

I Know How it Feels: A Voice-hearing Simulation to Enhance Nursing Students' Empathy and Self-efficacy

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certificate of Original Authorship	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	viii
Abstract	x
Introduction.....	x
Aims	x
Method	x
Results	x
Discussion and Conclusion.....	xi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Developing the Research Idea	1
The Phenomenon of Voice-hearing	2
Subjective Experiences of Voice-hearing	3
Voice-hearing Simulation	4
Empathy.....	5
Self-efficacy to Communicate.....	6
Originality of Research	6
Summary.....	7
Organisation of the Thesis	7
Key Terms.....	9
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	10
Introduction	10
Literature Search Method.....	10
The Prevalence of Voice-Hearing.....	12

General Populations	12
Clinical Populations	13
Approaches to Voice-hearing	14
Traditional Psychiatric Approach.....	14
An Alternative Approach	15
Hearing Voices Movement.....	21
Therapeutic Engagement with Consumers' Voice-Hearing Experiences	22
Engaging with Families.....	25
Mental Health Nursing Approaches to Voice-Hearing.....	26
Adopting a Hearing Voices Approach	29
Nursing Students' Understandings of Mental Disorder and Voice-Hearing	30
Changing Mental Health Nursing Practice.....	31
Developing Self-efficacy to Communicate.....	32
Developing Empathy.....	33
Educational Preparation of Nurses	37
Voice-hearing Simulations to Increase Awareness and Understanding.....	37
Voice-hearing Simulations to Enhance Empathy	38
Voice-hearing Simulations to Increase Self-efficacy to Communicate.....	40
Summary.....	40
Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods	45
Introduction	45
Aims of the Study.....	45
Research Design.....	46
Philosophical Foundation.....	48
Setting.....	48
Participants	48
Procedure	49
Intervention	50
The Voice Hearing Simulation Workshop.....	50

An Experiential Learning Cycle.....	52
Data Collection.....	53
Survey Data.....	53
Focus Groups.....	54
Instruments.....	54
Jefferson Scale of Empathy.....	54
Self-Efficacy Scale.....	56
Student Questionnaire.....	57
Focus Group.....	57
Data Analysis.....	59
Survey Data.....	59
Focus Group Interview Data.....	61
Reflexivity.....	62
Ethical Considerations.....	62
Consent.....	63
Risks and their Management.....	63
Data Management.....	64
Summary.....	65
Chapter Four: Results.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Survey Participants.....	66
Self-Efficacy to Communicate (SEC).....	68
Self-Efficacy to Communicate and Gender.....	69
Self-Efficacy to Communicate and English Language.....	70
Self-Efficacy to Communicate and Nursing Qualification.....	71
Self-Efficacy to Communicate and Highest Educational Qualification other than Nursing.....	72
Self-Efficacy to Communicate and Family Member's Experience of Mental Illness and of Hearing Voices.....	73

Empathy.....	75
Empathy and Gender.....	76
Empathy and English Language.....	77
Empathy and Nursing Qualification.....	78
Empathy and Highest Educational Qualification other than Nursing.....	79
Empathy, Family Member Experience of Mental Illness, and Voice-hearing.....	80
Talking to Consumers Who Hear Voices.....	82
Developing Awareness and Understanding of Voice-hearing: <i>'I did not think it would feel so real'</i>	83
Developing Empathy for Consumers Who Hear Voices: <i>'I now know how they feel'</i>	87
Developing Confidence to Talk with Consumers about Voice-hearing: <i>'You've got to take the first step and then it gets easier'</i>	88
Responding Therapeutically: <i>'It's like opening a Pandora's Box'</i>	91
Fearing Aggression Related to Voice-hearing: <i>'You do not know what the patients' voices are telling them'</i>	97
Preparation for Practice: <i>'I think more of the coursework could be devoted to actually communicating with individuals who hear voices'</i>	99
Summary.....	102
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion	104
Experiential Knowledge and Learning	104
Experts by Experience.....	105
The Experiential Learning Cycle of the VHS	106
reported that the voices were consuming and required the use of considerable amounts of their mental energy.....	109
Developing Nursing Students' Confidence to Talk about Voice-hearing	113
Self-efficacy to Communicate	113
Increasing Awareness and Decreasing Fears and Concerns.....	116
Increasing Therapeutic Engagement	116
Developing Nursing Students' Empathy for Consumers who Hear Voices.....	117

Educational Approaches	117
Characteristics of Nursing Students	120
Limitations of the Study	126
Recommendations	128
Educational Preparation for Confident and Empathic practice	128
Future Directions for Research	130
Conclusion	130
Appendices	132
Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet	132
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form.....	135
Appendix C: Survey Instruments	137
Appendix D: Approval to Use Jefferson Scale of Empathy: Health Professions Students Version (JSE – HPS version)	150
Appendix E: Participant Consent Form - Focus group	151
Appendix F: Focus Group Schedule.....	153
Appendix G: Ethics Approval.....	154
Appendix H: Participant Demographics	156
Bibliography.....	157

