Experiences of nursing students undertaking clinical placement in a bachelor degree: a perspective of diversity

EDAN: Exploring Diversity among Nursing Students on clinical placement

D. Jane Koch
RN, RNT, MA, BA

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Technology, Sydney

December 2013
My interest in this study derived from a long-standing personal and professional involvement in, and passion for, teaching nursing students. This interest was further developed since coming to Australia, whilst working with enthusiastic academic colleagues, committed to educational research, investigating the learning strategies and preferences of nursing students, and becoming aware of the importance of English language literacy. This work involved developing strategies to support students with English as a second language in the writing of assignments and designing web-based interventions to help students understand the biological and physical sciences supporting nursing practice, which included narrated glossaries of terms. Ultimately this research led to the School using web-based interventions to support nursing students during their first clinical placement. From this ethno-cultural perspective of diversity, my interest evolved to query the effect of any diversity characteristics on undergraduate nursing students’ experiences during their clinical placements, which resulted in an exponential learning curve – and the current study! I would therefore like to acknowledge Associate Professor Yenna Salamonson, Dr Bronwyn Everett, Dr Roslyn Weaver and Professor Sharon Andrew for their enthusiastic approach to research, the sharing of their research skills and encouragement to begin the PhD journey and their belief that I could reach the destination.

To my principal supervisor Professor Trish Davidson, my sincere thanks for your great vision, encouragement and support throughout my thesis. To my co-supervisors, Professor Jane Phillips and Dr Bronwyn Everett, thank you for sharing your significant expertise and for giving your time so generously. Your endless challenges certainly stimulated me to think and the critical feedback to the seemingly endless drafts has been invaluable. I am indebted to you all and believe that I am fortunate to have such inspiring and outstanding academics as mentors.

To the students and staff who participated in this study and whose perceptions provided the basis of this thesis, thank you. To the staff of the seven universities, especially the ‘contact persons’, your support and commitment was invaluable.

I am indebted to the Curtin University and University of Technology, Sydney researchers, those within the Centre for Cardiovascular & Chronic Care and fellow students for their expertise, guidance and friendship during the highs and lows of the journey: Dr Michelle DiGiacomo, Dr Phil Newton, Dr Tim Luckett, Dr John Rolley, Dr Jo Lewis, Dr Sungwon Chang, Dr HuiYun Du, Ms Vasiliki Betihavas and Dr Jan Sayers, Ms Anne Wheeler and Ms Anna Green and for the humour, the many cakes and social functions that certainly ‘helped the medicine go down’! My sincere thanks to Ms Yukwon Lum for her technical help.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support provided by an Australian Postgraduate Award which gave me the freedom to complete most of the thesis full-time.

In memory of my dear mum-in-law Thelma who died in February 2013. To my family who shared my research journey, Gordon, Geoff, Jon and Steph, for their love, encouragement and belief that I could reach the summit. To my two brothers and their families who provided love, nurture and generosity during my rejuvenating breaks in Spain and the UK, which recharged the batteries and invigorated the spirit.
Papers Published during thesis


Weaver, R., Peters, K., **Koch, J.** & Wilson, I. 2011. ‘‘Part of the team’: professional identity and social exclusivity in medical students', *Medical Education*, vol. 45, pp. 1220–9.


Weaver, R., Salamonson, Y., **Koch, J.** & Jackson, D. 2013, 'Nursing on television: Student perceptions of television's role in public image, recruitment and education', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, vol. 69, no. 12, pp. 2635-43.

Papers under review


Conferences/presentations


Statement of Authentication

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)

..........................................................

