Intercultural educators exploring facilitation

A qualitative study on facilitating students' learning process during a short exchange

An ENM field-study

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Abstract

The development of intercultural learning during international exchanges requires mentoring and reflection, both essential in the learning process.

This small-scale qualitative study aimed to understand what facilitators in their own voice do to influence the students' reflective practice and intercultural learning process before, during and after the students join a short exchange.

The European Nursing Module (ENM) is a short exchange programme for nursing students. We interviewed four ENM facilitators from different countries individually online, and analysed data qualitatively. The results showed that the facilitator supported, guided and challenged students in their intercultural learning process; experience helped them to choose which approach would encourage students' deeper reflection. They structured learning processes using agreed ENM learning tools and elements they had previously experienced being effective such as preparation prior to exchange, peer learning and creating a safe environment. They challenged students' mind-set and helped them transfer learning from one setting to another. The learning process was life changing and continued after the exchange.

This study gave an insight into the nuanced ways in which facilitators encouraged and promoted students to reflect on their experiences and how this led to a deeper intercultural learning within a short exchange programme. The study could contribute to understand more profoundly the process of reflective facilitation of students' intercultural learning before, during and after an exchange.

Keywords: Reflection, Short exchange, Structuring learning, Skype interviews

Introduction

This small-scale study presents a qualitative exploration of how the facilitators, in their own voice, undertook reflection with students in an international exchange program and what influenced the
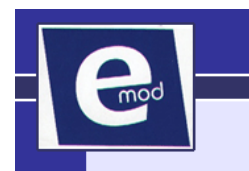
students' reflective cultural learning process. In a previous study we focussed on the students' perspective of situations and strategies for cultural learning (Bønløkke et al., 2018). This sparked an awareness that neither the literature or the network itself could explicit what actions of a facilitator promotes intercultural learning.

As health care and nursing today is a multi-cultured practice, students must be prepared for it (Napier et al., 2014; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; Sairanen et al., 2013; van den Bergh et al., 2020). Exchange programmes for nursing students seem to make students question their own values, become more culturally sensitive and develop respect for different perspectives (Gower et al., 2017; Kulbok et al., 2012; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; Rocha Pereira et al., 2018).

Allowing students from different countries to share experiences and reflect together enhances cultural learning (Cajander et al., 2012; Curtin et al., 2015; Rodgers, 2002; Sofo et al., 2010; Wheeler et al., 2016). Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning refers to Intercultural learning as the

> *'the acquisition of knowledge and skills that support the ability of learners to both understand culture and interact with people from cultures different from their own. It is developmental in the sense that learners advance through stages of progressively more sophisticated levels of understanding'.* (Lane, 2012)

The European Nursing Module offers this kind of exchanges with an emphasis on reflection. The reflective practices between the facilitator and the students are tacit for the network (Muir & Byrne, 2020).

A network of intercultural learning

This study forms part of the European Nursing Module (ENM) quality development process focussing upon the importance of reflection (ENM network, 2020), a process that builds upon sharing knowledge and practises among facilitators (Table I). The study will concentrate on the facilitator's perspective when facilitating intercultural learning and reflecting with students.

Table I Overview of the European Nursing Module Network (ENM)
ENM, founded in 1994, offers exchange programmes to raise students' awareness of and respect for individual cultures (ENM network, 2020). The network facilitates around 200 short exchanges (2 week) annually, exchanges are undertaken as part of a formal 4-week programme. During the exchange students engage in intercultural learning during clinical visits in hospitals, home care or other areas of nursing and meet other ENM students allocated to the same host institution. The agreed language for the ENM is English. The network members meet annually to sustain and develop the programme. Guidelines are recorded within the ENM handbook. Membership countries 2020: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, The Republic of North Macedonia, the

Netherlands, Norway, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Week 1 (Preparation), students study the Health Service of host countries, the nursing culture and the country's history and culture.

Week 2-3 (Exchange period) minimally 30 hours clinical practice, reflective sessions and use of a reflective diary.

Week 4 (Debriefing) reflections with the home facilitator, a presentation for other students, an assignment or other ways of final reflections.

