

# **Educating EAL nursing students: the clinical experience**

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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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## Abstract

Increasing numbers of undergraduate nursing students in Australia speak English as an additional language (EAL). Although the benefits of a linguistically diverse nursing workforce are often noted in the literature, the discourse around EAL nursing students often centres on the challenges that students face in completing their degree. In particular, clinical placements (compulsory workplace experience) are often considered to be difficult for both students and their supervisors (clinical facilitators), who feel they lack strategies to effectively supervise EAL students. The causes of the challenges for both students and facilitators are often considered to be students' lack of English language ability or learning styles that are not suited to western style education.

Clinical placement is a critical site for learning. It can offer students opportunities to participate in key nursing activities, learn from more expert others, and learn the specialised language of nursing. Thus, challenges students face and facilitators' perceived lack of confidence in supervising students are problematic.

This study investigates the pedagogic practices of three facilitators, as they supervise EAL students during clinical placements. It is based on six weeks of fieldwork, where I observed and audio recorded facilitators and students during their daily practices in three different metropolitan hospitals in Australia. An ethnographic research design combined with discourse analysis enabled a macro analysis of the broader context and a micro analysis of talk-in-action, resulting in detailed insights into facilitator-student interactions.

This study is based on the view that learning occurs through social interaction and that students can be guided by an expert other to be socialised into the practices and language of nursing. Rather than focusing only on students' individual abilities and learning styles, this study focuses on how facilitators' pedagogic practices can provide access to learning opportunities, and encourage student participation.

I found that there are multiple learning spaces in hospitals, each of which is associated with particular learning activities between facilitators and students. These activities provide access to opportunities for learning core nursing skills, as well as for socialisation into the language of nursing. However, not all students had access to these opportunities.

This research proposes a new way of thinking about the supervision of EAL students in clinical settings. Rather than focusing on a lack of English language or cultural heritage factors, it proposes that what I call a guided spatial approach can maximise EAL students' opportunities for learning.