



# Volunteering Days in Lanyu

## Transcultural Learning for Nursing Students

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Recently, the Nursing Department of Tzu Chi University designed several professional curriculums involving service-learning such as community nursing, serious disease control, psychiatric nursing and nursing fundamentals. Furthermore, we provided offshore island service as an extended course during summer vacations. Combining nursing with volunteer service has become an important role for nursing

care in the twenty-first century.

In 2001, the “Universal Declaration on Volunteering” of the International Association for Volunteer Effort stated that it was time for citizens to become volunteers. Taiwan also published “Volunteer Service Law” – a legal document about volunteerism. Volunteer service is a popular global strategy for citizen involvement and realization of citizen responsibility. On

school campuses, the Ministry of Education published a “Subsidy of College Public Service Curriculum”, a curriculum that provides community volunteering. The objective of this curriculum is to encourage colleges to provide public service internship for students in order to gain hands on experience. Combining service and knowledge, students can perceive the importance of volunteering spirit values. With systematic design, planning, self-examination, and evaluation, students can achieve goals. Tzu Chi Nursing Department provides professional curriculums with public service including Community Nursing, Severe Disease Care, Psychiatric Nursing, and Fundamental Nursing. The extended courses require students to provide volunteer services at offshore island during their summer vacation time.

### **Five Years of Oversea Transcultural Learning**

Doctor Madeleine Leininger, a transcultural nursing expert with expertise in anthropology and nursing, mentioned, “In order for human beings to live in a healthy, harmonious, and meaningful world, nursing staff should understand the human cultural care concept, value and life style, in order to provide culturally congruent, meaningful and beneficial health care to people.” To understand recipients’ need and cultural background is very important in providing professional quality of service as a caregiver.

Taiwan is a beautiful Asian Pacific Island

with multi-ethnic groups. There are about five to ten thousand aboriginal people, which consist of two percent of the island’s total population. The Taiwanese government recognizes fourteen tribes: Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Puyuma, Rukai Tribe, Tsou, Saisiat, Yami, Thao, Kebaran, Taroko, Sakiraya, and Seediq. There are six Yami Tribe (or Tao Tribe) villages in Lanyu. The Yami Tribe is the only oceanic aboriginal tribe in Taiwan. According to April 2011’s census, their population is about 3,956. Due to the independent living environment, Yami traditional culture is preserved. There is no chieftain system for Yami Tribe. The decision is made by the consensus among their elders. In their religion, there are eight levels that the Yami views the universe: five levels in heaven that are in charge of land,



**Hygiene education in the community is not hard for nursing students, rather the greater challenge is boarding the airplane to leave Taiwan, to meet and interact with different cultural residents. Tzu Chi College nursing students teach Lanyu children oral disease prevention.**



ocean, food and life. Yami aboriginals also believe in spirits, and are particularly fearful of Anito, the dead spirit. Many unfortunate things all come from evil spirits. The most unfortunate of all is death. According to the island's tradition, the seniors would move out to live alone to wait for death.

When nurse Shu-Lan Chang returned to Lanyu to assist with in-home care, she faced the conflict between her traditional culture and practical nursing care. She then recorded her experience in a documentary. I invited Chang to speak at the Tzu Chi University and played the documentary video "Facing the Evil Spirit." The speech inspired me to take students to learn and understand the culture and nursing care system in Lanyu. We formed a "Transcultural Offshore Island Service Group" for a service trip to Lanyu. The program began in 2006 and is still running today.

We missed the trip for a couple years due to bad weather conditions. August 2012 is the fourth year of our service trip. We followed through with our assigned tasks and execution goals and held a meeting afterward. Since the Ministry of Education's publication of the "Subsidy of College Public Service Curriculum", our group systematically combined curriculum design, service plan, supervision, feedback and evaluation with eighteen other service opportunities. There are two service categories: children's camp and community health evaluation. The students made use of their learning from anthropology, fundamental nursing theory and community nursing care classes to evaluate the need

of service recipients. The children's camp curriculums include hygienic education, environmental education, etiquette, dental hygiene, and individual tutoring. The style is more relaxed and interactive. For community health care evaluation, the students interact with the community residents to collect the natural, humanistic, educational, and health data to build up a community health plan.