The ENM Handbook describes the ENM exchange programme and emphasizes reflection as an essential learning tool. Preparation in week 1 is required in order to focus student expectations and to explore and increase the students' awareness of culture and cultural differences. Students are introduced to a reflective diary as a support for reflection. It describes a learning circle of four stages inspired by D. A. Kolb (Kolb, 1984). The first stage starts with selecting an event that made an impression. The second stage investigates what happened, when, why did it happen, what were your thoughts and what were your feelings? The third stage draws a general conclusion about the learning from this experience. In the fourth stage, ideas and conclusions are being put to the test and the new understanding is applied to a relevant situation. Reflective sessions between students and facilitator during the exchange weeks take place on campus. Critical events and other points of interest are discussed to enhance the students' cultural learning process. It is implicit that the cultural learning process in both home and host institutions is undertaken by an experienced facilitator. The ENM Handbook does not offer guidelines on facilitator's skills needed for the reflective cultural learning process, which prompted this research.

Intercultural learning and reflective practices

An interest and participation in intercultural exchange often starts a process of intercultural learning for the student (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Gower et al., 2017; Kulbok et al., 2012; Rocha Pereira et al., 2018; Smith-Miller et al., 2010). As research indicates, students benefit from pedagogical interventions and mentoring to develop their intercultural learning (Bennett, 2009; Campbell & Walta, 2015; Campinha-Bacote, 2007; Curtin et al., 2015; Hammer, 2012; Spenader & Retka, 2015; Vande Berg et al., 2009). Bennett (2009) states that guided reflection helps students to become more culturally self-aware which supports cultural learning (Bennett, 2009). Therefore making time for guided reflection and group discussion may offer unrecognised insight for participating students (Hammer, 2012; Loughran, 2002; Mikkonen, Elo, Tuomikoski, et al., 2016). Lou and Bosley (2012) show how much the impact of cultural learning improves through formalised facilitation focussed upon reflection (Lou & Bosley, 2012; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012).

Dewey describes the reflective process as a flow of successive reflective thoughts that build on the previous step in a consecutive order (Dewey, 1910 pp2-3).

Intercultural facilitator at work

Literature identifies many skills of the intercultural facilitator, such as cultural competence, open-mindedness, being systematic (Cornish & White, 2016), comfortable with their own identity and ethnicity, and having flexibility in facilitation (Liaw et al., 2016). Other key skills include being respectful, and being able to distinguish between rationalisation and justification (Loughran, 2002). The facilitator should also be able to guide the reflection process, in particular regarding differences and commonalities (Hammer, 2012). Language skills are key to this (Mikkonen, Elo, Tuomikoski, et al., 2016). In addition the intercultural facilitator must set up activities for the students' learning process (Cornish & White, 2016; Hammer, 2012; Loughran, 2002; Mikkonen, Elo, Tuomikoski, et al., 2016). The 'Toolkit for Intercultural Mentor Training' and 'Self-study Course for Trainers of Intercultural Mediators; Trainer profile and learning content' describe a range of social, communicational, self-reflective, interpersonal and educational skills (European Commision, n.d.; TIME project partnership, 2016). These are all recommendations, how the practice reveals itself is what this research tries to illuminate.

The study

This small-scale qualitative study aimed to understand what facilitators in their own voice do to influence the students' reflective practice and intercultural learning process before, during and after the students join in a short exchange.

Research design

To enhance our understanding of the character and quality of a phenomenon, qualitative methodology is most suitable (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Malterud, 2012, 2017). To study a phenomenon qualitatively – i.e. the learning process in a short exchange and its facilitation – the subjective experiences and understandings of participants' lifeworld, is in focus. The researcher listens to, interprets and organises the experiences before summarising for further understanding (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Malterud, 2012; Malterud K, 2001).

Data collection

This research is based on data collected from four individual semi-structured interviews with intercultural educators. Skype was utilised for the semi-structured interviews as a way of reducing the geographical

distance between participant and researchers (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Krouwel et al., 2019). Based on the research question an interview guide was constructed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014) with three key questions: 1) What have you done together with your students relating to reflection – pre, during and post ENM exchange? 2) What worked, what was the problem? 3) What do you think the students gained from this related to cultural learning process? Each interview was restricted to the participant and both researchers. During one interview we experienced sound problems. The interview was stopped and on second attempt was remedied.

The interviews took place in early 2018, they were video and sound recorded and notes were taken by both interviewers who supported each other during the interview ensuring exploration of all topics. The interviews lasted a little over an hour each, and were transcribed verbatim.

