

Changes in Education Practice for Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the imperative need to modernize educational approaches in higher education, with a specific emphasis on adult education in the Nursing Department at the University of Ioannina. It provides a detailed analysis of the nursing curriculum and its implementation, showcasing the method of clinical training and practice for nursing students at the university. The paper illustrates how the department has successfully integrated collaborative, reflective, and exploratory learning practices into its clinical training program.

The curriculum employed in the Nursing Department effectively merges theoretical knowledge with practical skills, prioritizing active student participation. A distinctive feature of this program is the transition from the traditional, extended training model to a more intensive, 13-day immersive experience in a variety of healthcare settings, including primary healthcare institutions, mental health facilities, and the University General Hospital of Ioannina. Students are required to register their attendance electronically at their respective sites daily. Simultaneously, they electronically document their application of clinical skills, thus enabling a thorough evaluation of both their academic achievements and professional competencies.

The assessment process comprehensively evaluates the students' academic performance, professional behaviour, and practical skills. The program's educational philosophy, grounded in active, inquiry-based learning, draws inspiration from the theories of Bruner and Rogers. This methodological approach not only augments the students' knowledge and skillsets but also fosters cognitive development and professional readiness, thereby significantly contributing to the advancement of nursing education.

Key words: clinical training; nursing education; collaborative learning practices; inquiry-based learning theory; professional competency development

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KEY POINTS

- The collaborative, reflective, and exploratory learning practices into its clinical training program. in the Nursing Department at the University of Ioannina
- The combination theoretical knowledge with practical skills, prioritizing active student participation.
- The intensive, 13-day immersion in a variety of healthcare environments.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there is an urgent need to replace outdated educational methods, a need that is most clearly highlighted in academic scholarship (Jarvis, 2004; Osborne & Thomas, 2003; Halx, 2010). Within the sphere of higher education, this discourse has long been at the forefront of scholarly debate. In the field of adult education, it is acknowledged in scholarly texts that the pedagogical approach for students must equally prioritize the process of learning alongside the curriculum's content (Halx, 2010). It is noteworthy that the primary objective remains the evaluation of knowledge (Tsui, 2003:328). Consequently, it is essential for students to cultivate critical thinking and analytical skills to appraise the knowledge imparted to them prior to assuming functional and leadership roles in society. In contemporary times, the necessity, reception, and assimilation of new knowledge often hold greater importance than the knowledge previously acquired (Illeris, 2009).

Educational attempts of this nature encounter numerous impediments within the formal educational system, particularly evident in Greece. There persists a tenacious adherence to traditional educational paradigms. Students, habituated to conventional educational methods from school to university, with minor variances but without significant departures, are often unacquainted with educational forms that foster critical thinking.

Simultaneously, numerous university institutions exhibit reluctance in recognizing students as adult learners and in modifying their pedagogical strategies and curricula accordingly (Kasworm, 2003 & Knowles, 1984, cited in Halx, 2010). The dynamics unfolding between educators and learners in the university setting have been scrutinized, suggesting that student-teacher interactions are ineffectual unless they are meticulously organized, transparent, and goal-oriented. Such interactions may even prove detrimental if not mutually embraced (Cox, 2009). Therefore, the quintessential aim of higher education, as posited by Fink (Fink, 2003), should be to nurture students' capacity for intricate thought and reasoning; this necessitates an educational process that affords students profound and meaningful learning experiences. A consequential learning experience is one that engages students actively, fosters a high degree of

classroom interaction, and ultimately induces significant, enduring transformations beneficial to their personal, social, and professional futures (Fink, 2003).

Specifically, the fundamental objective of impactful learning is to initially impart the essential foundational knowledge required by students and subsequently ensure the application of this knowledge. This application encompasses the acquisition of pertinent skills, the management of complex scenarios, and the development of thought. When we discuss thinking, we refer to three types of cognition, as delineated by Sternberg (1989) as "tendentiousness": critical, creative, and practical thinking, all equally vital and interconnected in higher education.

Redefining educational paradigms

The evolution of teaching and learning in higher education

Observing the aforementioned types of desired learning in higher education, we discern their alignment with the objectives of adult education. Additionally, it is recognized that transformation and evolution were being transpired during the learning process in higher education; it is imperative to cultivate a conducive environment, a concept echoed in adult education literature (Langan et al., 2009). A conducive environment is characterized as an educational setting that promotes collaboration, recognizing learning as a social process wherein learners are interconnected rather than isolated entities. Furthermore, as expounded in relevant research (Donaldson, 2009), no transformation in learning can materialize absent cohesion, teamwork, and engagement with others as co-learners and co-reflectors. The core of this transformation is the active participation of the student, with educators facilitating the learning process.

