The purpose of this research project was to investigate peer-assisted learning (PAL) with two levels of pre-licensure nursing students. Through PAL, students at different levels are actively involved in the teaching/learning process (Williams & Reddy, 2016). This collaborative educational strategy provides positive benefits for both the student learners and student teachers. Because nurses provide patient education and precept nurses and nursing students, teaching is an integral part of their professional role. Therefore, educational programs should encouraged this innovative teaching strategy (Irvine, Williams, & McKenna, 2017).

A subset of PAL is near-peer teaching, in which students who act as teachers have at least one additional year of experience than learners. According to McKenna and Williams (2017), near-peer learning allowed student learners to identify with their peer teachers and better understand the course expectations, alleviated students’ anxiety about clinical rotations, and helped them learn to manage difficult situations. Studies similar to this have been conducted with medical students. The benefits to the student learners included receiving helpful feedback on clinical skills and having a supportive learning environment. The advantages for the student teachers included developing their teaching skills and refining their own knowledge and clinical competence (Khaw & Raw, 2016; deMenezes & Premnath, 2016). Students were also introduced to role models through the near-peer teaching process, and the student teachers voiced a greater interest in being involved with medical education after the experience (Nelson et al., 2013). Brauer, Axelson, Emrich, Rowat, and Stafford (2014) found that a near-peer shadowing program alleviated students’ anxiety about the transition from the classroom setting to clinical rotations. In addition to improving clinical skills, near-peer teaching assisted the learners to develop (effective) communication skills (Aba Alkhail, 2015). In near-peer education with junior medical residents and third-year medical students, the junior residents felt that the experience helped them to become more aware of their own limitations, encouraged collaboration, and helped to stress the importance of using a systematic approach when evaluating sick patients (Antonelou, Krishnamoorthy, Walker, & Murch, 2014).

In undergraduate nursing programs, PAL has been incorporated through the use of standardized patients. By utilizing standardized patient simulation experiences, students are exposed to real-life scenarios within the confines of a nonthreatening environment. They are also a realistic way to evaluate the health assessment skills of nursing students (Sarmasoglu, Dinç, & Elçin, 2016). In addition, the debriefing process that occurs between the student teacher and student learner is an invaluable tool to provide feedback to the student learners. Sideras et al. (2013) also found that students’ communication skills were enhanced through the use of standardized patients. Students provided positive feedback about standardized patient experiences in which higher-level nursing students served the role of patients for first-year nursing students (Owen & Ward-Smith, 2014; Bryant 2017).

In this study, PAL was used among the first semester junior and second semester junior undergraduate nursing students in a rural, bachelor of science in nursing program. Eight second-semester junior students who were enrolled in the Adult Health I course were recruited to be standardized patients and student teachers for the 62 first semester junior Health Assessment students, who were in in the role of student learners. The first semester students randomly received one of six focused health assessment scenarios, and the second semester junior students provided feedback to students on their assessment skills after the conclusion of each standardized patient simulation. The research study was approved by
the institution's Institutional Review Board. Written informed consent was obtained prior to the simulation experience. The students completed an anonymous, online survey immediately following the standardized patient experience and then six weeks later. The survey was adapted from the instrument utilized in a similar, prior study and used with permission from the authors (Owen & Ward-Smith, 2014).

The participants in this study consisted of first semester junior (N=62) and second semester junior (N=8) undergraduate nursing students. Of the 70 prelicensure students who participated in the simulation experience, 100% completed the post-test survey (PT1) immediately following the experience, and 56 students (80%) completed the post-test survey administered six weeks later (PT2). Students' opinions and perceptions of the simulation experience were measured on a Likert scale, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree. The total median score for the ten perception questions was 2.3 at immediate post-test and 2.2 at six-weeks after the simulation experience, corresponding to a consistent level of agreement from immediate post-test to the six-week post-test. Participants were asked to provide qualitative feedback about their experience in both the immediate post-test and the six-week post-test after the simulation experience. General themes in responses included that working with nursing students at a different level in the program was helpful. Some participants reported feeling “intimidated” and “nervous” but felt that it was a helpful experience. Participants reported the “most useful” aspect of the experience was the feedback provided by the second semester students. The predominante theme in responses regarding the “least useful” aspect of the experience was the time allowed for the scenario (8 minutes) and the limitation of only one standardized patient experience per semester. Many participants recommended this experience to all nursing students.

Our study has demonstrated benefits of PAL for student teachers and student learners alike. Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is a growing area of research in nursing education. Future PAL studies could research the experiences of students with at least one year between their program levels and could be conducted over a longer time frame. In addition, it may be helpful to have students participate in multiple standardized patient scenarios during a semester. In conclusion, intraprofessional simulation is an innovative teaching strategy which offers beneficial learning opportunities for all students involved.

Title:
Impact of Peer-Assisted Learning With Standardized Patients in an Undergraduate Nursing Course

Keywords:
Collaborative Strategies, Nursing Education and Peer-assisted learning

References:


Abstract Summary:
Peer-assisted learning an approach that can provide positive benefits to students. A standardized patient simulation using first semester and second semester junior nursing students was developed. The students were surveyed about their feelings about collaborative learning immediately after the simulation and six weeks later (pre-test n=70, post-test n=56).

Content Outline:

1. Elaborate on the use of peer-assisted learning (PAL) as a collaborative learning strategy.
   1. Peer-assisted learning (PAL) allows students to be involved in the teaching process.
   2. PAL provides positive benefits for both the student learners and student teachers.
   3. The benefits to the student learners included receiving helpful feedback on clinical skills and having a supportive learning environment.
   4. The advantages for the student teachers included developing their teaching skills and improving their own knowledge and clinical skills.
   5. Students were introduced to near-peer role models through this process.
2. Explain the benefits of peer-assisted learning using standardized patients.
   1. Standardized patients provide valuable feedback to students through the debriefing process.
   2. Standardized patients are a realistic way to evaluate the health assessment skills of nursing students.
   3. Students’ communication skills were enhanced through the use of standardized patients.
   4. Second-year nursing students were used successfully as standardized patients during the head-to-toe assessment for first-year nursing students, with positive feedback from both groups of students.
3. Analyze pre-licensure nursing students’ feelings about collaborative learning.
   1. The findings immediately post-simulation and 6 weeks later were consistent.
2. The total median score for the ten perception questions was 2.3 at immediate post-test and 2.2 at six-weeks after the simulation experience (with 1 corresponding to strongly agree and 5 corresponding to strongly disagree).
3. Qualitative feedback indicated that the peer feedback was useful.
4. Students requested more than one PAL simulation per semester, with more time allotted.

4. Discuss implications for nursing education based on research results and literature findings.
   1. PAL is an area in nursing education that needs additional research.
   2. Future studies could examine students with at least one year between their program levels and could occur over a longer period of time.

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**Author Summary:** Ms. Weaver earned her Bachelor of Nursing degree and Master’s Degree at DeSales University. She obtained a post-master’s certificate as a Nurse Educator from Villanova University. She has been a nurse educator since June 2000 teaching within a variety of programs. Ms. Weaver currently is enrolled in a DNP program at Chatham University where she will graduate in December 2017. Her capstone project focuses on enhancing education utilizing high-fidelity simulation.

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**Professional Experience:** Dr. Tracy George has been a family nurse practitioner since 1999. She currently sees patients in the public health and free clinic settings. She has been an assistant professor of nursing at Francis Marion University since 2012. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate nursing courses. She has published and presented on the scholarship of teaching and learning, shared decision-making, and clinical nursing topics. She has published nine peer-reviewed articles, several book chapters, and has presented at a number of regional and national conferences.

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