Participant sample

Researchers looked for ENM members with more than 2 years of experience with the network and a good grasp of English to participate in an interview. Four (out of 23) persons volunteered to participate and came from Spain, Romania, UK and Denmark, they encompassed the geographical diversity of the ENM. The educators were all lecturers in nursing programmes with a background in nursing and/or an academic background relevant to nursing and each having between four and ten years of experience in ENM students' exchanges. The researchers decided that the four participants with their combined experience and expertise were able to give substantial and diverse understanding to the research question.

Data analysis

Data was analysed inductively by the authors using the four steps of Systematic Text Condensation (STC) described by Kirsti Malterud and based on A. Giorgie's method for phenomenological analysis (Malterud, 2012, 2017). The first step *"Total impressions – from chaos to themes".* To get an overview of the data, we read all notes and transcripts separately and discussed our first impressions – *"a bird's eye view"* (Malterud, 2012 p. 797). In step two "*Identifying and sorting meaningful units – from themes to codes"* we coded the data separately into meaningful units and together discussed the coding using the transcriptions, and sometimes the recordings to ensure an accurate interpretation and validity. Step three "*Condensation – from code to meaning* together we organised meaningful units into the code groups and sub-groups – a decontextualization process. The final step "*Synthesizing – from condensation to descriptions and concepts"* is a recontextualization process in which the new text is validated against the transcripts. Researchers tried to overcome possible prejudice in the interpretation, by analysing data separately. The following

discussions focused on the importance of keeping true to the data, resulting in a trustworthy interpretation (Graneheim et al., 2017; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Malterud, 2017).

Ethics

All participants consented orally to participate. Further information on the project was sent by e-mail to each participant, including reassurance that at any time during the project they could withdraw their consent (World Medical Association, 2013). Data was anonymized following General Data Protection Regulation. All recordings will be deleted once results are published. The Committee Law Section 14, Part 2 The National Committee on Health Research Ethics, Denmark (NVK, 2018) states that a study of this character does not have to be approved by the committee as long as adhered to the regulations of informed consent (World Medical Association, 2013).

Findings

From the inductive analysis three key themes emerged. 'Facilitation' described what the facilitators did when facilitating students' reflections and learning process. 'Structuring the learning process' described a way of arranging the learning. 'The learning process' described what happened during the learning process and where it led to (Table II). In this section the participants are named facilitators. The categories and subcategories are the headlines in this section.

Table II Themes and sub-categories		
Facilitation	**Structuring the learning process**	**The learning process**
The approach	Learning tools	To prompt learning
To support	Meeting arrangements	Stages of learning
To guide	Substantial content	Outcome
To challenge		
To be accomplished		

Facilitation

In Facilitation five sub-categories were named (1) The approach, (2) To support, (3) To guide, (4) To challenge and (5) To be accomplished. This section describes what these sub-categories mean and thus describes the phenomenon of reflective facilitation as mentioned by the facilitators.

The approach

Openness as an approach mean having an eye for what the students carry, to be flexible, to meet the students' individual needs and follow their learning process and trust the process. It seemed valuable not to have a set plan but to follow the students' lead and still be directive. To be open was to be prepared for

the unexpected and being able to cope with new situations as every meeting and every group of students was different.

> *'I don't have a set sort of plan – this is what is going to happen. It is harder for me, I never know what they are going to say, but I think it works better; it is more tailored to their needs.'*
>
> *'I think it is just that flexibility by letting students lead in a way but still keeping a tie.'*

The facilitators were sensitive to the students' needs. To help them on the road to learn, there was an expressed requirement to know more about the student, aside from what was currently written in the application, such as knowing their expectations and mind-set. The facilitators stated that letting the students set the agenda for the reflective sessions offered the students a freedom that encouraged motivation for learning. The reflective diary with its cultural focus helped the students to choose situations to discuss.

> *'I tend to ask them to talk about something that interested them in the practice 'tell me what you have been doing' and then the reflection leads on from that.'*

To support

The facilitators supported by helping the students to feel safe in the learning environment. According to the facilitators, being informal in their attitude, they engaged in building trust by diminishing the student-teacher barrier they often experienced with exchange students.