(Date)
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ................................................................. i

**Anthology of Publications and Presentations** ................................ ii

**Statement of Authentication** .................................................. iv

**Table of Contents** ........................................................................ v

**List of Tables** ............................................................................ ix

**List of Figures** ........................................................................... x

**List of Appendices** ..................................................................... xi

**Abbreviations** ............................................................................ xii

**ABSTRACT** ................................................................................ xiii

**CHAPTER ONE Introduction** ..................................................... 1
  1.1 Background ........................................................................... 1
  1.2 Diversity ............................................................................. 3
    1.2.1 Diversity in Nursing Students ......................................... 4
    1.2.2 Diversity in Health Care Settings .................................... 6
  1.3 Statement of the Problem ...................................................... 8
  1.4 Study Significance ............................................................... 8
  1.5 Research Aims and Research Questions ............................... 9
  1.6 Overview of Thesis Structure ............................................... 9
  1.7 Conclusion .......................................................................... 10
  1.8 References .......................................................................... 12

**CHAPTER TWO Literature Review** ............................................. 18
  2.1 Introduction ......................................................................... 18
  2.2 Search Method ..................................................................... 18
  2.3 Results ................................................................................. 21
    2.3.1 The student group ......................................................... 21
    2.3.2 The placement workforce .............................................. 28
    2.3.3 Patient population ......................................................... 31
  2.4 Conclusion .......................................................................... 31
  2.5 References .......................................................................... 37

