

Utilizing Teddy Bear Clinics to Facilitate Service-Learning in Undergraduate BSN Students

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Introduction

Research has shown that children learn best through age appropriate fun activities and that service-learning aids academic students by increasing knowledge and skills, while meeting the needs of the community. Teddy Bear Clinics are simulated health care environments where service learning, a course-based teaching and learning approach, integrates community service with instruction and reflection to enrich learning experiences and strengthen communities. These clinics are designed to alleviate fears and anxieties that children feel related to medical professionals, medical treatments, and hospitalizations through promotion of knowledge and active participation. Children actively participate in the clinic by using teddy bears, or other plush animals, brought from home. Teddy Bear Clinics educate young children, while allowing nursing students to practice skills in a real-life environment.

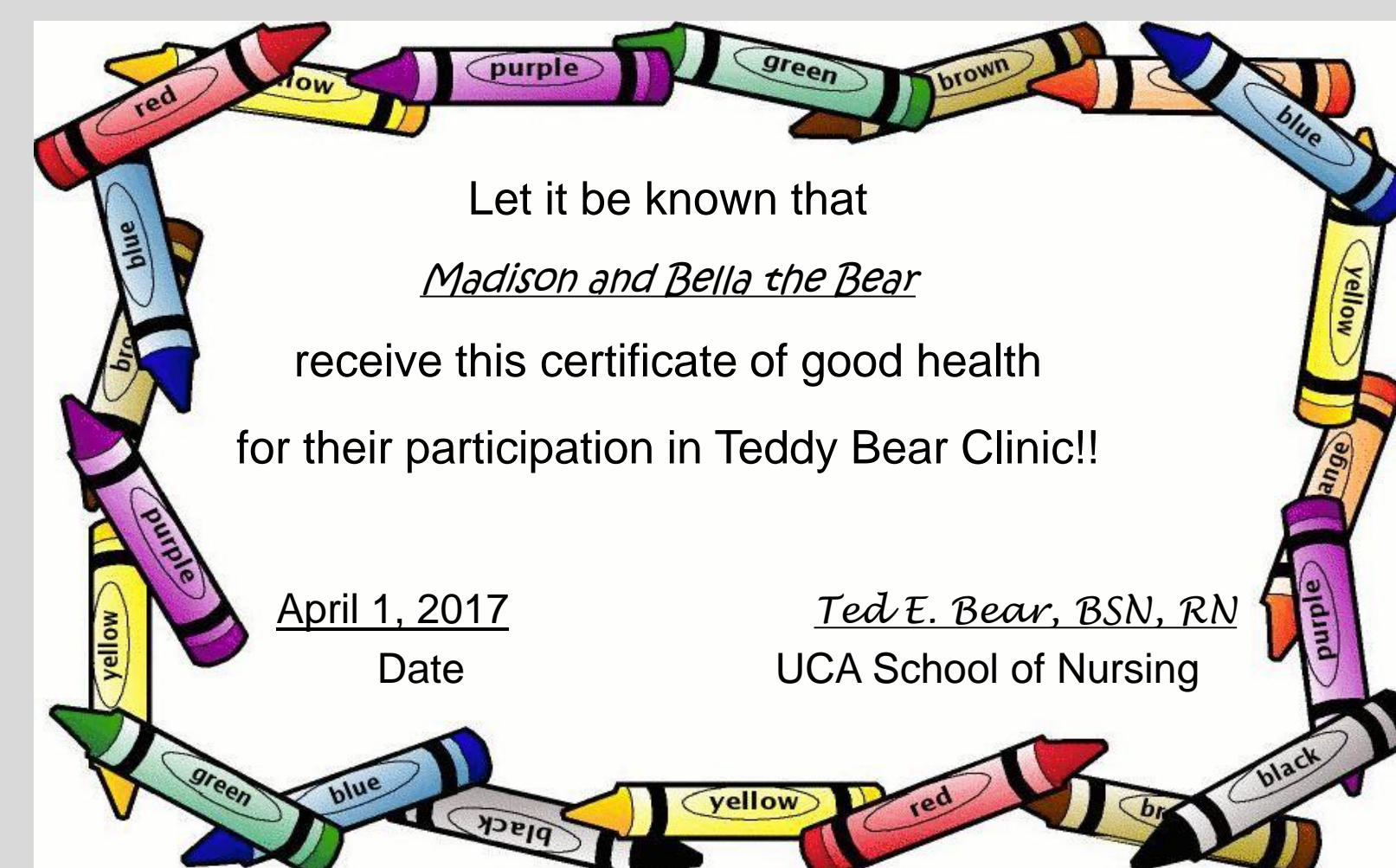
Methodology/Implementation

Nursing students worked with school nurses from area schools to identify health related topics of interest.