> *'Some of them won't talk so it is about bringing them out, getting them to feel comfortable to talk.'*

In order to make the students feel comfortable and encouraged, it seemed important to the facilitators to build trust within the group of students and between student and facilitator and giving time for this process. It meant to meet them where they were and from there, help them to open up.

> *'Afterwards always ask: how does it feel for you, what is new for you, what has changed for you up till now. Talk in a personal level.'*

The students were supported in making sense of their experiences in a professional context

> *'Sometimes being a stranger for them makes them totally forget to transfer to their daily nursing life - student life. That is actually quite an important part of it.'*

To guide

To guide meant that the facilitator led the student's reflection forward without pushing and by holding back their own views and opinions.

> *'Some students are better at moving the blinkers than others; some of them just need a bit more time and a bit more sort of putting in the right direction.'*
>
> *'My role is to facilitate the discussion between students, as it is important for them to find out themselves. To not judge anything.'*
>
> *'I chip away by getting them to question and getting the other students involved as well;*
> *'What do you think, is it this way in your country?'*

The facilitators helped the students to make sense of what they had experienced by discussing the cultural context and facilitate these discussions without judging. They tried to unpick what the students talked about and gave them time to understand what they had seen and heard. They also tried to bring the students out of their comfort zone in order to make them aware of and accept differences.

To challenge

The facilitators stated, they challenged the students professionally and personally. They questioned opinions, attitudes, perceptions and superficial reflections.

> *'If they are uncomfortable 'why does this makes you uncomfortable'? If they say it is bad practice, I say 'is it really bad practice or is it just a different practice that you see and why is it different. So, the questions – yes'.*

By doing this, facilitators aimed for in-depth reflections on the students' experiences and their interpretation of them. The facilitators stated that they encouraged discussion between the students. Ethical issues appeared to be difficult for the students to comprehend without probing questions. By asking questions, they confronted set behaviours and opinions, thereby opened up different interpretations and a deeper understanding both professionally and culturally.

> *'Is it an ethical issue or is it something you are not comfortable with because you are not used to it.'*

When students showed signs of ethnocentrism, the facilitators challenged by questioning the personal and professional cultural attitude. In the post-exchange reflection, the challenge was to make the students focus on the learning outcome and not only on the excitement of the exchange.

To be accomplished

This sub-category described the more didactic aspects of facilitation. The facilitators indicated a professionalism based on confidence developed by experience.

> *'It has an impact and because I have been doing it a long time now, I have done 6 years, and I have grown in confidence of what it is all about and it is easier to adapt and it also allows me to lead it in a less formal way. I am confident in myself in what I am doing. If someone was new to this, they might find it harder to do it. Their reflection might be less interactive and might rely more on notes and doing it in just one way – until you become more confident as a teacher, and what you are trying to get the students to get out of it.'*

The facilitators appeared to facilitate through structuring the students' learning process using their knowledge of the aims and outcomes of the module. They also reported that it was important to be true to one's own ways, to one's culture and to be authentic personally and professionally. It was to be on top of the situation and be ready to try new ways according to the students' needs – for example to be a role model for the students. It was also the ability to use prior knowledge and understanding of what prompted intercultural learning such as students' interaction, peer learning and to prepare the students for the role of observer in an intercultural context.

Structuring the learning process

Structuring the learning process had three sub-categories (1) Learning tools, (2) Meeting arrangements and (3) Substantial content. The content of this theme focused upon the facilitators' description of successful ways to structure the cultural learning process.

Learning tools

The question 'Why' was important to stimulate the students to reflect; 'Why did that shock you?', 'Why did that interest you?', 'Why did you feel that way?' Questioning started reflection, the compulsory diary and group sessions assisted in this -

> *'... encourage students to write down how they feel, what they do with details in the reflective diary'.*
> *'Maybe explain to them better about the importance of reflective questions. Encourage them to reflect themselves – use more questions and make them more aware of the reflection'*

Use of reflective questions appeared to be valuable to the facilitator as well as the students. Discussing the aims and objectives of the exchange and of the home curriculum focused the students' learning process and guided them to choose what they needed to reflect more deeply.

Meeting arrangements

According to the facilitators, they met with the exchange students more than once every week. These were face-to face meetings with groups of students, not too large but also not too small groups, approximately 6-10 students, to allow involvement, sharing and security in the group. Facilitators also arranged meetings prior to and following the exchange. Timing for this final meeting was difficult. Debriefing was ideal soon after the exchange in order to follow up on the overall exchange as stated in the Handbook, however it might be too early for deeper refection.