The relationships forged among participants are pivotal, representing a key element in the learning process, as emphasized in adult education literature. Cranton (Cranton, 2006) elaborates, and asserts that for the genesis of transformative learning, it is vital to fortify the educator-student relationship. Collaboration, group involvement, participatory learning, learning contracts, and the learner's leading role are all identified as critical

components in the trajectory of the learning process in both higher and adult education. Transformative learning is contrasted with assimilative learning, as defined by McGonigal (2005), which occurs when students merely accumulate new information. Transformative learning theory encapsulates the conditions and processes requisite for students to realize the most profound form of knowledge transformation: perspective transformation (McGonigal, 2005).

Transformative learning experiences, though potentially destabilizing and formidable for learners, simultaneously necessitate the establishment of a secure environment, guaranteed by the course's specific structure and methodology. However, it is equally crucial to foster an atmosphere conducive to unbridled exploration and the free articulation of ideas and perspectives. Thus, a harmonious balance between structured and malleable pedagogical approaches is imperative. Additionally, selecting learning goals that are more conducive to crafting and executing transformative learning experiences proves advantageous. In structured dialogues, particularly those tailored to unearth the core theme of the lesson, open-ended questions should be posed to encourage unrestrained expression. Concurrently, the adoption of a learning portfolio is advisable, serving as a reflective tool for learners to ponder over their accomplishments, and as a monitoring instrument for educators to track shifts, lacunae, and advancements in their students' cognitive progression, elements critical to the course's success. Nevertheless, it is essential to perpetually reassess and refine our methodologies, drawing upon feedback garnered from students, be it through their comportment in the classroom or their portfolios, as well as the experiences and assessments of the instructor regarding the course. Hence, according to Gravett & Petersen (2009), transformative learning encompasses two principal facets: dynamism and intentionality. Dynamism denotes the evolving and adaptive nature of teaching in response to emerging challenges, while intentionality pertains to the objective, which is the application of acquired knowledge to enhance the course, student learning, and the pedagogical growth of the instructors themselves (Gravett & Petersen, 2009).

"Experiencing alone does not equate to learning; it is the amalgamation of experience with reflective thought that constitutes true learning. Exceptional teaching does not rely on immutable, prescriptive rules and techniques; rather, it demands educators who are contemplative, critically evaluating the conditions of teaching without presuming their constancy, and who approach each scenario with receptivity to both their existing knowledge

and the realms of the unknown" (Richert, 1991).

As elucidated by Dewey (1933), the reflective educator does not perceive teaching as a mere routine but rather as an intellectual pursuit. Such an educator's classroom is a hub of intellectual engagement, laying the foundation for empirical learning and adeptly melding acquired knowledge with experiences in an ever-evolving world. This approach facilitates the formation of novel concepts, leading to the refinement of actions. It becomes evident, therefore, that a pivotal objective in higher education, particularly in the realm of teacher training, is the cultivation of critical thinking. Consequently, the pressing question that emerges pertains to how we define critical thinking and, more critically, how we envision its development as feasible within this specific educational milieu.

Progressive stages of clinical training in nursing ***An approach from the university of Ioannina***

Therefore, adhering to the tenets of adult education, the clinical training in nursing at the University of Ioannina is conducted with an emphasis on maximizing active student participation in the learning process. The practical component of nursing education, as delineated in the curriculum, commences in the third semester, focusing on community nursing for a duration of five hours weekly. During this phase, students engage with various "Community Nursing" facilities, including Mobile Health Care Units (KOMYs) and Day Care Centres for the Elderly (KHFHs). In the fourth semester, under the aegis of the course "Applied Nursing in Pathological Contexts," students dedicate five hours each week to clinical placements across diverse departments within the University Hospital of Ioannina. The fifth semester, within the ambit of the course "Mental Health and Care," allocates four weekly hours for student visits to mental health facilities, the Psychiatric Clinic of the University Hospital, and the Neo martyr George unit for individuals with disabilities.

