



# The influence of clinical placement and experiential learning on student nurse development: an exploratory case study

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	viii
List of Tables .....	ix
Abstract .....	x
Statement of Originality .....	xii
Acknowledgement .....	xiii
1 Chapter 1 - Introduction .....	1
1.1 Study summary .....	5
1.2 Rationale for the study - literature review .....	6
1.3 Study design - Methodology & Method .....	7
1.4 Analysis .....	7
1.5 Case report .....	8
1.6 Cross case report .....	8
1.7 Conclusion .....	8
1.7.1 Glossary .....	9
2 Chapter 2 - Literature review .....	13
2.1 Introduction .....	13
2.1.1 Search Strategy .....	13
2.1.2 Ontological and epistemological positions within the profession of nursing .....	15
2.1.3 Theoretical frameworks for learning .....	18
2.1.4 Complexity theory .....	26
2.1.5 Delivery of nursing education in Australian universities .....	29
2.1.6 Pedagogy, learning and nursing .....	31
2.1.7 Clinical Placement Models and Placement Experiences .....	39
2.1.8 Experiential learning .....	45
2.1.9 Competence and Clinical Skill Acquisition .....	49
2.1.10 Nursing curricula and readiness for practice .....	54
2.1.11 Indicators of nursing care .....	57
2.1.12 Falls .....	63
2.1.13 Pneumonia .....	63
2.1.14 Pressure Area Injury .....	64
2.2 Conclusion .....	65
3 Chapter 3 - Study Design .....	67
3.1 Introduction .....	67

3.1.1	Selecting a research methodology.....	68
3.1.2	Case study methodology .....	69
3.1.3	Case study methodology in nursing research.....	71
3.1.4	Case study methodology in other educational settings .....	73
3.1.5	The Research Question and The Case.....	75
3.1.6	Case study and analysis.....	78
3.1.7	Multiple sources of evidence .....	79
3.1.8	Create a case study database .....	80
3.1.9	Case study and theory development.....	80
3.1.10	Critique of case study methodology.....	81
3.2	Method.....	83
3.2.1	Introduction.....	83
3.2.2	Sample or Replication?.....	87
3.2.3	Questionnaire and survey - design and piloting.....	88
3.2.4	Ethical Considerations - Hospital Ethics Committee.....	92
3.2.5	Recruitment.....	93
3.2.6	Validity, reliability and credibility.....	94
3.2.7	Researcher bias .....	97
3.2.8	Data collection .....	98
3.3	Conclusion .....	100
4	Chapter 4 – Case study analysis.....	101
4.1	Introduction.....	101
4.1.1	Framing a general analytic strategy .....	101
4.1.2	Qualitative data analysis .....	106
4.1.3	Qualifying a General Analytic Strategy .....	108
4.1.4	Triangulation.....	109
4.1.5	Pattern matching and theory development.....	111
4.1.6	A theory of clinical placement.....	113
4.1.7	Deductive and inductive analysis.....	116
4.2	Analysis framework .....	117
4.3	Descriptive data (Form A) .....	119
4.3.1	Time in placement.....	124
4.3.2	Benefit of placement .....	124
4.3.3	Nursing indicators and placement experiences.....	125
4.3.4	Clinical supervision.....	126

