Photography and Reflection: A study exploring perceptions of first year nursing students’ towards older persons.

By

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This thesis is submitted as a partial fulfilment for the Degree of Masters of Nursing (Research with training) at School of Nursing and Midwifery, Murdoch University.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Gabrielle Brand

Signature.................................................

Date........................................................
Abstract

Photography and Reflection: A study exploring perceptions of first year nursing students’ towards older persons.

This qualitative exploratory study sought to explore and analyse the perceptions of first year nursing students aged 18-25 years toward older persons in aged care facilities. The expectations of first year nursing students in relation to performing nursing care on older persons was also examined. The students’ perceptions were explored using a photo-elicitation technique to evoke an emotive response. By challenging and confronting the participants with realistic photographs of nursing care, this technique encouraged the research participants to engage in anticipatory reflection prior to their first aged care clinical placement.

Data were gathered through demographic questionnaires and semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews. Findings were analysed using thematic analysis. Themes included dissecting what it means to be a nurse, recognising dependence, and the re-visioning of therapeutic relationships including considering patient dignity and empathising with older persons. A youthful reflection on the differences between young and old included participants’ fearing for themselves in future, and this was another identified theme. The photo-elicitation technique challenged and confronted participants as they became aware of the responsibilities of performing nursing care and their belief that they lacked emotional preparedness. Experiencing sensitivity and awkwardness to nakedness of older person’s bodies was also highlighted by most of the participants’ responses.

The findings suggest that it is essential in this time of demographic change and the growing ageing population that nursing education responds to the challenge of an evolving health care system by providing qualified, experienced aged care nurses who are familiar with the reality of older people. Therefore, first year nursing students’ transition to aged care nursing clinical
placement and the adoption of positive attitudes is paramount. Despite a large number of research studies highlighting nursing students’ disinterest in caring for older persons, there have been few studies investigating educational interventions that could assist in overcoming this negative trend.

The findings from this study have important implications for teaching strategies aimed at understanding undergraduate nursing students. Using photography to elicit emotional responses can also assist with reflective practice, which can be useful to enhance self awareness and an aesthetic and personal knowing. Encouraging anticipatory reflection can help socially prepare nursing students, increase their readiness for learning and foster more positive attitudes to caring for older people prior to the students’ initial aged care clinical placement.
Acknowledgements

“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious...the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science”
Albert Einstein

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