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1: PRISMA Flowchart of Database Search Outcomes	11
Figure 3-1: Model of the Research Study Design.....	47
Figure 4-1: Self-efficacy to Communicate & 95% CI, by Study Stage.....	69
Figure 5-1: Experiential Learning Cycle in Relation to the VHS.....	107

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participant Profile, by Gender	66
Table 2: Nursing Qualifications and Experience, by Gender	67
Table 3: Non-nursing Qualifications, by Gender.....	67
Table 4: Family Member Mental Illness and Voice-Hearing, by Gender	68
Table 5: Self-Efficacy to Communicate, by Stage	68
Table 6: Self-Efficacy to Communicate, Mean Scores, by Stage.....	68
Table 7: Self-Efficacy to Communicate, by Stage, Post hoc Tests	69
Table 8: Self-Efficacy to Communicate, Mean Scores by Gender, by Stage	70
Table 9: Self-Efficacy to Communicate by Gender, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	70
Table 10: Self-Efficacy to Communicate Mean Scores, by English Language, by Stage	71
Table 11: Self-Efficacy to Communicate by English Language, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	71
Table 12: Self-Efficacy to Communicate Mean Scores, by Nursing Qualification, by Stage.....	71
Table 13: Self-Efficacy to Communicate by Nursing Qualification, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	72
Table 14: Self-Efficacy to Communicate Mean Scores, by Qualification Other than Nursing, by Stage	72
Table 15: Self-Efficacy to Communicate by Qualification Other than Nursing, by Stage, Post hoc Tests	73
Table 16: Self-Efficacy to Communicate Mean Scores, by Family Member Mental Illness, by Stage	73
Table 17: Self-Efficacy to Communicate by Family Member Mental Illness, by Stage, Post hoc Tests	74

Table 18: Self-Efficacy to Communicate Mean Scores, by Family Member Hears Voices, by Stage.....	74
Table 19: Self-Efficacy to Communicate, by Family Member Hears Voices, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	75
Table 20: Empathy, by Stage.....	75
Table 21: Empathy Mean Scores, by Stage.....	75
Table 22: Empathy, Post hoc Tests.....	76
Table 23: Empathy Mean Scores by Gender, by Stage.....	76
Table 24: Empathy by Gender, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	77
Table 25: Empathy Mean Scores, by English Language, by Stage.....	77
Table 26: Empathy by English Language, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	78
Table 27: Empathy Mean Scores, by Nursing Qualification, by Stage.....	78
Table 28: Empathy, by Nursing Qualification, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	79
Table 29: Empathy Mean Scores, by Qualification other than Nursing, by Stage.....	79
Table 30: Empathy, by Qualification Other than Nursing, by Stage, Post hoc Tests....	80
Table 31: Empathy Mean Scores, by Family Member Mental Illness, by Stage.....	80
Table 32: Empathy, by Family Member Mental Illness, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	81
Table 33: Empathy Mean Scores, by Family Member Mental Illness, Hears Voices, by Stage.....	81
Table 34: Empathy, by Family Member Mental Illness, Hears Voices, by Stage, Post hoc Tests.....	82

ABSTRACT

Introduction

There is evidence that nurses do not routinely discuss voice-hearing experiences with mental health care consumers despite its importance for recovery-focused nursing practice. One way to address this shortcoming is the use of an experiential voice-hearing simulation workshop (VHS).

Aims

The aims of the study were to: determine whether an experiential VHS increased nursing students' empathy and self-efficacy to discuss consumers' experiences of voice-hearing immediately after the VHS and at six-month follow-up, and identify concerns students had about talking with consumers about their voice-hearing experiences.

Method

A concurrent mixed methods study was undertaken with 370 final year nursing students who participated in a VHS workshop. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from participants using a survey before and after the VHS, and at six-month follow-up. The survey instrument comprised demographic and other questions, a measure of empathy, a measure of self-efficacy to communicate, and open-ended questions related to the VHS experience. Additional qualitative data were collected via focus group three months post the VHS.

Results

Analysis of the quantitative data revealed that nursing students' confidence to talk about voice-hearing experiences increased significantly after participation in the VHS and at six-month follow-up, with empathy significantly increased at follow-up for: females, those in whom English was an additional language, for those whom had no prior nursing or other tertiary education qualification, and those whose family members did not have a mental illness. Prior to the VHS the participants expressed concerns

about interacting with consumers who hear voices. After the VHS they reported increased awareness of the effects of voice-hearing, less concerns about consumers who hear voices, and increased feelings of empathy for them. Further, the students expressed increased confidence to talk with consumers about their voice-hearing experiences, with many practicing this during their mental health clinical placements.

Discussion and Conclusion

The use of experiential learning principles contributed to development of the participants' understanding of voice-hearing and its effects on consumers. The level of realism of the simulation experience aroused emotions in the participants and contributed to their development of empathy and confidence when interacting with consumers who hear voices. This study identified the need for the further development of communication skills, specifically addressing consumers' voice-hearing experiences. This study highlights the utility of VHS to increase and sustain nursing students' empathy for, and confidence to communicate with, consumers who hear voices, and it is recommended for the educational preparation of all health professions students.