



TEACHING GERONTOLOGY

A JOINT MISSION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD



There is a growing need for registered nurses committed to working with older people. Formal nursing education in gerontology and geriatrics will then be crucial. With rapid global aging, a high incidence of chronic diseases, a socioeconomic development which brings an erosion of multigenerational family structures and the fact that we live in a world where people grow old as immigrants to a new country also brings a need of awareness about cultural issues.

BACKGROUND

Providing formal nursing education in gerontology for nursing students is highly important for engendering positive attitudes towards working with older adults. The older population is growing globally, but until recently the research record on gerontology and on aging attitudes has mostly had an emphasis on Western cultural contexts.

Internationalization in higher education provides good opportunities for spreading ideas and an awareness of different ways of addressing the needs of a changing demography around the world.



In the Double Degree Bilingual Nursing Program (DDBNP), students from Bangkai University Bangkok, Thailand, study their fourth and final year of the program at Mälardalen University, Sweden.

The program includes a course in gerontology and fundamentals of nursing older adults. Questions have thus been raised about pedagogy and different teaching cultures as well as an differences in views on older adults and aging between Eastern and Western societies.

As faculty at a Swedish University with teaching and research in gerontology as our main occupation, creating a syllabus appropriate for Asian students has been a challenge and a reward, bringing visions of the need for future cooperation.



AIM

The aim of this presentation is to explore and discuss how courses in gerontology can be improved and shared through co-production between different countries and cultures.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Within the course in gerontology a qualitative study has been done.

The data was based on a semi structured qualitative evaluation questionnaire focusing on attitudes on aging, with questions such as: Describe what you think when you meet an old person? What do you think of aging and older people when you have studied gerontology?

The questions were asked at the introduction of the gerontology course and a second time when the course was finished. The course content concerned normal aging processes versus pathological processes and geriatric care.

The participants were 30 nursing students from Thailand (29 females / 1 male) with the mean age of 22.5 years (range: 20-26) and 25 nursing students from Sweden (23 females / 2 males) with the mean age of 26 years (range: 21-47).

The course was held in Sweden and three teachers/clinical students from Thailand and two Swedish teachers lectured.

The open-ended questions in the questionnaire were analyzed with qualitative content analysis.

RESULTS: The multiplicative process proceeds ...

Based on the course evaluation, the next step was to adapt the course to be suitable for Thai conditions and education. The course curriculum changed with minor revisions, such as adding a part related to Buddhism, a religion which influences Thai society and the living conditions of older people in Thailand and old age care. This could only partly be seen in the analysis of the qualitative study where both Swedish and Thai students emphasized how old persons have life experience, wisdom and deserved respect. However, the perceptions differed in that the Swedish nursing students described

older people in words as frailty, active and less in need of care. This finding, contradicts some of the "ageism" that the Swedish society sometimes is accused of. In contrast, Thai students saw the older person as one who needs help and to be taken care of. These findings are based on the questionnaire at the beginning of the course. The same questions were asked after the course and this time the Swedish students had changed their perception of older people to be more in need of care. In contrast the Thai students had changed their perceptions in the opposite direction, older people

were no longer only needing care, but older people were considered as competent, resourceful and active. Both Swedish and Thai students expressed a growth in knowledge and deeper understanding about aging and older people. The Thai students took the knowledge of the aging process further by reflecting on the consequences of their own life style and questioned whether they needed to do life style changes in order to prevent some of the typical conditions associated with aging.

OUR VISION ...

... is to see a continuation and accelerated development of gerontological proficiency by using internationalization in higher education as a tool. By including lecturers in nursing from international collaboration partners, we can combine Eastern and Western cultural views on aging as well as pedagogy.

Thereby, we will not only challenge our mutual understanding, we will also be able to spread the gerontology course to a greater number of students internationally using a concept that builds on the idea of multiplication.



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Teaching Gerontology

Wolfgang Guggemos



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