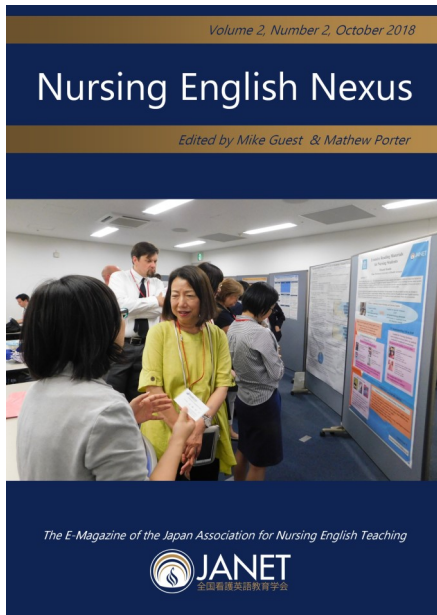


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Contextualizing Learning for Japanese Nursing Students — Nursing Labs and Textbooks

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Abstract: This short article offers insight into the importance of contextualized learning within a nursing English class. There are three main topics that I will be covering: explicit contextualization of course content, active participation of nursing instructors, and employing engaging material. I believe that if teachers would like to carry out a successful nursing English class, they should consider including these three factors.

For three years I instructed undergraduate nursing English courses at a large, private Japanese university (roughly 30,000 students). During my first year working at this university I was asked to develop a nursing English course for the Faculty of Nursing (this request was based on my previous experience developing two intensive nursing English courses in Canada). I subsequently met with the head of the Faculty of Nursing, and, following several discussions with various nursing professors regarding expectations and potential class content, I agreed to undertake this request.

The main pedagogic approaches I employed to instruct this course were:

- English for specific purposes (ESP) — the course was designed based on input from the nursing faculty and ongoing feedback from nursing students
- Content and language integrated learning (CLIL), content-based instruction (CBI), and content based language teaching (CBLT) — at all times course themes and content were rooted in nursing English, with language focused instruction linked directly to the nursing-based content
- Contextualized learning, which was foundational for the second and third versions of the course when over 25% of class time was held in nursing labs
- Individualized learning, and learner-centered instruction (utilized in order to identify, highlight, and address individual student needs throughout the duration of the courses)

- Computer assisted language learning (CALL) was used at all times to ensure immediate student access to online nursing English resources, and supplemental course materials such as nursing vocabulary lists, quizlet, and in-class references.

During the three years teaching the nursing English courses, the students were highly motivated, hard-working and enthusiastic. The courses also received very high evaluations from the students (an average of 4.6/5 for the combined three years). However, upon completion of the second year's courses something fundamental had changed. Not only were the test score means and in-class task evaluations higher than in the first year, the feedback from both the students as well as the nursing instructors appeared entirely more enthusiastic and encouraging. Why the change?

My own feeling was that the large discrepancy in scores, as well as the even more positive feedback than the first year, were due primarily to the three foundational changes I had implemented for the second year of classes. The three changes were: i) teaching slightly more than 25% of the classes in actual nursing-labs; ii) having the nursing faculty play active roles during the nursing lab classes, and iii) using two new nursing English textbooks. Allow me to explain these in more detail.

Contextualization: Nursing Labs and Nurse Instructors

The first version of the nursing English course was

carried out entirely in a modified computer lab (a typical classroom that had been refurbished to function as a computer lab), that offered adequate space for pair and group work as well as for students to move around class to interact with each other during nursing role-play tasks.

Although students evaluated this course very highly (4.5/5) and reported that they enjoyed the activities, they agreed with my suggestion that future versions of the course include a more contextualized experience by incorporating actual nursing environments.

