

‘Placements with women, not institutions’

**Learning and the follow-through experience in three
year Bachelor of Midwifery programs in Australia.**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at the University of Technology, Sydney

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

Joanne Gray

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Abstract

Background

This research explored the follow-through experience in three year, pre-registration Bachelor of Midwifery programs in Australia. The follow-through experience involves midwifery students following women on their journey through pregnancy, labour and birth and into the early parenting period. The concept was introduced to midwifery education in Australia in 2001 when it was embedded in the foundational Australian College of Midwives' National Education Standards for Bachelor of Midwifery programs. The inclusion of the follow-through experience in Bachelor of Midwifery education programs was a deliberate strategy to ensure midwifery students would experience midwifery continuity of care.

Aims

The aims of this research were to:

- explore the follow-through experience in order to better understand its impact on students, midwifery education providers and midwives, and,
- to identify the learning that is associated with this experience.

Setting

This research was conducted in Australia. Students from all three-year pre-registration Bachelor of Midwifery programs were invited to participate.

Design

A qualitative study was undertaken. In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders who had been involved in the development and implementation of the follow-through experience. Data were collected from former and current Bachelor of Midwifery students through an online survey and telephone interviews. A thematic analysis was undertaken and situated learning and constructivist theories were used to identify whether learning occurred in the context of the follow-through experience.

Results

The findings provided a unique insight into the follow-through experience from the perception of students and stakeholders. This research established that students do learn from their engagement in this experience. This learning was characterised by the primacy of the relationship with the women. Students also identified the challenges they faced in undertaking these experiences, including problems with recruitment and time commitment. Difficulties were identified around requirements of the follow-through experience, the lack of support at times for students, and the lack of congruence with the existing Australian maternity system. These difficulties were identified as having a significant impact on the students' ability to engage in, and to maximise their learning from, this experience. A conceptual model was developed to provide a synthesis of the results of this research and a framework for effective implementation and management of the follow-through experience.

Implications

This research has implications for midwifery education, particularly in Australia but also internationally. This experience does indeed provide unique learning opportunities for students. It is however essential that the student is given adequate support to aid their learning and to ensure they gain the most from these experiences.

Conclusions

The follow-through experience is an innovative education strategy and this research identified that learning occurred within this experience. This learning was identified as being situated in the context of students being placed with women. This research clearly identifies the value of the follow-through experience as an important component of student learning.

Presentations

- Gray, J. (2005). *The follow-through experience: Balancing on the waves of change*. Paper presented at the NSW Midwives Association Annual State Conference: 'Midwifery by the sea', Bondi, Australia.
- Gray, J., Homer, C., & Leap, N. (2007). *How bold is this! – The follow-through experience in midwifery education*. Paper presented at the 15th Australian College of Midwives Biennial Conference: 'Big, bold & beautiful', Canberra, Australia.
- Gray, J., Homer, C., & Leap, N. (2008). *Student learning and the follow-through experience in Australian Bachelor of Midwifery programs*. Paper presented at the 28th International Confederation of Midwives Triennial Conference: 'Midwifery: A Worldwide Commitment to Women and the Newborn', Glasgow, Scotland.
- Gray, J., Homer, C., & Leap, N. (2009a). *'A golden opportunity: The follow-through experience'*. Paper presented at the Australian College of Midwives (NSW Branch) Annual State Conference: 'Midwifery - Going for Gold', Homebush, Australia.
- Gray, J., Homer, C., & Leap, N. (2009b). *Midwifery students working with women: Relationships, learning and the follow-through experience*. Paper presented at the Australian College of Midwives 16th National Conference: 'Midwives and women: A brilliant blend.' Adelaide, Australia.
- Gray, J., Homer, C., & Leap, N. (2009c). *Placements with women: Innovation in student midwifery education and practice*. Paper presented at the Northern Sydney Central Coast Health inaugural nursing and midwifery research and innovative practice conference: 'Research for health', Sydney, Australia.