The Lived Experiences of Baccalaureate Nursing Students on a Short Term Study Abroad Program to Peru

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Background
- Cultural competence is integral to providing patient-centered care.
- Evidence suggests that semester-long study abroad experiences may contribute to increases in cultural competence (Carpenter & Garcia, 2012), but because of the nature of nursing curricula spending a semester abroad is not always feasible.
- Evidence that immersion experiences result in increases in cultural competence that are sustained after a period of one year or more suggests long-term learning occurs (Roller & Ballestas, 2017; Caldwell & Purtzer, 2015).
- Cultural competence is always feasible.

Purpose
- To examine the lived experiences of baccalaureate nursing students on a short term study abroad program to Peru.
- To examine the effect of a short term study abroad program on cultural competence.

Sample and Methods
- Qualitative descriptive study
- N=5 undergraduate nursing students participating in a 13-day immersion experience in May 2019.
- Content analysis performed of students' pre-travel and post-travel reflection journals to identify prominent themes.

Program Description
- Short term study abroad program focused on incorporating clinical experiences for maternal and pediatric nursing care with a global health experience.
- Students participated in:
  - guided tours of public and private hospitals in Cusco, Peru.
  - shadowing nurses and other healthcare members in a variety of hospital, clinic, and community health settings.
  - providing care to children in a long-term care hospital.
  - academic lectures focused on maternal and newborn health statistics, the history of women’s healthcare in Peru, and the role of the Andean midwife.
  - an ancient Andean ritual, Pago a la Tierra, led by an Andean Shaman to honor Pachamama.
  - guided cultural tours of Cusco, Chinchero, the Sacred Valley, and Machu Picchu.

Results
- Analysis of the students’ pre-travel and post-travel journals uncovered three themes of Advocacy, Ethnocentric Shift, and Cultural Competence.
- Pre-travel journals revealed that most of the students had never travelled outside of the U.S. and all but one student had never provided care for a client from a different culture or who spoke a language other than English.
- Students indicated they chose to participate in this course because of a desire to learn more about pediatric and maternity nursing, because they wanted to experience international travel, and because a short-term study abroad was the only feasible way to participate in a study abroad during their nursing program.

Advocacy
- I learned just how important it is for the nurse to speak up because I rarely saw that happen. I already knew that being my patient’s advocate is a part of my criteria as a nurse, but now I feel I can be a better advocate. I never want my patients to feel the way some of the women in the clinics and hospitals felt. As a nurse, I will do everything in my power so that my patient’s needs are heard and respected.

Ethnocentric Shift
- This experience helped me to understand how it feels to not speak the native language. Now when I have patients that speak little to no English I can understand a little better how they feel. I can also think of ways to help me communicate with people that do not speak English.

Cultural Competence
- This trip helped me greatly with my cultural competency. When I have patients from different cultures, I know I will be the nurse that researches about their culture so that I understand them better. Lack of knowledge of someone’s beliefs would make me uncomfortable, not because they believe in different things, but because I would feel my care for them would not be up to par.

Discussion
- Themes of ethnocentric shifts and increased cultural competence emerging as a result of participating in a study abroad are consistent with earlier research findings (Phillips et al., 2017; Edmonds, 2010; Caldwell & Purtzer, 2015).
- An increase in the desire to advocate for others, both globally and domestically, emerged as a result of this study abroad experience.
- Limitations of this study include the small, homogenous sample.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice
- Navigating the complexities of traveling and working abroad help cultivate critical thinking skills necessary for providing competent nursing care.
- Participants in this study appeared to have a transformational process occur in that their worldviews and assumptions have changed.
- When full semesters abroad are not feasible, short-term immersion experiences will help prepare nursing students with the skills needed for a career caring for diverse populations.
- Schools of nursing should support short-term programs as they contribute to experiential learning, career preparation, and fit within the confines of the nursing curriculum.

References