> *'Reflection in the week they come back does tend to be a kind of moaning or enjoyment session; 'I enjoyed this, I didn't like that, it should have been like this', because it is too soon. I think it would be ideal to have another session'*

A follow-up meeting or an assignment focusing upon the learning process from a personal, professional and social point of view was expressed as very valuable for the students' reflections.

Substantial content

The topics addressed changed according to the learning process of the exchange. Prior to the exchange, topics such as expectations, practical matters, the concept of reflection and the role of an observer were introduced. During the exchange the students' interests, personal aims, experiences, differences and similarities would define the discussions and reflection.

> *'I think they go from what are the differences to there are actually a lot of similarities, and that is very, very important'.*
>
> *'A lot of students are looking for the differences and they have been asked to look for the differences. And when you focus on that the risk is about them and us instead of what we do as an intercultural [Unfinished sentence] and I think that is very meaningful'*

Following the exchange, meetings focused upon re-entering as well as the overall exchange, and aimed at the ability to reflect on cultural learning and to make transfer into the home curriculum.

Learning process

The learning process had three sub-categories (1) To prompt learning, (2) Stages of learning and (3) Outcome. Within this theme, the facilitators described what supported the learning process, recognising what comprised each stage of learning and the outcome of the learning process.

To prompt learning

The facilitators stated that preparation enhances the learning process. To acquire background knowledge about the country, the healthcare system and how nursing was organised prior to the exchange, assisted students to reflect on their experience and to understand what they saw; *'they have something to pin it on'*. Talking about possible differences, being aware of feelings of unease, and things being different helped to prepare students for the new experience *'without telling them they might have a culture shock'*.

> *'Actually, I am trying to 'scare them' a little. To say it is OK if you feel not at ease and expect that. We also talk about what do you have in your backpack to deal with that, what kind of skills you already have that you can use, when it is difficult for you – can you use this in this situation as well? And that is very useful for being a nurse as well.'*

To open their mind to enable them to compare differences, students prepared a presentation about their own country, including local customs, culture and their nursing education. '*If you are the one telling the other one, you have to know about it before you can tell about it.'* Working together in smaller groups with those who were going abroad or with peers who had already undertaken exchanges enhanced the preparation and allowed them to feel safe with others. Discussion regarding observation as a learning method, prepared students for the role of the observer. Active reference to the aims and objectives in the Handbook prompted their mind to what was expected of them and helped them to connect the exchange learning outcomes and curriculum goals.

The mindset of being open or closed and the respect for differences were discussed in order to encourage reflection and understanding of new information. By discussing their experiences and by seeing and exploring differences and similarities, they began to develop cultural understanding, leading to more professional cultural awareness. Many students experienced what they describe as disturbing ethical and social issues, which sparked the reflection and confronted set values.

Prior to the exchange former exchange students can be involved in the preparation of outgoing students.

> *'When former ENM students share what they encountered and talk about who to talk to, it is important for the new students and they can absorb this information better as it comes from the same 'level' [student-student].'*

During the exchange, intercultural groups developed. In between formal sessions, student-student conversations went on where they shared their experiences and asked each other questions. The prepared presentation initiated valuable discussions in which they experience listening and being received by others, and they develop a feeling of being safe together. The facilitators valued the sharing of peers; in this way they share the nursing sphere and their experiences. This way of learning allows facilitators to compare, to have deeper reflection and to discuss sensitive issues.

Stages of learning

The facilitators described the learning process as ongoing. At the beginning of the exchange, students tended to keep their distance; they were quite self-conscious and cautious. Within a week, the students explored what is happening to them and they got to know themselves better. The facilitators observed that the students also became aware of the fact that they begin to use previously acquired skills in a new situation. They began to explore differences and to put observations in a social perspective. By letting go of pre- formed or misconceptions, the facilitators noticed that the students began to gain a new understanding and to see new possibilities. The learning continued after their return:

> *'But some of the learning does not happen by the time they finish the exchange. Later they come back to you and say, 'I did learn so much from that'. I think they sometimes have to go away and think about it, just dwell on it when they come home and suddenly things become more meaningful. ... When they first come back, it is just about the experience, the things that shock them, all the things that have excited them and they will dwell on that. Then they need time to settle down and get back into the routine and then they start to think more deeply about it – what it means.'*