**CHAPTER THREE Theories to Explain Diversity** ......................... 41
  3.1 Introduction ......................................................................... 41
  3.2 Theoretical perspectives of diversity .................................... 41
    3.2.1 Historical overview of diversity theories: the need for integration ......................................................................................................................... 42
    3.2.2 Social categorisation theory .......................................... 43
    3.2.3 Similarity/attraction theory ............................................ 43
    3.2.4 Information and decision making approach .................... 44
    3.2.5 Intervening process theory ............................................. 44
    3.2.6 Extended Intervening Process Model .............................. 45
      Communication ...................................................................... 48
      Social integration ................................................................... 49
      Conflict .............................................................................. 50
      Moderating effects ............................................................. 51
5.3.1.6 Factors affecting having a positive experience on last clinical placement in relation to clinical facility ................................................................. 107
5.3.2 Staff participants ........................................................................................................ 107
  5.3.2.1 Characteristics of the staff cohort ........................................................................ 107
  5.3.2.2 Staff role and self-report items ........................................................................... 108
  5.3.2.3 Staff perceptions of difference ............................................................................ 109
5.4 Similarities and differences in findings of students and staff ................................... 109
  5.4.1 Sociodemographic characteristics ....................................................................... 109
  5.4.2 Perceptions of difference ....................................................................................... 109
  5.4.3 Preparedness for clinical placement ..................................................................... 110
  5.4.4 Improvement needed in clinical placements ......................................................... 110
5.5 Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 111
5.6 References .................................................................................................................... 112
CHAPTER SIX Qualitative survey findings ................................................................... 113
6.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 113
6.2 Findings ....................................................................................................................... 113
  6.2.1 Diversity ................................................................................................................ 115
    6.2.1.1 Difference ........................................................................................................ 115
    6.2.1.2 Difficulty .......................................................................................................... 120
    6.2.1.3 Discrimination .................................................................................................. 125
6.3 Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 128
6.4 References .................................................................................................................... 129
CHAPTER SEVEN Integration, Interpretation and Discussion ...................................... 130
7.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 130
7.2 Integrating and interpreting the data ........................................................................ 131
  7.2.1 Research Question 1 ............................................................................................ 132
  7.2.2 Research Questions 2 and 3 ................................................................................ 132
    7.2.2.1 Age and previous nursing experience ............................................................. 134
    7.2.2.2 Parental responsibilities, finance and work experience .................................. 138
    7.2.2.3 Language ......................................................................................................... 139
    Students who speak English as a second language .................................................... 140
    Students speaking English as a first language .......................................................... 144
    7.2.2.4 Gender ............................................................................................................ 145
    7.2.2.5 Disabilities ...................................................................................................... 146
    7.2.2.6 Sexual orientation ........................................................................................... 146
  7.2.3 Research Question 4 ............................................................................................ 147
    7.2.3.1 The patients ..................................................................................................... 147
    7.2.3.2 The placement workforce ............................................................................... 150
    7.2.3.3 Student peers .................................................................................................. 153
  7.2.4 Research Question 5 ............................................................................................ 154
  7.2.5 Research Question 6 ............................................................................................ 156
7.3 Theoretical framework and model ............................................................................ 160
  7.3.1 Diversity theories .................................................................................................. 160
    7.3.1.1 Social categorisation theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986) ......................................... 160
    7.3.1.2 Similarity/attraction theory (Berscheid 1978; Byrne 1971) ............................... 161
    7.3.1.3 Information and decision-making approach (Gruenfeld et al. 1996; Wittenbaum & Stasser 1996) ................................................................. 162
    7.3.1.4 Intervening process theory (Pelled 1996) ......................................................... 162
  7.3.2 Proposed model ..................................................................................................... 163
7.4 Strengths and limitations of the study ...................................................................... 170
7.5 References .................................................................................................................. 171
CHAPTER EIGHT Conclusion and Recommendations .............................................. 181
8.1 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 181
8.2 Recommendations ..................................................................................................... 183
  8.2.1 Recommendations for universities and placement facilities ............................... 183
8.2.1.2 Language and communication ................................................................. 183
8.2.1.2 Older students with previous nursing experience .................................... 184
8.2.2 Placements and facilities ............................................................................. 185
  8.2.2.1 Facility staff attitudes and mentor training .......................................... 185
  8.2.2.2 Facilities ............................................................................................... 186
  8.2.2.3 Clinical practice experiences need to be responsive to students’ lives 187
  8.2.2.4 University expectations ...................................................................... 187
8.2.3 University factors ....................................................................................... 187
  8.2.3.1 Adequate theoretical preparation ....................................................... 188
  8.2.3.2 Racist and other discriminatory behaviour ......................................... 188
8.2.4 National recommendations ...................................................................... 188
8.2.5 Recommendations for further research .................................................... 188
8.3 References .................................................................................................... 190
Glossary .............................................................................................................. 1
Appendices .......................................................................................................... 5
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Summary Table ........................................................................................................................................ 33
Table 3.1 An overview of theories used as a theoretical framework ........................................................................ 53
Table 4.1 Measures used in survey for students and staff ........................................................................................ 75
Table 5.1 Study sites: Total numbers of nursing students and staff ....................................................................... 97
Table 5.2 University and clinical characteristics of the nursing students ................................................................. 98
Table 5.3 Characteristics of the nursing students .................................................................................................... 100
Table 5.4 Comparison of sociodemographic characteristics of students who felt different with those who did not feel different (N=691) * .................................................................................................................. 101
Table 5.5 Correlations of sociodemographic characteristics, ‘feeling different’ and the four student self-report items .............................................................................................................................................. 104
Table 5.6 Sociodemographic predictors of ‘feeling different’ (N=682) ........................................................................ 106
Table 5.7 Sociodemographic predictors of a positive experience on last clinical placement (N=639) ....................... 107
Table 5.8 Characteristics of the staff cohort ............................................................................................................. 108
Table 6.1 Aspects of diversity: Difference, difficulty and discrimination .................................................................... 114
Table 7.1 Positive and negative experiences on last clinical practice ......................................................................... 156
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Flow chart of literature search strategy 20

Figure 3.1 An extended intervening process model (Qin et al. 2012) 47

Figure 3.2 Model for the effect of diversity on nursing students during clinical placements (modified from Qin et al. 2012) 56

Figure 4.1 A diagrammatic representation of convergent parallel mixed methods design used in the study. Adapted from Creswell and Clark (2011). 68

Figure 5.1 Student perceptions of difference 102

Figure 5.2 Staff perceptions of difference in students 109

Figure 7.1 The interaction between the themes 131

Figure 7.2 Model for the effect of diversity on nursing students during clinical placements (modified from Qin et al. 2012) 164

