Creating a Culture of Comfort in the Classroom: Application of a Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT
Ethnically diverse nursing students face unique challenges and stressors in the academic environment. Comfort as it is culturally defined and contextually influenced may provide relief from stressors. Faculty understanding of diverse nursing student comfort care needs may improve educational outcomes. The purpose of this qualitative ethnornursing study was to examine the culture care meaning of comfort for ethnically diverse nursing students in the academic setting. The study was guided by the Culture Care Theory (CCT) and used the ethnornursing research method. Interviews, field notes of observations, and participant comfort artifacts were used to understand the meaning of comfort for diverse nursing students. Five themes emerged and resulted in action recommendations to guide nurse educators in the provision of culturally congruent nursing care for ethnically diverse nursing students.

OBJECTIVE
The purpose of this presentation was to present action recommendations to guide educators in the provision of culturally congruent comfort care for ethnically diverse undergraduate students in the educational environment.

BACKGROUND
Ethnically diverse undergraduate nursing students face unique challenges and stressors in the academic environment (Amaro, Abriam-Yago, & Yoder, 2006; Evans, 2004; Gilchrist & Rector, 2007; Veal, Bull, & Miller, 2012). Comfort as it is culturally defined and contextually influenced may provide relief from stressors. Culturally diverse students may benefit from the promotion of comfort as they strive to cope with challenges associated with learning in a cultural environment different from their own. Nursing faculty should be educated to preserve and maintain comfort care needs which may impact retention of culturally diverse students. An ethnornursing research study of the culture care meaning of comfort supports this understanding and consequently may improve the educational outcomes for culturally diverse nursing students.

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METHOD
The researcher conducted a qualitative ethnornursing study to examine the culture care meaning of comfort for ethnically diverse nursing students in the academic setting. The study was guided by Leininger’s Culture Care Theory (CCT) (Leininger, 1991) and used the ethnornursing research method (1991; McFarland, & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015). Data were collected in several forms. Twenty-one key and general informants participated in semi-structured interviews; key informants also identified personal artifacts that represented comfort. In addition, the researcher was an observer at student nurse association meetings, and an observer and participant in a nursing classroom. Transcribed audio-tapes, field notes, and participant comfort artifacts were analyzed using Leininger’s four phases of analysis and qualitative criteria (Leininger, 1991,2006). The criteria used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research were: credibility, confirmability, meaning-in-context, recurrent patterning, saturation, and transferability.

FINDINGS
Five themes supported by 13 patterns identify similar and diverse expressions of comfort care. The first three themes with patterns and supporting quotes are presented (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes 1 through 3 with Patterns and Quotes
## APPLICATION TO NURSING EDUCATION

### Recommendations

CCT decision and action recommendations developed from the themes and patterns guide nurse educators in providing culturally congruent nursing care for ethnically diverse nursing students. The action recommendations can be applied to most higher education classroom settings (Table 2). Recommendations are made to 1) preserve or maintain actions of comfort care that are currently successful (Culture Care Preservation/Maintenance); 2) accommodate the comfort care needs of the diverse student while considering curriculum requirements and academic obligations (Culture Care Accommodation and negotiation); and 3) demonstrate professional actions that can promote better outcomes for diverse students in academic environment (Culture Care Re-patterning and Restructuring).

### Non- Diverse Faculty

Faculty understanding of diverse student comfort care needs may improve educational outcomes. Several recommendations for faculty who are non-diverse are to a) be present, open, and genuine; b) use a different lens to view the world of the students; c) appreciate differences and use the knowledge of these differences to enhance learning opportunities for both faculty and students (Bednarz, Schim, Doorenbos, 2008); d) consider self-assessment about the breadth and depth of knowledge about cultural diversity and e) acknowledge differences and find common ground with students. When trust is established—both the faculty and student feel comfortable to exchange personal and life experiences that have formed their opinions of the world (Leininger, 2008).

### CONCLUSION

Patterns of comfort care are expressed similarly and differently, depending on the students’ precollege cultural factors. Nurse educators may take a culturally congruent approach by applying the recommendations to enhance comfort for ethnically diverse nursing students. Enhancing comfort in the educational setting as it is culturally defined may contribute to retention of ethnically diverse nursing students, who will ultimately practice nursing care for a culturally diverse population of patients.

### Keywords

Comfort, culture care theory, ethnonursing research, nursing education, diverse nursing students
## Table 2. Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture Care Preservation (Keep what’s working)</th>
<th>Culture Care Accommodation (Compromise – What’s negotiable)</th>
<th>Culture Care Re-patterning (Change for better outcomes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Address students by name</em></td>
<td><em>Provide examples in the classroom that are applicable to the students’ life and culture.</em></td>
<td><em>Ask students (one on one) what they feel comfortable sharing</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inquire about family members</td>
<td><em>Ask students for input about caring for people from their culture</em></td>
<td><em>Call on them in class to share experiences</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ask about specific traditions</em></td>
<td><em>Ask students about obstacles related to balancing work, home, family, school; assist with problem solving and finding solutions</em></td>
<td><em>Exhibit genuine appreciation for the students’ contributions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>an open, genuine, caring attitude</em></td>
<td><em>Assist with making connections assisting diverse students to find others on campus who share their diversity</em></td>
<td>Challenge inaccurate statements, stereotypical responses and bias from other students and faculty*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Faculty self-assessment of cultural knowledge</em></td>
<td><em>Assigning students to small groups in which they feel comfortable</em></td>
<td><em>Support open respectful interaction in the classroom between students and faculty</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Appreciate differences in students,</em> (Bednarz, Schim, Doorenbos, 2010)</td>
<td><em>Understand that for some individuals comfort means socializing with members of their own culture (Smith et al., 2007)</em></td>
<td><em>Promote campus wide events that celebrate diversity</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Connect diverse students to appropriate programs</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Request money for faculty and staff development in the areas of culturally congruent care</em></td>
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