4.3.5	Descriptive data – summary.....	127
4.4	Thematic analysis (Form B).....	127
4.4.1	Discovering themes and sub themes .....	128
4.4.2	From Themes to Codebook.....	132
4.4.3	Describing the core and peripheral elements of themes.....	133
4.4.4	Trustworthiness and rigour of thematic analysis .....	134
4.4.5	Themes .....	134
4.4.6	NVivo and thematic analysis .....	140
4.4.7	Thematic analysis - Summary.....	142
4.5	Scatterplot, Correlation and ANOVA (Form C).....	144
4.5.1	Scatterplot and correlation .....	145
4.5.2	Placement Hours Vs Level of Preparation .....	145
4.5.3	Placement Hours Vs Number of care interventions reported by participants ....	147
4.5.4	ANOVA .....	148
4.5.5	Knowledge - Pressure area care .....	149
4.5.6	Knowledge - Falls care .....	150
4.5.7	Knowledge - Pneumonia care .....	150
4.5.8	Skills .....	151
4.5.9	Skills - Pressure area care .....	151
4.5.10	Skills - Falls care.....	152
4.5.11	Skills - Pneumonia care.....	153
4.5.12	Summary .....	153
4.6	Qualitative Comparative Analysis - QCA (Forms A, B & C) .....	154
4.6.1	Principles for using QCA.....	160
4.6.2	Identification of conditions .....	161
4.6.3	Part 1 - QCA Results.....	165
4.6.4	Truth Table.....	166
4.6.5	Venn Diagram .....	167
4.6.6	Prime Implicants .....	169
4.6.7	Part 2 - Resolving contradictory configurations .....	170
4.6.8	Part 3 - Acquiring Boolean minimisation .....	175
4.6.9	Interpretation of QCA .....	177
4.7	Document analysis (Form D).....	180
4.8	Chapter - Conclusion .....	185
5	Chapter 5 - Case Report.....	187

5.1	Introduction.....	187
5.2	Case report - Executive Summary .....	188
5.2.1	The researcher .....	189
5.3	Individual case reports .....	190
5.3.1	A Case Description .....	190
5.3.2	The Graduates .....	190
5.3.3	Industry and graduate expectations .....	201
5.4	Being competent .....	202
5.5	Nursing practice – interventions .....	207
5.5.1	Comments on simulation .....	209
5.5.2	Pressure area care.....	210
5.5.3	Falls.....	212
5.5.4	Pneumonia.....	214
5.5.5	Summary of nursing practice .....	215
5.6	Confidence and learning .....	217
5.6.1	Constructing learning.....	222
5.7	Avoiding dissonance .....	225
5.8	Responsibility .....	229
5.9	Relationships, placement patterns and knowledge development .....	233
5.9.1	Relationships.....	233
5.9.2	Placement pattern and knowledge development .....	235
5.9.3	Working as a carer or assistant in nursing. ....	237
5.10	The value of placement .....	237
5.10.1	Case report conclusions .....	242
5.11	Conclusion .....	243
6	Chapter 6 - Cross Case Report.....	247
6.1	Introduction.....	247
6.1.1	Curriculum models.....	247
6.1.2	Block placement.....	249
6.1.3	Block and dedicated education unit .....	250
6.1.4	Integrated placement .....	251
6.2	Theory Testing.....	252
6.2.1	Pattern match to a theoretical position .....	254
6.2.2	The ‘fit’ of Complexity Theory .....	261
6.2.3	Reconstructing clinical placement experience using complexity .....	265

6.3	Policy implications.....	268
6.3.1	Constructing a conceptual model for clinical placement .....	268
6.4	Conclusion .....	274
7	Chapter 7 - Conclusion .....	275
7.1.1	The value of case study.....	278
7.1.2	The suitability of QCA for nursing research.....	280
7.1.3	Limitations of the study .....	281
7.1.4	Dissemination of findings .....	282
7.1.5	Recommendations for further studies .....	282
	Reference List .....	285
	List of Appendices .....	303
	Appendix 1 - Logic Grid PhD -Donnelly.....	304
	Appendix 2 - Data Collection Forms A - D .....	306
	Appendix 3 - Participant information sheet .....	319
	Appendix 4 - Consent Form.....	320
	Appendix 5 - Participants responses to case study report .....	321
	Appendix 6 - TOSMANA Reports .....	323
	Appendix 7 - Conference presentations during candidature .....	328
	Appendix 8 - Journal Article - Nurse Education Today 2012 Vol 32, no 8 (title page)	329
	Appendix 9 - Journal Article - Nurse Researcher 2013, Vol 20 no 6 (title page).....	330
	Appendix 10 – Raw data.....	331
	Appendix 11 – Correlation and ANOVA.....	334