Figure 7.3 Modified model for the effect of diversity on nursing students during clinical placements (from Qin et al. 2012) 168
List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Strategy adapted for all electronic searches</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>EDAN-specific banner</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Pilot: Email to request participation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Final Validation of Surveys</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Staff Survey</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Email to Chair of Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Email from CDMN to all Deans/Heads of SoN</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Summary of thesis sent to Deans/Heads of School</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Email to Contact person at participating university</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Email to Students at one participating university</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Information Sheet for one participating university</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pop up announcement on secure site for students</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Secure Platform</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Email to Staff at one participating university</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Information Sheet for one participating university</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Reminder email: staff at one participating university</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Study Site Questionnaire</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>HREC and Approval to Access Students: Curtin</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Transfer of HREC and Approval to Access Students: UTS</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Approval for Study: Griffith University</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Approval for Study: ACU</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Approval for Study: UOW</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Approval for Study: UWS</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Approval for Study: UNDA</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Additional Logistic Regression</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIN</td>
<td>assistant in nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANMC</td>
<td>Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BN</td>
<td>Bachelor of Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>confidence interval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEN</td>
<td>endorsed enrolled nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELAS</td>
<td>English Language Acculturation Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td>enrolled nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDAN</td>
<td>Exploring Diversity Among Nursing Students on Clinical Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIPM</td>
<td>extended intervening process model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICN</td>
<td>International Council of Nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDA</td>
<td>information and decision-making approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPT</td>
<td>intervening process theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSAOs</td>
<td>knowledge skills abilities other characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>sample size, total number in sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>sub-sample size, total number in sub-sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>nurse unit manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMBA</td>
<td>Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDF</td>
<td>Portable Document Files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN, RNs</td>
<td>registered nurse, registered nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>similarity/attraction theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCT</td>
<td>social categorisation theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>standard deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>standard error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIL</td>
<td>work integrated learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evidence suggests that nursing students’ diverse cultures and backgrounds may have a less positive experience than mainstream students during their clinical placement and leave their nursing courses at higher rates, but whether their clinical experiences play a role is unclear. Further, little is known about which socio-demographic characteristics or attributes if any, may lead to nursing students feeling different to their peers during their clinical placements and how this may affect the quality of their clinical experiences. There is therefore a need to better understand these effects not only from the student’s perspective but from the perspective of the staff who supervise them, in order to ensure students obtain maximal benefit from their placements.

This study, ‘Exploring Diversity Among Nursing students (EDAN) on clinical placement’, used a mixed methods approach involving an anonymous web-based survey. A broad-based definition of diversity described by Loden and Rosener (1991) was modified and used to include age, gender, ethnicity (including language and religious belief), sexual orientation, educational background, income, marital status, parental status, work experience and disability. First, second and third year students undertaking any Bachelor of Nursing course (N=704) and university staff involved in the clinical learning environment (N = 165) were recruited from seven Australian universities.

Both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that diversity attributes affect students’ experience on clinical placement. When comparing the sociodemographic characteristics of those who felt different with those who did not, students who were older, male, International, had previous nursing experience, had lesser English language skills, a previous degree, non - Australian born and not in paid employment were more likely to report feeling different (p <0.001 for all characteristics except not in paid employment p <0.05). Analysis of the open-ended comments refined three themes under the construct of diversity, Difference, Difficulties and Discrimination. Subthemes within the theme of Difference were “being and feeling” and “experience, exposure and expectation”. Within the theme of Difficulty were the subthemes “not prepared for diversity” encountered during the placements, “speaking up” about the challenges, and “surviving financially”, the financial impact of a reduction or absence of part-time employment. The subthemes within Discrimination were “prejudices do prevail”, “send them home” and “walked away”. The finding that students and workforce staff for whom English is a second language affected the clinical and learning experiences of students who spoke English as a first language has not been previously reported.
The model proposed used in this study, based on diversity theories was supported by the findings and also helped to identify where further research is required. The findings are important to enable the provision of appropriate support for nursing students who feel different because of socio-demographic characteristics and will also provide guidance for universities developing curricula and the clinical placement facilities where students obtain their experience. More importantly, there is an urgent need for Australia to develop a national profile of nursing students. Changes in the sociodemographic characteristics of the nursing student population have occurred and will continue. These must be acknowledged and strategies developed both locally and nationally to manage these changes.