Nursing students worked in teams to plan, develop, and implement the clinics. Children entered the simulated health care setting and reported their teddy bear's illness to the student nurse who then assessed, planned, and treated the 'patient'.

Children proceeded to acute care and health promotion stations, such as triage, immunizations, x-ray, surgery, pharmacy, handwashing, dental hygiene, nutrition, bicycle safety, and fire safety. Teddy bears received treatment and health promotion information at each station.

After visiting all stations, each child received a goody bag, along with a certificate of good health for their teddy bears



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"Medical play helps the child to feel safe to express his/her fears and fantasies associated with the hospital events and thereby gives the health personnel an opportunity to address these concerns and offer further age-appropriate explanations."¹

Research has shown that "Interventions designed to help children to cope with their fears are not only likely to decrease their stress during hospitalization, but are also likely to influence how their future experiences are appraised and managed."²



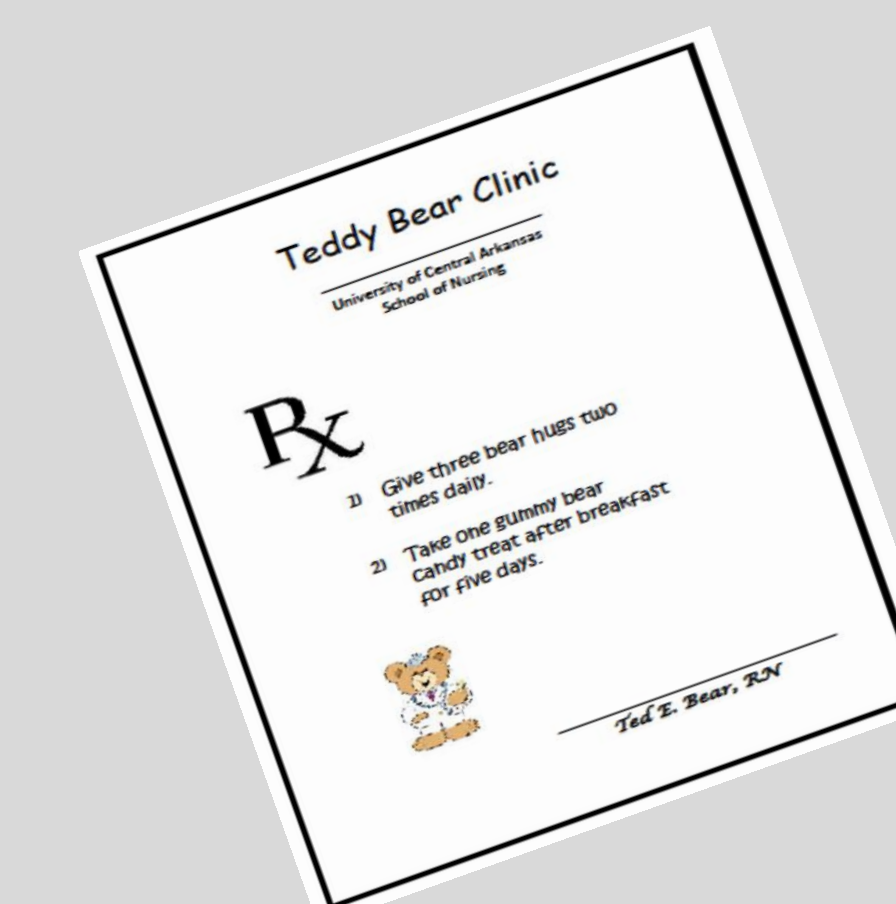
Evaluation/Results

This service-learning project allowed nursing students to address community needs and interact with children outside of an acute care setting. Nursing students were able to impart knowledge aimed at decreasing anxiety related to health care experiences while honing their own organizational, communication, critical thinking, time management, and collaboration skills. Pre-test and post-test data showed an increase in student learning and a decrease in anxiety. Anecdotally, feedback received from teachers, staff, and parents was very positive.

Conclusions

Nursing programs can use the service-learning model to successfully incorporate projects into the nursing curriculum that integrate important health promotion concepts across populations. The service-learning model can be used to promote intentional, positive, community-based collaborative learning opportunities outside of the traditional classroom environment, while building clinical and interpersonal skills of nursing students.

Including community-based clinical experiences along with hospital-based experiences allows nursing students to respond to the changing needs of individual communities while enhancing their own knowledge, skills, and employment opportunities.³



References

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