The facilitators described that on a personal level the students were cautious, they overcame their initial fear to speak when they realised that their peers had the same language fears. Their confidence grew and they began to leave their comfort zone. Once having had a good experience in a safe environment where people spoke a familiar language (English or Nordic) they said, *'if I should go another time or recommend another student I would say go to another country as well'.* The students seemed to then find the freedom to ask questions and the willingness to share their experiences and perceptions. In the end, they became more expressive about what they learned and thereby more culturally conscious.

Outcome

According to the facilitators, students often tell them that undertaking the exchange had changed their life.

> *'And I know this is true, because students have come back to me when they have qualified and gone into practice, they say this has changed my life'.*

Among the transferrable skills and attitudes students acquired, they mentioned a greater confidence to meet new situations, to be able to contain differences, and to use critical thinking more frequently. A facilitator commented: *'They begin to work with more personal effort to do extra, like making things better, not because they have to from the authorities.'* They had experienced the meaning of nonverbal communication;

> *'by theory they know it but that it is THAT, much becomes very visible for them when they go on exchange. And have the feeling that they can connect with people that they didn't know they could connect with.'*

Discussion

This small-scale qualitative study aimed to understand what facilitators in their own voice did to influence the students' reflective practice and intercultural learning process before, during and after the students join a short exchange. They describe how they saw the phenomenon of facilitation presenting itself in their life world. Our facilitators, as experienced facilitators, showed a deep understanding of the students' cultural learning process and use of reflection. They also described their observations of how the learning process developed during and after the exchange, their role therein and what they valued. The discussion of the findings focuses on facilitation and the students' learning process.

Facilitation

A systematic review confirmed that working in groups, sharing and making time for reflection was producing positive learning experience for the student (Mikkonen, Elo, Kuivila, et al., 2016). The facilitators highly valued the group sharing and the peer learning. In the process of helping the students reflect, they facilitate in different ways sensitive to the students' needs. 'To support' can be defined as when you encourage someone in order to help them succeed (Cambridge University Press, 2020). Facilitators supported the students, e.g. when they were insecure in the new situation, they put them at ease.
'To guide' is helping someone to form an opinion (Cambridge University Press, 2020). The facilitators used guiding, when they observed the students' need to think in wider perspectives but were not ready to be challenged. They took them on a journey to different ways of understanding.
'To challenge' is to question if something is true, legal or outmoded (Cambridge University Press, 2020). They challenged the students' set perceptions, and when a student for example showed signs of ethnocentrism, the facilitators questioned the underlying assumptions and values. These variations in facilitating the students' cultural learning process are not described in the literature on intercultural learning, but these nuanced approaches seemed efficacious for these facilitators when encouraging reflection on different aspects of cultural learning.
Harvey (2016) describes reflection as contributing to skills such as critical reflective thinking, metacognition and professional competence, which are valuable skills in any professional practice (Harvey et al., 2016). According to Dewey (1910) and others reflection is a deliberate and active process that helps the student

move from superficial learning to a deeper learning process where new knowledge is created (Dewey, 1910; Lou & Bosley, 2012; Young, 2018). Dewey describes the reflective process as a flow of successive reflective thoughts that build on the previous step in a consecutive order (Dewey, 1910 pp. 2-3). It is a process of framing and reframing (Schön, 1983). This was highlighted within the findings in various ways. The facilitators tried to 'move the students' blinkers' and challenged what the students found uncomfortable. In focusing on the students' emotions and reactions, they saw the student as someone who was learning, they did not only focus on knowledge. Some of the facilitators' statements emphasized the importance of encouraging the students to reflect deeply and find different perspectives. Deep reflection draws on many perspectives and enhances understanding (Harvey et al., 2016; Loughran, 2002). This learning can become transformative when taken for granted assumptions are challenged, reflected upon and seen in new ways (Harvey et al., 2016; Loughran, 2002; Mezirow, 1997). It is a process where the student's previous knowledge and beliefs are seen in the light of the new experience – a process of reframing. Lou (2012) states that this process is reached through guided discussions, without it *'students will tend to skim the surface'* (Lou & Bosley, 2012 p. 352). The facilitators commented on the students' transformation and the importance of following this up after the exchange. Literature on reflective processes suggests that the use of reflective tools scaffolds reflective processes (Harvey et al., 2016).

