



## A CONSOLIDATED LEARNING ANALYSIS OF A STUDENT NURSE'S CLINICAL EXPERIENCE WITH A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT WHO IS DEAF

By: Sally Chung, Student Nurse, 4<sup>th</sup> year [skmchung@ucalgary.ca](mailto:skmchung@ucalgary.ca) and  
Tracey Clancy, RN, MN, Nursing Practice Instructor [tclancy@ucalgary.ca](mailto:tclancy@ucalgary.ca),  
University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing,  
Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4, Canada

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This paper was developed during the first author's Nursing 285 theory course. It is a foundational course with the intent of helping novice nursing students begin to develop an understanding of nursing as a profession and as a discipline.

**Aim:** The purpose of this consolidation of learning assignment offered students an opportunity to reflect upon and articulate salient aspects from their experiential learning and to further explore their growing understanding through bridging theory to practice and expressing how this transformational learning informs who they are becoming as a registered nurse. The experience described in this reflective paper occurred during my first community health placement in the fall of 2011. Placed at a high school setting in Western Canada, I worked with a group of students with cognitive disabilities, some of whom were deaf as well. As defined by the Canadian Association for the Deaf (CAD, 2014), a person is recognized as medically/audiologically deaf when that person has "little to no functional hearing and depends upon visual rather than auditory communication."

**Action Plan:** When working with a particular student at this high school—we will refer to her as Lisa (pseudonym)—I found that Lisa had been born deaf. Knowing that her strengths lay in sign language, I sought the help of her teacher and sign language aides (websites with translators and a sign language book) to better facilitate my teachings and improve our rapport.

**Discussion:** The themes discussed in this paper are: critical thinking, self-regulation, adapting to changes when in practice, and the complexity of the nursing role.

**Conclusion:** The complexity of the nursing role is a primary theme learned as a result of this experience in that nurses may oftentimes find themselves facing sudden or unexpected client status changes. The nurse needs to adapt to care for that client safely and effectively, thinking critically of priorities and what resources are available at the nurse's disposal.

*Keywords:* Reflective Learning for Nursing Students; Nursing Care; Persons who are deaf

Nursing 285 is a foundational course with the intent (objective) of helping novice nursing students begin to develop an understanding of nursing as a profession and as a discipline. Throughout the course, students explore nursing knowledge, and how nurses organize and utilize

the knowledge required for nursing practice. Foundational concepts that underpin nursing practice are introduced, and include professionalism, disciplinary knowledge, practice standards, ethical practice, and scope of practice, roles and contexts of practice, health, transition, complexity, advocacy, and social justice. Students begin to develop an understanding of themselves as a professional registered nurse.

The integrated, context relevant nature of our curriculum exposes students to a wide range of theoretical and experiential knowledge, with theory courses designed to complement one another, in addition to the experiential learning in on and off campus practice contexts, and vice versa. This consolidation of learning assignment offers students an opportunity to reflect upon and articulate salient aspects from their experiential learning and further explore their growing understanding through bridging theory to practice and expressing how this transformational learning informs who they are becoming as a registered nurse.

### **Nursing as a Profession**

A nurse's scope of practice encompasses a wide variety of roles, expectations, and duties, all of which are carried out in a professional and competent manner. That being said, the nursing profession itself is complex and involves equally complex situations and responses. This concept is significant as it demonstrates how a nurse is required to adapt to new situations, responding by using critical thinking in providing safe, efficient, and beneficial care to clients. Adaptability to the environment is not only necessary to provide safe nursing interventions to the client, but it also helps in shaping the nurse's skills, knowledge, and the ability to self-regulate his or her own actions in the practice setting. The profession involves a continuous evolution of competence and ability to think critically as the situation demands. By relating and implementing these concepts and expectations to the clinical setting, I was able to learn this complexity in nursing. I developed an appreciation for the many roles a nurse takes on and have strengthened my understanding and view towards the profession. In this paper, I will describe and relate a significant nursing practice event to content discussed in class and in the course readings in order to convey the concepts and abilities of adaptability, self-regulation, and thinking critically in the nursing scope of practice.