To address this suggestion, in versions two and three of the nursing English course, nursing labs were used as the classroom for 4 of the 15 lessons. The 11 other lessons took place in a spacious modern computer lab. Most importantly, nurse instructors agreed to take part in the nursing lab lessons. The difference in student feedback was profound. All 22 students chose 'Excellent' on the feedback survey when answering the two questions focused on the use of nursing labs, with 6 students including the word "love" or "loved" in their comments. Additionally, the students expressed gratitude, appreciation, and excitement for the opportunity to have worked with their Japanese nursing instructors in English. They welcomed the experience to learn both with and from their professional mentors in such an environment and were eager for more such activities.

As an English instructor of nurses, it is vital to meet with actual nursing professors and attempt to involve them in classroom activities. Their participation adds a level of credibility and professionalism to the course in a way that a language instructor cannot. By having engaging, knowledgeable nursing professors supporting the course instructor's efforts, as well as participating in classroom activities, students reported that their desire to participate was very high, and that their confidence in their own ability to use English when speaking with patients or hospital staff had

increased. Equally as important, both students and nurse instructors reported that they were extremely satisfied with both the regular class activities and those held in the nursing lab, and were excited to work with each other again.

Textbooks

When I carried out a course needs analysis, both students and professors indicated that although they would like both a structured class with a textbook to refer to, they also suggested a flexible approach that encourages risk-taking and allows for creativity. To this end, a faculty-recommended textbook was adopted, a range of supplemental materials was developed and all classes were carried out in a computer lab (year 1), or a combination of a computer lab and nursing lab (years 2 and 3).

I used two textbooks as fundamental components of each course. One textbook the students themselves purchased, while I used the second one as a supplemental resource for additional photographs and dialogues. In version one of the nursing English course, the students purchased *Clinical Scenes for a New Age* (Tanaka et al., 2009) and I used *Vital Signs* (Morooka and Sugiura, 2009) as a supplemental resource. In versions two and three of the course I chose *Bedside Manner* (Capper, 2013) as the main student text and *Cambridge English for Nursing: Pre-intermediate* (Allum and McGarr, 2010) for use as the supplemental textbook.

The reason for using textbooks was simple: both nursing students and the faculty desired them. However, the textbooks were supplemented with teacher-developed materials as well as the use of online resources (nursing-focused videos, and content-based, educational resource sites), both of which targeted specific vocabulary and phrases for the activities we carried out in class (such as dialogues, interviews, and role-plays).

Although student feedback from the first version of the course was positive regarding the

textbook, the student feedback from the second and third versions of the course indicated that students overwhelmingly enjoyed using the textbook *Bedside Manner*. Specifically, students suggested that it was easy to use, clear, topically relevant, and extremely useful for building contextualized word lists and nursing-appropriate phrases.

Summary

My own sensibilities regarding the overall success of the course, which compliments the positive feedback from both students and nursing professors, is that the better class experience and improved activity scores were due to the contextualized experience in the nursing lab and the participation of the nursing professors, as well as the new textbooks. More so than students from the initial version of the nursing English course, the students from versions two and three exhibited very high levels of energy in all lessons, expressed an enthusiastic willingness to participate, and laughed heartily at the conclusion of most interactive activities. The positive energy in these courses was contagious, with both myself and various nurse instructors commenting on the excellent atmosphere created by the students' enthusiasm and excitement.

To fellow nursing English teachers that are working in the field of nursing English, specific research based on the contextualization of content within the field is needed. Most current research that examines contextualization is located primarily within the general field of English for specific purposes but is not targeted specifically at either nursing or medical English. This gap needs to be addressed.

To conclude this short article, please let me reiterate, should you be in a position to instruct a nursing English course, consider contextualizing the course through the active use of a nursing lab as a classroom. Additionally, whenever possible, utilize the university's own nursing faculty

members as participants in the nursing lab activities. This contributes to an authentic environment and increases student participation. Finally, consider including contextualized nursing English materials that support practical nursing activities and promote nursing vocabulary acquisition. In doing so, you may find that your own nursing English classes become more invigorated.

Textbook References

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