Learning process

Each facilitator had their own way of organising the learning process and indicated a variety in how they prompt learning. For example, they asked the students if they used a specific reflective model and encouraged the use of the reflective diary. How this was utilised, apart from setting a subject for discussion, was unclear in the data. The facilitators highly valued the students being prepared before undertaking the exchange, which could be the very first step in the learning process. Cornish (2016) stated that open-mindedness and a willingness to explore topics on culture together with the student was important for the student's learning process (Cornish & White, 2016), which also was present in the data material. Other studies also have highlighted this point (Campbell & Walta, 2015; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Lou & Bosley, 2012), but as commented by the facilitators, not all students were well prepared for the exchange. This suggests that preparation might be more clearly structured within the ENM-module to ensure the students' deeper cultural learning.

The facilitators stated that learning was an ongoing process. During their encounters in the practice with local nurses or students, exchange students began to explore differences and to put observations in a cultural and social perspective. Experiencing cultural differences can challenge students' preconceptions, and it often needs challenging questions within the reflective process to enable students to gain new

understanding and new insight (Hammer, 2012). Lou and Bosley (2012) elaborate that in all learning processes there is a fundamental mechanism that sheds light on why it is sometimes difficult to leave one's own position and take a different one (Lou & Bosley, 2012). This concerns a person's relationship with the environment whether physical, social or cultural, which shapes the framework of values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour in such a way that it becomes part of a person's identity. People are often unaware of their own formative cultural framework which can lead to ethnocentricity (Bennett, 2009, 2021). This was why the facilitators challenged the personal and professional cultural attitude of the students by questioning the underlying assumptions as students appeared to follow their own often semiconscious logic. Lou and Bosley (2012) suggested that *'the task of intercultural learning within a cultural immersion context is a developmental one'* (Lou & Bosley, 2012 p. 337)*.* This appears to underpin the importance of using reflection in the dialectic process between the individual and their surroundings and to experience the tension between one's own reality and the reality around (Lou & Bosley, 2012). What may begin as an 'us and them' experience can become a process of deeper learning, where one can begin to rebuild one's own frame of perceiving and become more open to new perceptions. This learning process from being in denial to integration is what the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is addressing (Bennett, 2009). The DMIS offers an encompassing framework to progressive and guided learning of becoming aware of one's perceptions and assumptions and actively pursuing different perspectives. It requires rethinking, relearning and rebuilding one's fundamental attitude (Bennett, 2009). Through this process, a person is acquiring lifelong reflective skills that will help to unlock many future professional experiences. Ceo-DiFrancesco (2020) calls cultural competence *'a lifelong process of continual reflection and cultural awareness'* (Ceo-DiFrancesco et al., 2020). Our study described, how the learning process that started prior to and during the exchange seemed to continue later into the professional clinical arena. Some past exchange students said; 'it has changed my life'. It would be interesting to track these students' learning process and find out in what way the experience has changed their lives. This however is for another study. As reflection is an ongoing process building upon previous understanding (Dewey, 1910), we found it interesting that at the end of the interviews all facilitators thanked us for giving them the opportunity to reflect on their practice and become more aware of different perspectives of their work with students' intercultural learning process. Putting one's practice into words seemed to make a difference, it offered insight and understanding that could lead to further actions in the developmental processes of the ENM network and intercultural learning elsewhere.

Conclusion

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The facilitators used three aspects of facilitation; to support, to guide and to challenge students in their intercultural learning process during a short exchange programme. Experience helped the facilitators to choose which aspect to use in order to encourage the students to deepen their reflection. Facilitators structured the learning process using learning tools from the ENM Handbook and from their professional facilitation experience such as preparation prior to exchange, peer learning and creation of a safe environment. Facilitators challenged the students' mind-set whilst maintaining sensitivity to the students' individual needs and stages of learning. They assisted students to transfer cultural learning from the exchange into their home curriculum. According to former exchange students the intercultural learning process continued long after the exchange and was life changing.

Hopefully this small-scale study will contribute to understand reflective facilitation of students' intercultural learning process before, during and after and exchange.

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