### **Off-shore Island Beauty and Challenges in Cultural Integration**

There is no difference between the service provided in Lanyu and Taiwan. However, a student is not familiar with the local culture or cannot accept local culture, he or she might not be able to mingle with the residents and the program would not be as effective. This poses a big challenge for the group.

When our group arrived at Lanyu, I invited Iraralay Elementary Director Kuan-Huei Chiu and Lanyu Home Care Association Shu-Lan Chang to give the students a lecture to understand the local children's education and Lanyu culture.

The service period is one week in the month of August. The results were presented quantitatively, such as the number of service recipients and their satisfaction of the service. This year, not only the quantitative results were provided, the life stories of the recipients were also collected. The period of data collection was from May 2011 to September 2011. The data was analyzed via students' meetings,

study report, self-examination report and meeting notes.

Besides hygienic education and promotion directly related to nursing education, the offshore island camp presents certain attraction to students. The motive of every student is different. Some wanted to learn communication skills while others wanted to learn about the cultural difference.

A foreign student from Malaysia said, "As a foreigner, we have never been to an off-shore island. We long for the opportunity." Another student revealed that his initial intention was sightseeing. He said, "I had never been to Lanyu so I wanted to spend time there. Since I had the opportunity to tour and record with video, I joined the camp." Many students plan their summer with internship, lab practice, part time job and time with family.

One student just wanted to experience living outside his home. "I just want to leave

home and do something I have never done. For example, to work with different people," he said. Another student thought he's well prepared but he expressed, "When I am on the plane seeing Taiwan getting smaller, and recalling all the difficulty and challenges from previous community service experiences, I couldn't stop crying." Whether students publicly or privately expressed their feelings, they all looked forward to the experience. With culture shock and camp projects, what would be the learning outcome ?

### **Understanding and Respect - Basic Health Care Attainments**

According to students' feedback, "Throughout the event, the things I touched and experienced, are things I will not learn from textbooks, such as the mutual understanding between members, the mobility and spontaneous reaction in facing changes, and the communication skills with people." Apparently, oral hygiene, intestinal virus epidemic prevention and health education are not difficult to the students. The learning seems more from other areas.

Culture, religion and the way of living are closely related to one another. "In Da-Wu tribe, to get sick means to be attached by an evil-spirit. Therefore, you need to live alone in a small house outside of the main house to prevent evil spirits from affecting other family members. In our viewpoints, patients need more attention and to be taken care of promptly. How can you leave the patient alone in such a small place? As a result, there are conflicts." The difficulties



**Before going to Lanyu to participate in care giving experiences, nursing students must study the social customs, and more importantly practice adapting to the local customs when they arrive. Nursing students and children from the community interact enthusiastically.**



students encountered are from feelings and perception differences. Students need to try to find a compromised view, when serving as a team.

The results and findings can be categorized into three parts: service providers' learning motivation, the difficulty and challenges of the service-learning, and the transformation of service-learning.

### **The Difficulty and Challenges of Service Learning**

In order to achieve the team's purpose and goal, there was a training course every two weeks during semester and an intensive one-week training before departure. Upon arrival, everyone must learn to adjust and adapt to the local environment in a short time. Each team

had to develop mutual understanding and team spirit. Conflicts and frustration are bound to happen especially when there is a mismatch between expectations and real situations. One student from the Department of Communication Studies, who was responsible for activity recording, recognized that holding a camera was his job. He needed to hold a camera on his hand all the time. After viewing Director Tai-Li Hu's documentary regarding Lanyu, he said, "I was so scared when I was watching the documentary. It seems that people in Lanyu are easily offended by cameras. I was thinking about what I could do. I thought I was doomed." It was hard to imagine the limited resources in Lanyu, when students who are all from Taiwan get so used to the convenient life in Taiwan. In Lanyu, the majority of the materials are shipped here.



Besides educating children, nursing students also conducted health evaluations in the community while experiencing unique local customs. Nurses are conducting education on gout.

Shipping is interrupted when weather is bad. One student exclaimed that “Lanyu’s information is really scarce; there is no Seven-Eleven!” Students seemed surprised and unable to accept when they heard that there is no 24-hour convenient store. On the other hand, for the islanders, it would also be hard for them to imagine how heavily people rely on material conveniences in Taiwan.

