

Reflective Practice Narrative  
Nursing 370- Easter Seals Camp Orientation

## Reflective Practice Narrative

During orientation, staff members, including myself, participated in empathy exercises. This was to increase our understanding of the barriers faced by individuals in a wheelchair, with a visual impairment, or who are non-verbal. Each exercise, although only practiced for a maximum of four hours, proved to be difficult, frustrating, but most importantly, a significant learning experience.

This experience allowed a small glimpse into the barriers faced and responses received within the environment and by those around me. It proved to increase my understanding of the context, emotions, and experiences that surrounds patients and family; thus aiding in my ability to nurse relationally with individuals who have such “diffabilities” (Doane & Varcoe, 2005). Within each exercise, various barriers arose from both my environment and the responses by individuals. For example, when I was in a wheelchair, constantly I was asked, “do you need help?”; although the gesture is nice, I was completely capable. The most significant experience however, came when I was blindfolded and simulating visual impairment. I was at a table during lunch, a fellow staff member went up and grabbed me food- once again, unnecessary but meant with good intentions; when at the table it was hard to involve myself in conversation, one because I couldn’t lip read and with the high volume of surrounding conversations made hearing hard. And second, when I did want to say something, I couldn’t make eye contact and therefore did not know if anyone was listening. I felt excluded, saddened and ‘accidentally’ disrespected by those around me. It seemed the only conversation during this lunch break was for assistance, “can I cut your food? Do you want a drink? Here is a napkin...”.

What I gained for relational practice is my understanding of habits people, including myself, have towards those with various “diffabilities”. Many people, including my ‘previous self’ feel the need to offer assistance. In truth, people with various diffabilities are fully capable, and the offer of assistance isn’t needed; but the invitation for them to ask is respectful, such as: “...let me know if you need my assistance”. Habits arise through interactions with people, repetitive activities, and our environment. Although they can be viewed as useful, they hold the ability to constrain relational capabilities (Doane & Varcoe, 2005). I feel that a habit I have unconsciously picked up is way of thinking that people with diffabilities need my assistance, however they are adaptive people with just as much and possibly more capabilities as anyone else. Thankfully, habits can be unlearned (Doane & Varcoe, 2005); and, this exercise highlighted the habit and this practicum is feeding the practice of unlearning.

One topic of conversation that came up as a big group was regarding wheelchair accessibility in the community. Being in the wheelchair for four hours I realized how difficult it is to maneuver in such places as the dining hall. Furthermore, the uneven pavement and various slopes in Easter seals camp alone. I have begun to analyze the barriers in other communities and the importance for change. Our environment has been built with the assumption that everyone walks on two legs; however this is not that fact and therefore, wheel chair access is pivotal in all locations. This should include the condition of pavement, size of sidewalk, and all modes of transportation. Community health nurses (CHN) must assess these factors in the community; from this position, CHN can better plan and implement change according to individual community needs, such as

inadequate sidewalk pavement (Yiu, 2008). CHN can provide means for strengthening community action to promote access in communities (Cohen, 2008; WHO, 1987). Through acknowledging community needs, CHN can advocate for community members to seek options regarding strategies to improve the physical environment (Yui, 2008).

Educating the community can be succeeded through multiple means of communication such as: local newspapers, newsletters, notice boards, radio, television, flyers, and community forums (Yiu, 2008). Empowering the community can raise awareness of the barriers persisting in the environment and aid in creating a greater community atmosphere. As nurses we are in an innate position to advocate for change, through this experience at Easter seals camp I hope to understand and analyze what barriers children and families face. Furthermore, open my eyes to what I perceive in the Victoria community as changes needed to adapt to the needs of access for those with various diffabilities.

#### References

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