Meaningful Lifelong Learning in Nursing Education: Barriers, Facilitators, and Outcomes

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Agenda

• Context for nursing bridging education in Ontario, Canada
• Overview of collaborative research conducted by 3 universities and 3 college partners, representing 50% of the nursing bridging programs in Ontario
• Student Perceptions:
  – Barriers
  – Facilitators
• Predictors of academic success
• Theorizing about transition
Background

• Education of nurses from one level to another is a global phenomenon

• However, challenges persist to career mobility and lifelong learning for nurses

• While nursing bridging educational models are emerging, virtually no evaluative data exists

• As a result, rigorous evaluation of this type of educational offering
Our Context

- In our jurisdiction (Ontario, Canada), three types of nurses exist:
  - Registered Nurses - RN
  - Registered Practical Nurses - RPN
  - Nurse Practitioners - RN(EC)

- With the move to a BScN entry to practice in 2005, the educational gap between RPNs and RNs was formalized as the difference between a diploma (completed through a college program) or a degree (completed at a university, often offered in collaboration with a college).

- Since 2006, RPN-to-BScN educational programs have been offered in Ontario, currently by 6 universities and 10 college partners.

- While there is tremendous interest from RPNs and employers to be able to access opportunities for career mobility through ongoing education of RPNs, the concern about lack of evaluation of newly developed bridging programs persists.
Collaborative Research Opportunity

• Funded through a grant from the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT)

• Research partners represent 50% of the nursing bridging programs in Ontario:
  – University of Ontario Institute of Technology
  – Durham College
  – Georgian College
  – Nipissing University
  – George Brown College
  – Trent University
Research Design

• Using a mixed-method design, the research is exploring the following elements across a range of nursing bridging educational models:
  – Student perceptions of barriers, facilitators, and outcomes of nursing bridging education
  – Faculty perceptions of the quality of nursing bridging education, including barriers and facilitators to teaching within bridging programs
  – Graduate perceptions of barriers, facilitators, and outcomes of nursing bridging education, including perceptions of changes to self as a person and as a nurse through the educational experience
  – Employer/clinical agency partner perceptions of nursing bridging education
Student Demographics

• 172 student responses
• 90% female
• Avg. age at application = 32 (range 18-64)
• Avg. “years out” between PN diploma and bridging program is 2-3 years (range 0-30)
• 60% have dependent care responsibilities
• 62% work full time while studying either FT or PT
• Students admitted who have graduated from all 23 PN programs in Ontario as well as from other provinces and other countries
Student Perception of Barriers

- Time (class schedules, commuting)
- Competing personal life, school, and work demands
- Cost (educational expenses and lost wages)
- Employer inflexibility
- School/program inflexibility
- Clinical requirements
- Limited transfer credit
- Changing job market leading to job insecurity
Student Perceptions of Facilitators

- Effective work-life balance
- When faculty are flexible and accommodating
- Supportive family
- Life skills and inner resources (resourcefulness, determination)
- Computer/digital literacy skills
- Nursing knowledge and skills
- Academic resources
- Realization of change to self and one’s practice
- Highly experienced clinical instructors
Preliminary Patterns of Academic Success

Is there a relationship between:
- entrance GPA and bridge term GPA?
  [yes, weak +]
- “years out” and bridge term GPA?
  [yes, weak -]
- amount of additional transfer credit?
  [yes, +]
- entrance GPA & GPA at graduation?
  [yes, + for those who complete the program]
- admission GPA and program completion?
  [no]
What Did We Learn About Transition?

**Transition into the program:**

- Is not easy, anticipated, or generally welcomed
- Involves an intersection between expectations of what they will encounter and the reality of university nursing education
- Is as much about adjusting to changing work-life balance needs as it is about realizing academic expectations
What Did We Learn About Transition?

Transition through the program:

• Follows a pattern over time
  – Initial reactivity and resistance
  – Growing responsiveness, at times grudgingly
  – Moving to self-directedness, proactivity, & transformation

• Early in the program, personal gains are off-set by challenges experienced

• Practicum and work experiences provide a mirror for student insight into how they are changing

• Involves changes to both ‘self as a person’ and ‘self as a nurse’
What Did We Learn About Transition?

Transition *out of the program and into practice*:

- Involves dual transition from
  - student to RN
  - RPN to RN
- Includes a process of internalization of professional responsibility and accountability
- **External transition** into RN practice leads to an internal process of personal and professional transformation through the experience of RN role enactment
A Conceptual Model of Transition and Transformation in Nursing Bridging Education

Transition into, through, and beyond the RPN-to-BScN program is characterized by a process of progression from being:

reactive/resistant → responsive → proactive/transformative

External transition into RN practice leads to an internal process of personal and professional transformation, mediated by the experience of RN role enactment.
Discussion

• Given the intense and growing interest in nursing bridging education, it is critical that this type of educational offering be evaluated rigorously and from the perspective of the many stakeholders involved.

• Collaborating around research across the jurisdiction provides opportunities for all programs to benefit from insights into this new type of education offering.

• Early results indicate that RPN-to-BScN programs are a successful means by which to support learners to bridge from a Registered Practical Nursing diploma to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree.

• Attention to the unique issues of transition and transformation are critical to supporting students through this complex personal and professional change.
References