During the sixth semester, the course "Pediatric Nursing Care" involves students in a five-hour weekly immersion in the pediatric departments of the University Hospital of Ioannina. In the seventh semester, the course "Clinical Practice" expands to encompass eight hours per week, offering students comprehensive exposure to almost all departments of the university hospital. Implementing clinical practice in nursing education. The implementation of clinical practice requires students to attend the clinical site once weekly for 13 weeks, adhering to the schedule outlined in their timetable. A distinctive approach employed by the Nursing Department at the University of Ioannina in

the execution of clinical practice involves a shift from the traditional model of weekly site visits to a concentrated span of 13 consecutive days. This modification was informed by feedback from mental health facilities and community nursing facilities. In these settings, not all activities transpire daily, which could potentially result in a less comprehensive educational experience for our students. For example, witnessing the organization and execution of a theater, dance, or psychotherapy group in real time would be improbable without consistent participation. Additionally, it was recognized that daily immersion in a clinical environment cultivates a deeper familiarity and adaptability for the trainee. This consistent presence transforms the student into an integral member of the team, thereby enhancing their educational journey. Moreover, a 13-day continuous engagement simplifies the process of supervision, feedback provision, and evaluation by the clinical instructor of the institution and the academic supervisor. On the contrary, in the traditional model where students visit once a week, their presence might be less noticeable or impactful. Students are apprised of their clinical site assignment through the department's website and are advised to regularly monitor it for any schedule alterations.

Operational dynamics of clinical practice in nursing education

The orchestration and execution of the clinical practice necessitate the involvement of a diverse team, each member assuming specific responsibilities. This collective is referred to as the "Clinical Education Support Team / Training in Facilities Team.". The support team is bolstered by:

a. The Course Conductor

This individual is tasked with imparting the theoretical aspects of the course. In scenarios where no theoretical course exists, as in the case of the 7th-semester "Clinical Exercise," a faculty member with relevant expertise is designated as the responsible authority and is introduced to the students. The course conductor's primary responsibility is the allocation of students to appropriate clinical settings and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application as effectively as possible. Students may seek guidance from the course conductor regarding any issues pertaining to the ethos or operational aspects of their clinical practice.

b. Academic Course Supervisor

This role is filled by one or more members from the Department of Nursing at the University of Ioannina,

associated with the course's laboratory or appointed for clinical training in various facilities. The academic supervisor collaborates with the course conductor in organizing student placements. They oversee the students' daily activities, either through physical presence or by monitoring their electronic portfolios. In these portfolios, students are required to register their arrival at their designated clinical site daily. Furthermore, upon completing their internship, they must document the skills they have practiced. This system allows the team to track the location and progress of each student. Direct interaction between the students and academic supervisors is also maintained. The academic supervisor periodically visits the clinical sites unannounced, ensuring the validity of online attendance records and assessing each student's progression by reviewing their electronic submissions. Communication with students occurs in three stages: initial briefing on intended clinical skills, mid-placement progress reports, and final evaluations of learned skills and achieved competencies. The academic supervisor liaises with mentors, verifies daily attendance, ensures student safety, and is responsible for providing feedback and evaluating student performance.

c. Clinical Mentor

The clinical mentor is a professional employed at the clinical placement site, such as a supervising nurse or other nursing staff. Their role includes performing daily nursing tasks as per routine, allowing students to observe these procedures. Subsequently, the mentor oversees the student's execution of these nursing skills, confirming their competence. The clinical mentor's role does not extend to instructing students in unfamiliar clinical skills; such queries should be directed to the relevant department faculty. Additionally, the mentor is not obligated to monitor student attendance or ensure their safety.

The structural operation in nursing education. The educational paradigm for nursing students at the University of Ioannina meticulously integrates theoretical knowledge with practical competencies, with each aspect constituting 50% of the curriculum. The term "clinical operations" encompasses the students' training within hospital clinics, while "operations" encapsulates their training in various healthcare settings, including care facilities, welfare centres, prevention units, and laboratories. Consequently, students hone their practical skills in a diverse array of environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, mental health institutions, day centres, hostels, and health centres. The training in clinical practice, as well as in these diverse structures,

is a fundamental component of the educational journey. It possesses a well-defined structure, encompassing specific learning objectives, desired outcomes, supportive pedagogical frameworks, and thorough assessment and evaluation mechanisms.

Assessment and evaluation process in nursing education

The students' competencies are evaluated on a multitude of criteria, detailed in the assessment/grading rubric available on the department's website. Initially, student performance is gauged through electronic sheets in their portfolios, reflecting their execution of requisite clinical/practical skills. These e-sheets, completed daily, allow the tutor to monitor the student's progression in learning. Accurate completion of e-sheets accounts for 10% of the total grade. Skills are categorized into mandatory and opportunistic, with the latter being those not listed but opportunistically performed by the student. Each skill must be executed at least twice: once as an observer and once as an active participant. A minimum percentage of clinical/practical skills execution, as specified in the course's skill forms, is mandatory for successful course completion. This constitutes 65% of the total grade. Failure to meet this criterion necessitates the student to retake the clinical training in the subsequent year. The remaining 25% of the grade is derived from feedback provided by the clinical training/practice site. It should be noted that the assessment and grading are based on the student's overall performance, as outlined in the detailed rubric.

