Allison Nicholson

Diversity in Nursing

University of Saint Mary
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The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (1997) promotes the inclusion of a diverse educational system to ensure that future nurses can adequately meet the needs of a diverse patient population. Their stance is still relevant today as the United States is constantly changing its cultural landscape. The learning community within nursing should reflect this change and integrate cultural education so that every student receives a quality education that is focused on the learner’s needs. The AACN (1997) also states that it is nursing’s responsibility to bring diversity into the educational setting by incorporating mutual respect and trust into the learning environment. While there is probably more diversity in the nursing profession today than there was in 1997, nursing still struggles to address the different needs of a culturally diverse student population. Bednarz, Schim, and Doorenbos (2010) report that 73% of undergraduate nursing students are considered nontraditional. They define nontraditional students as students who meet “one or more of the following criteria: aged 25 or older, commutes to school, enrolled part time, is male, is a member of an ethnic or racial minority group, speaks English as a second or additional language, has dependent children, and holds a general equivalency diploma (GED) or has required remedial classes” (Bednarz, Schim, & Doorenbos, 2010). Traditional nursing students are considered young, unmarried women who are entering nursing school after completion of high school. This distinction is important to assess learning needs that might differ across cultures. It is also significant to evaluate the communication styles that might be appropriate to utilize when providing instruction. Communication will be central in accomplishing culturally diverse nursing programs.

Instructors should be aware of different learning styles that vary across cultures, but cannot expected to be knowledgeable on every aspect or every culture. Clear and open
communication will be needed between students and instructors to allow for discussion and acceptance of cultural differences and requirements. There are many ways to include diversity in the classroom. Shared personal experiences, case studies, guest speakers, and class discussion on current events could promote diversity awareness in the classroom. Another way to incorporate diversity in the classroom is to reflect on diversity awareness and diversity self-awareness. This self-assessment is essential for patient assessment and cultural sharing among the interdisciplinary team to be able to collaborate and provide comprehensive care that is patient focused and attuned to their cultural needs (Jefferys, 2008). In order to provide culturally competent care, students need to be aware of cultural diversity and their own feelings associated with providing that care.

That being said, however, true diversity education can only come from a diversified environment. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s (1997) objective was to create both an educational environment and professional workplace that was inclusive of the diverse perspectives reflective of the populations being served. The National League of Nursing wants to shift the focus from teaching diversity to including a diverse environment that develops into a “culture where individuals and institutions move beyond simple tolerance, where they embrace and celebrate the richness of debate and dialogue on difference” (Peery, Julian, Avery, & Henry, 2013). Melillo, Dowling, Abdallah, Findeisen, and Knight (2013) also echo this sentiment. They point to the lack of diversity in the nursing workforce as hindering nursing’s ability to address healthcare disparities and provide culturally competent care. In efforts to remedy this, Melillo et al (2013) encourage recruiting underrepresented populations and promoting the retention and graduation of these students. Creating a more diverse workforce by incorporating a more diverse educational system in terms of both faculty and students will advance nursing care.
References