### **Overview of the Community Clinical Practice**

As part of my community clinical practice, I worked with the high school population at Gestel High School (pseudonym), working particularly with students in the Adaptive Learning Program (ALP) where assistance is given to those with cognitive disabilities. Working in a group of eight undergraduate nurses, I helped with English and Social Studies classes, giving one-on-one assistance and encouragement to the students by helping them come up with their own ideas and writing them down as part of their assignments. At one point, we implemented a structured English lesson where each student received a worksheet depicting pictures of physical activities accompanied by several questions pertaining to that picture (e.g. what body parts are becoming stronger, why is this activity healthy, etc.) to which the students would write answers for.

## Selection of Client Action Plan for Nursing Care

When our group of eight undergraduate nurses split off to work with the students in pairs, I decided that I would work with Lisa (pseudonym). I knew from previously working with the class that Lisa was deaf, the extent of which I was unaware of. However, during this particular class, I noticed she had a headset of sorts that was attached to her right ear and I assumed that she could hear me. I began talking to her, asking her to take out a pencil and to start reviewing the assignment. She seemed to understand what I was saying, appearing keen to learn by standing up to retrieve a pencil from a shelf by the teacher's desk and giving me her full attention. However, it was not until another assistant came up to me a few moments later that I realized Lisa actually could not hear me and that she understood better through sign language. This would explain why Lisa did not write down anything when I asked her to, and remained silent when I asked her to tell me what her thoughts on some of the questions were.

Several concerns arose in my mind at this point as I wondered how I could help Lisa complete the assignment in a way where she could easily understand me. I did not want to simply leave everything to the teacher nor did I want to leave what little rapport I had begun to develop with Lisa. At the same time, I wondered how I was going to respond to the complex nature of this situation as I neither had any experience with sign language nor any information on what else worked well with helping Lisa learn. Therefore, I was faced with a situation where the concepts of complexity, adaptability, and thinking critically, as taught in class, were present.

It occurred to me that because sign language was the only solution I could think of at the time, I should appeal to those who did have knowledge in the practice. As such, I asked the teacher for her help and in response she immediately provided me with a sign language book as a reference and accessed a sign language website on the SMART board at the front of the classroom. SMART boards are interactive whiteboards that combine both writing and computer components to allow information access and presentation on one board (SMART tech, 2014). Lisa and I were seated beside the computer that was connected to the SMART board and as such, not only was every word I typed being seen on the board, it also allowed me to quickly move back and forth between the computer and Lisa's desk. Additionally, the teacher provided me with a quick lesson on how to sign words like "write," "sentence," and "strong" so that I could encourage Lisa in writing down her thoughts. My solution to the turn of events was to find a way to effectively communicate to Lisa that would take her health issues into consideration. This not only helped her in the immediate situation, but it also helped strengthen my rapport with her.

## Discussion

In connecting this event to course content, I recognized the complex nature of the nursing role. The medical system has evolved overtime to include evidence-based practice and has developed linear ways of intervening in a client's care (Plsek & Greenhalgh, 2001). What this event has taught me, however, is the unpredictable nature of the health care system (personal communication with Kathleen Wong, University of Calgary, Nursing 285 lecture, November 1, 2011). That is, although there are certain procedures involved in specific care-giving situations, there are also unpredictable occurrences that call for quick responses that may or may not follow these linear procedures. As such, "to cope with escalating complexity in health care, we

must...accept unpredictability, respect (and utilize) autonomy and creativity, and respond flexibly to emerging patterns and opportunities” (Plsek & Greenhalgh, 2001, p.628).

