and more specifically with the kind of experiences that cannot be duplicated in real clinical settings. The use of SP methodology may illustrate how this learning tool supports the application of clinical judgment and clinical decision-making skills, which are required to successfully write and pass the national registration exam and an imperative component of the College of Nurses entry to practice competencies.

Methodology
In this study the use of SP simulation functions as a learning tool by providing participants with a realistic clinical environment that explores the character and personality they are interacting with. This exposes participants to be both actively involved in self-assessment and obtain sustainable formative feedback. Findings will facilitate an understanding of critical emotional competencies including communication and interpersonal skills, conflict and leadership skills and physical examination and interviewing skills which are empirically linked to effective performance in nursing education and practice.

Research Question
What are 4th year undergraduate nursing students’ experiences of SP methodology as a form of experiential education in their transition to practice? Understanding the answers to this question are fundamental to both the successful education of future nurses and the nursing profession; particularly in the area of developing communication and interpersonal skills, which are a key to every nurse patient, encounter.

Data Collection and Analysis
Given that this is a pilot study, three undergraduate nursing students in their forth year of study were recruited through a purposive sample. Each participant interacted with two SPs. The research employed a qualitative exploratory design and data was collected from each participant using video recorded observation, individual stimulated recall and individual interviews using a case study design. The interviews, although open-ended, were structured around the research question. Each of the two SPs were trained to play the role of a patient within two different clinical scenarios. Data analysis involved a detailed case study write-up for each participant, categorizing interview questions and answers and examined the data for within-group similarities and differences. A thematic analysis was conducted to derive themes and subthemes from the videotapes, stimulated recall and interviews.

Results
Four themes were derived from seven subthemes. Theme 1 Embedding SP methodology in the curriculum as an EE tool from first year of the program Theme 2 Practicing an emotional connection Theme 3 Experiencing the reality of person centered care Theme 4 Benefit of improvisation in the context of standardized patient methodology

Discussion
Given the findings of the research study it is imperative to embed this form of simulation methodology in the education of nurses early on in the curriculum. This requires educating the educator to work with SP methodology, including training of actors and creating realistic scenarios that meet course goals. This reinforces the premise that experiential environments are supportive of the collaborations between teachers, learners and standardized patients and can produce meaningful teaching-learning outcomes.

Conclusion
In this study participants were highly engaged in the interaction with the two SPs. Students indicated that the experiences contributed greatly to their understanding of nursing care and indicated that these form of simulation contributed greatly to their understanding of nursing care and indicated that these form of simulation needs to be integrated into the curriculum upon initiating the nursing program to provide exposure to circumstances that are beyond the textbook portrayal and that provide opportunity for self development and reflection.