Culture, religion and a way of living are so closely related to one another. One student said, “In Yami tribe, getting sick means you are attached by an evil-spirit. Therefore, you need to live alone in a small house outside of the main house to prevent evil spirit to get to other family members. From our point of view, patients need to be taken care of. How can you leave the patient alone living in such a small place. As a result, there are conflicts.” The student’s conflict comes from the difference in his own understanding and the traditional values. He would need to find a balance point which he feels comfortable with. A student who seldom travels far and had never left Taiwan, felt very emotional at the time he left Taiwan.

In a week’s service, there were children hygiene education, environmental protection education, family visit, and community assessment. A feedback shows, “Throughout the event, the things I touched and learned, are things I will not learn from textbooks, such as the mutual understanding between members, the mobility and spontaneous reaction in facing accidents, and the communication

skills with people.” Through this off-island service experience, I am happy to discover that many students appreciate their home environments and acknowledge the importance in cherishing what they have.

## **Transformation from Care-Giving Experience**

After the firsthand experience, many students feel that they gained more than what they had contributed. They had begun to learn to appreciate and respect different cultures. Furthermore, they gained deeper insight into service-learning. One of the students said, “The purpose of care is to give what is needed. It should be collaborative rather than administrative.”

One student expressed that “In our pre-camp training, when I was watching the documentary, I felt that all old people in Lanyu are so pitiful. Therefore, I thought old people there need lots of help.” The student who had observed the circumstances with his own values had a change in point of view after the experience. “I feel leaving seniors to live on their own is not necessarily a good or bad thing. I discovered how often I subconsciously evaluate the stories in books, as well as their tribal traditions, with my preconceived notions. The belief that they were uncivilized would occupy my subconscious; nevertheless in the minds of the tribal people, it was a typical tradition.”

A few students shared their reflections on the trans-cultural care experience: “In order to understand a different culture, we must abandon our biases, rather



than seeing everything from our own perspective.” Another student recounted, “Our course previously covered their taboos on funeral processions: residents along the funeral procession put logs around their houses, leaving space in between for the deceased to pass through. One night we went out and saw it happen - the atmosphere was solemn. Respect for their culture through direct experience was something that cannot be taught in the classroom.” From the transcultural care experience, a student says, “The biggest lesson, I feel, is to genuinely respect other cultures. It’s important that we, who continually interact with those of different cultural backgrounds, see from their perspectives.” After hearing students’ reflections expressing their aspiration to “truly respect, and see from the other’s perspective”, the teachers could clearly see students’ growth and transformation. It was truly a rewarding experience.

### **Cultivate Thinking and Communication Skills**

Holistic nursing is the profession of helping people. We offer services to different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Through the experience of transcultural care, students are able to practice respect directly. In joining transcultural nursing expert Dr. Leninger’s ideas, nurses and other health care providers must respond accordingly to different people. Care providers must understand human cultural care beliefs, values and lifestyles in order



Tzu Chi college nursing faculty teacher Hsiu-Fang Lu uses summer vacation to take nursing students to Lanyu and to publish the results in a documentary.

to offer culturally congruent and beneficial nursing.

I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to the many friends in Lanyu who have supported us. Through their passion and accommodation, students of the program learned the true meaning of volunteer service. I would also like to thank Tzu Chi University for pursuing the Department of Education’s funding that enables students to visit tribal areas, learn, grow and immerse in many cultures. Such experiences are solid foundations for nursing and care giving careers.

## Learning Respect and Altruism

Holistic nursing is the profession of helping, the people. We offer services to have different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Through the experience of trans-cultural care, students are able to learn to practice respect in direct experiencedirectly. According to Anthropologist and trans-cultural nursing expert Dr. Madeline Leininger: If people are to exist and live in a healthy, harmonious, and meaningful world, nurses and other health professional caregivers should understand human's cultural beliefs, values, and lifestyles, in order to be able to give a culturally suitable and practical healthcare. In joining trans-cultural nursing expert Dr.

Leininger's ideas, nurses and other health care providers must respond accordingly to different people. Care providers must understand human cultural care beliefs, values and lifestyles in order to offer culturally congruent and beneficial nursing.

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