In the situation described, I recognized that I needed to respond to Lisa’s inability to hear by focusing on her strengths—sign language—and developing a way that benefited her education and our rapport. This role to critically think is also outlined in the College & Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) *Scope of Practice for Registered Nurses*, as nurses “enable comprehensive assessment of client needs, available resources, work settings, and many other factors in complex and often rapidly changing situations” in order to provide the most effective client intervention (CARNA, 2011, p.4). The document goes on to describe that critically thinking and interpreting complex information pertaining to the client is “essential to the clinical decision-making required for safe and effective client care” (p.5). Therefore, the nursing role involves an application of self-regulation—to be able to process available information on clients in order to provide them with the appropriate and most beneficial of care (personal communication with Tracey Clancy, University of Calgary, Nursing 285 lecture, September 27, 2011).

Additionally, Jeanne Besner (2010) mentions in her video about the nurse’s scope of practice that a nurse must be autonomous within a group and a collaborative entity when working with others. In response to realizing that Lisa could not effectively understand me, I collaborated with others to identify an intervention that would benefit both Lisa’s education and my relationship with her. Therefore, the concepts of adapting to the situation, thinking critically and autonomously, and the complex nature of the nursing role were all apparent in this event. It seems then that “nursing is multi-faceted and very complex—there isn’t just one job or role” (personal communication with Tracey Clancy, University of Calgary, Nursing 285 lecture, September 27, 2011).

To further analyze the implications that this event has on my understanding of the nursing role, two University of Calgary Bachelor of Nursing program learner outcomes were apparent to me as I assessed and acted in response to the situation presented between me and Lisa. The first is learner outcome 3.2, *curiosity and lifelong learning*, which looks to “personal commitment to self-directed, lifelong learning and reflection foundational to continuing professional competence” (University of Calgary Curricular Themes, Sub-Themes, and Learner Outcomes, 2010). I found that the nursing profession entails a commitment to think and create an answer to problems as they present themselves to the nurse. It involves actively seeking out information from past assessment data, involving key informants, and establishing a solution in a timely manner. In doing so, the nurse accumulates knowledge and ‘lifelong learning and reflection’ that is crucial to providing the best of care to clients. Furthermore, this evolution of information is necessary in promoting the professional identity of nurses because being up to date in the occurrences and knowledge of health care is important and expected by the public. Nurses are competent, knowledgeable, self-regulating, and adaptive to the various situations that occur in health care.

The second learner outcome that is salient to the practice event described above refers to 5.4, *skills and leadership in managing complex health challenges*, which looks to the nurse’s ability to work as a leader, to take control of the situation and respond accordingly to complex situations that again, may or may not follow the linear procedures described earlier. This ability to effectively respond to rapidly changing client health situations is critical in the nursing

profession, as health care providers face numerous and various situations with every client. Being flexible to the client's circumstances and producing a beneficial intervention is one of the actions expected of nurses. Therefore, I recognized that a nurse's scope of practice "is based on the needs and health goals of their clients and is limited only by the specific competencies of the RN to perform the activities necessary for the client population with whom that nurse works" (CARNA, 2011, p.9).

### Conclusion

Through a nursing practice event with a student in the Adaptive Learning Program (ALP) at Gestel High School, I was faced with a situation where critical thinking, adaptability, self-regulation, and decision-making skills were all required. These skills make up a few of the many and various competencies expected of nurses in the health care setting. In understanding the need to utilize all the information available to the nurse when caring for clients, my understanding of the role nurses take on has deepened to include the fact that nurses draw their knowledge from not only their academic education, but also personal knowledge developed from experience and working with other clients (Wall, 2008). That is, a nurse utilizes a vast pool of knowledge to develop competencies used in caring for his or her clients. In this way, a nurse is versatile and able to regulate his or her own actions and develop appropriate nursing interventions. I found that these concepts were all present when working with Lisa, a deaf student enrolled in this program during my clinical placement at Gestel High School. By recognizing these concepts, I developed a greater appreciation for the various roles that is demanded of a nurse. I played the role of the critical thinker, the decision-maker, the adapter, and the self-regulator, all of which are crucial in thinking and being a nurse.

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