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**Communication in Clinical  
Practice:  
Critical success factors for ESL  
students**

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# Abstract

This study investigates the factors most likely to support effective communication in clinical placements for ESL nursing students in New Zealand. The experiences of ESL students as they complete a clinical placement are examined and compared with data from the students' clinical lecturers and preceptors.

Data for the study was collected through interviews with individual students before, during and after their Transition to Practice placement. Interviews were also held with two of the students' preceptors, and a focus group was held with clinical lecturers who had experience of working with ESL students. Results from the study underline the importance of facilitating students' entry to the placement community of practice, and access to its interactions. A number of factors supported or inhibited students' participation and learning within the placement community.

The study identified two critical factors intrinsic to the student, and two extrinsic to the student. Intrinsic factors included the student's proficiency with English language: in particular, the sophisticated sociopragmatic language skills used by nurses in their daily interactions. The student's use of learning strategies, including the proactive approach best suited to learning on placement, was also critical. Extrinsic factors likely to support the student's integration within the community of practice were the quality of

the preceptor, in terms of attitude to and training for the preceptoring role, and the tone of the placement environment.

The major outcomes of this study point to the importance of providing direct instruction for ESL students in the kinds of language and learning styles required for placement. There are also implications for the selection and training of preceptors and for the placing of students in appropriate clinical environments. The study concludes with suggestions for a specific communication programme for ESL students.

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# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background .....	1
1.2	Nursing Training in New Zealand .....	3
1.3	The Research Topic .....	7
<b>2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	Competent Communication in a Second Language .....	10
2.2	Pragmatic Language Skills in the Nursing Workplace .....	13
2.3	How Do Nurses Learn Communication Skills? .....	18
2.3.1	Communication skills in undergraduate nursing programmes .....	19
2.3.2	Learning communication skills through clinical placements .....	19
2.3.3	Second language learning in clinical placements .....	22
2.4	What are the Communication Problems for ESL Nurses? .....	25
2.5	Helping ESL Students Acquire Communication Skills for Clinical Placement.....	28
2.5.1	ESL programmes on workplace communication .....	28
2.5.2	ESL programmes on communication for clinical placements.....	31
2.5.3	Summary.....	32
<b>3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>34</b>
3.1	Introduction .....	34
3.2	The Research Approach .....	35
3.3	The Research Process: Students .....	38
3.3.1	Recruitment and selection of students .....	38
3.3.2	Characteristics of students .....	39
3.3.3	Pilot study .....	40
3.3.4	Student interviews.....	41
3.3.5	Emails on placement.....	48

3.4	The Research Process: Clinical Lecturers .....	48
3.4.1	Focus group .....	49
3.5	The Research Process: Preceptors .....	50
3.5.1	Recruitment and selection of preceptors.....	50
3.6	Data Analysis.....	53
<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS: FINDING A VOICE.....</b>	<b>55</b>
4.1	Intrinsic Factors: English language proficiency .....	57
4.1.1	Express ideas clearly, confidently and appropriately .....	60
4.1.2	Engage in and maintain conversations .....	65
4.1.3	Pronounce clearly .....	68
4.1.4	Comprehend others' speech .....	70
4.1.5	Understand Kiwi/New Zealand English.....	73
4.1.6	Use medical terminology correctly.....	74
4.1.7	Pressure points .....	76
4.2	Intrinsic Factors: Proactive approach to learning .....	82
4.2.1	Asking questions .....	83
4.2.2	Seeking and responding to feedback.....	84
4.2.3	Acting assertively.....	85
4.2.4	Identifying as a nursing student .....	86
4.3	Extrinsic Factors: Effective preceptor .....	88
4.3.1	The role of the preceptor .....	88
4.3.2	Student perceptions of 'good' preceptors .....	89
4.4	Extrinsic Factors: Supportive environment.....	94
4.4.1	Discrimination in placements .....	94
4.4.2	Supportive environments .....	97
<b>5</b>	<b>RESULTS: THE PATH TO CONFIDENCE .....</b>	<b>100</b>
5.1	Group One: Two steps forward, one step back .....	103
5.2	Group Two: Full steam ahead .....	107
5.3	Supporting Students in Placement .....	109

5.4	Conclusion.....	111
<b>6</b>	<b>DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....</b>	<b>113</b>
6.1	Question One: .....	113
6.1.1	Intrinsic factors: English language proficiency.....	113
6.1.2	Intrinsic factors: Proactive approach to learning .....	117
6.1.3	Extrinsic factors: Effective preceptor.....	118
6.1.4	Extrinsic factors: Supportive environment .....	119
6.1.5	The role of confidence.....	120
6.2	Question Two:.....	123
6.2.1	Specific instruction in the language and communication required for placement .....	124
6.2.2	Proactive approach to learning .....	128
6.2.3	Matching ESL students with supportive preceptors and colleagues.....	128
6.2.4	Fostering an inclusive atmosphere throughout the programme .....	129
6.3	The Optimum Situation.....	130
<b>7</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>133</b>
7.1	Practical Implications .....	134
	<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>138</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>161</b>



# List of Appendices

1	Student invitation to participate .....	138
2	Student information sheet .....	140
3	Student consent form .....	143
4	Student interview guide (1) .....	144
5	Student interview guide (2) .....	146
6	Student interview guide (3) .....	148
7	Language acculturation exercise .....	150
8	Clinical lecturers' information sheet .....	151
9	Clinical lecturers' consent form .....	154
10	Clinical lecturers' focus group topic guide .....	155
11	Preceptors' invitation and information sheet .....	156
12	Preceptors' interview guide .....	159
13	Preceptors' consent form .....	160

# List of Tables and Figures

1.1	Interpersonal interactions, inferred from Competencies for the Registered Nurse Scope of Practice (NCNZ, 2007)	5
2.1	Interpersonal interactions, inferred from Competencies for the Registered Nurse Scope of Practice (NCNZ, 2007)	11
2.2	Bachman's model of 'language competence'	13
3.1	Background and characteristics of the students	41
3.2	Example of completed Confidence in Communicating exercise	44
3.3	Aspects of spoken language use exercise	45
3.4	Example of 'aspects of spoken language use' exercise	46
3.5	The data collection timeline	52
4.1	Factors influencing the development of competent communication on placement	56
4.2	Language proficiency factors ranked by importance	58
4.3	Elements of 'good' English for communication in placement	60
4.4	Pressure points for communication	77
4.5	Pages from a 'Health History' form	79
4.6	Summary of language demands on placement	81
4.7	Qualities of a 'good' preceptor as perceived by students	89
4.8	Relationship between confidence, interaction and communication: positive cycle	98
5.1	Confidence in communicating, as reported at each student interview	101
5.2	Paths to confidence in communicating in placement	102
5.3	Group one: predicted difficulties in placement	103
5.4	Group one: actual difficulties in placement	106
5.5	Group two: predicted difficulties in placement	107
5.6	Group two: actual difficulties in placement	109
5.7	Participants' suggestions for ESL student support	110
6.1	Factors and support mechanisms to facilitate effective communication	132