The evaluation focuses on:

- The comprehensiveness and intricacy of each student's skill description.
- The depth and scope of skill execution.
- The attainment of set objectives

The totality of the student's learning experience can be substantiated through interviews, reflective exercises, self-evaluations, and oral feedback from the clinical mentor. It is the duty of the academic course supervisor to synthesize these elements and determine the final grade of the student. Completion of the electronic portfolio and e-sheets by students is mandatory, with a direct correlation between the extent of clinical skills mastered and the resultant course grade. The e-sheets, to be filled out from the second semester through to semester eight, contribute a predefined proportion to the overall grade, as allocated per semester. The sequence of skill acquisition is immaterial, provided all are proficiently completed

by the conclusion of the eighth semester. Additionally, certain skills categorized as 'occasional clinical practice' are also listed. If a student successfully accomplishes these, they will secure a passing grade.

Beyond traditional academic evaluation, students are assessed on their performance within clinical settings and on their professional comportment. This encompasses their communication with staff, time management, work organization, demonstration of empathy, and handling of challenging situations. Even aspects such as attire are subject to scrutiny. Students are required to register their attendance on the online platform, and in cases where this is not feasible, the supervisor must be informed promptly to avoid jeopardizing their course progression. It is imperative that attendance hours are accurately logged in the e-portfolio and ultimately validated by either the academic supervisor or clinical mentor.

Health and safety responsibilities

Nursing students bear significant responsibilities in terms of health and safety. Paramount among these is the obligation not to endanger others or colleagues and to operate clinical equipment solely within the bounds of their training. They must report any nursing errors, injuries, or accidents that occur as a result of clinical training. Furthermore, students are expected to adhere to a dress code that mandates appropriate attire, prohibits jewelry, and requires long hair to be properly secured. The overarching objective of these comprehensive measures is to elevate the quality of nursing education. This, in turn, is aimed at preparing future nurses to provide exemplary health services, emphasizing patient safety. Modern clinical nursing education plays a crucial role in both the personal and professional growth of aspiring nursing professionals, equipping them with high-level healthcare skills. Simultaneously, it contributes to raising academic standards within the nursing field.

CONCLUSION

In the Department of Nursing at the University of Ioannina, students engage in clinical practice with the primary objective of augmenting their knowledge and skills. This goal is pursued by employing educational techniques rooted in adult education. Instructors focus on facilitating learning beyond conventional methods, embracing an approach that emphasizes active learning and critical thinking based on prior learning experiences. This involves the application of theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, thereby evaluating and refining the acquired understanding through further critical inquiry and exploration for new solutions. Consequently,

students embark on the adult education learning cycle, beginning with an initial engagement with the learning material, followed by critical reflection, question formulation, and judgment (Rogers, 1997). Bruner (1966) posited that teaching does not merely involve imparting knowledge but rather engaging students in the construction of knowledge. For Bruner (1977), learning is an active process where exploration serves as a means for learners to actively engage and manipulate their environment, deriving satisfaction from solving problems independently. Bruner's (1990) concept of inquiry learning encourages learners to apply their knowledge and information to resolve educational challenges, which can occur under diverse circumstances. A fundamental principle of this theory is that learners approach knowledge and new skills through experimentation and practice, as demonstrated by clinical instructors. This process enables learners to transition from passive acquisition of learning experiences to active participation, as they replicate the skills demonstrated by their instructor.

Bruner (1991) advocates that learning is not about memorization but discovery, where the teacher provides guidance, and the learners seek answers (Bruner, 1997). The learning process unfolds through the investigation of a problem, in this case, a skill, with the depth of learning being directly proportional to the extent of skill

development. As per Goleman (1998), this educational approach aids in the deep and effective assimilation of knowledge, eschewing mere presentation in favor of discovery. Learners gradually uncover knowledge, engage in critical reflection, and ultimately, through literature review, substantiate and internalize their learning.

Initially, students in their clinical education phase grapple with questions like "How do I do this? Will I succeed?" Eventually, they progress to a level of critical reflection, pondering, "Is my approach correct? Why am I doing it this way?" Critical reflection, a cornerstone of adult education, contributes to the ultimate goal of adult development: self-actualization and the continuous expansion of awareness. In summary, this approach leads to a learning experience aimed at augmenting the learners' knowledge base, enhancing their skill set, and extending their cognitive abilities into new domains (Bruner, 1996).

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