## List of Figures

Figure 1- Case Study design .....	84
Figure 2 - Bringing concepts together.....	86
Figure 3 - Concept map - General Analytic Strategy.....	103
Figure 4 - Analysis framework .....	117
Figure 5 - Word Tree Confidence .....	141
Figure 6 - Word Tree Competence .....	142
Figure 7 - Scatterplot - Hours of placement Vs Preparation as RN .....	146
Figure 8 - Scatterplot - Placement Hours Vs Number of care interventions.....	147
Figure 9 - Venn diagram - Truth Table 1.....	168
Figure 10 - Venn diagram - Truth Table 2.....	174
Figure 11 - Venn diagram - no contradictory cases.....	176
Figure 12- Pie chart - Participants descriptions of competence.....	204
Figure 13 - Venn diagram – Confidence –zero contradictory configurations.....	221
Figure 14 - Word Tree - Responsibility .....	231
Figure 15 - Conceptual Model - A mechanism of clinical education .....	269

## List of Tables

Table 1 - Teaching models in the clinical setting .....	43
Table 2 - General Analytic Strategy .....	108
Table 3 - Theory matrix - 4 Pattern.....	114
Table 4 - Form A questions .....	120
Table 5 - Form A - All participant responses - Placement hours.....	122
Table 6 - Form A - Semantic differential responses .....	123
Table 7 - Supervision of students.....	126
Table 8 - Themes - thematic analysis.....	135
Table 9 - Correlation - Hours of placement and preparation as an RN.....	146
Table 10 - Correlation - Hours of placement Vs Number of interventions.....	148
Table 11 - ANOVA Knowledge .....	149
Table 12 - ANOVA - Skill.....	151
Table 13 – Patient care interventions provided by participants .....	162
Table 14 - QCA - Study conditions and rationale for dichotomy .....	164
Table 15- Truth Table 1 - includes contradictory cases.....	167
Table 16 - Boolean Analysis for Truth Table 1 - all outcomes.....	169
Table 17 - Prime Implicants - Truth Table 1 - [1] outcomes .....	169
Table 18 - Further conditions for QCA.....	171
Table 19 - Exemplar conditions and contradictory configuration outcomes .....	172
Table 20 - Truth Table No 2 .....	173
Table 21 - Boolean formula Truth Table 2 - [1] results with [R] included.....	173
Table 22 - Truth Table - no contradictory configurations.....	176
Table 23 - Coding for document extraction.....	182
Table 24- Frequency table - documentation regarding nursing interventions .....	183
Table 25 - Individual case descriptions.....	193
Table 26 - Curriculum models .....	249
Table 27 - Research Findings Summary .....	253
Table 28 - Pattern matching of case study variables.....	256

## **Abstract**

The role of clinical placement and experiential learning in the education and preparation of nurses is complex and difficult to research. The outcomes of nursing education, particularly in relation to the care of patients in acute care settings, are equally challenging. This study was conducted to address the question, 'How does the teaching model and duration of clinical placement, within an undergraduate nursing program, affect clinical skill acquisition and nursing practice?' The study describes the application of case study methodology to the experiences of sixteen graduate nurses within a large South Australian metropolitan hospital. Each participant (case) described through interview, their university and clinical placement experiences. A survey conducted at the same time as the interview focused on the participant's skills and knowledge of interventions for pressure area care, falls and pneumonia. This emphasis was to examine if the nature of the clinical placement experience was influential in developing the capabilities of graduate nurses. A range of analysis techniques including thematic analysis, parametric and non-parametric analysis and a unique approach using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) enabled the formation of a case report. As the participants had attended various universities, a cross-case comparison was performed using a pattern matching technique. The findings of the study suggest there are a range of conditions, which in combination may contribute to a higher level of skill, knowledge and confidence. Of these conditions, the duration of placement has an important influence on the student's ability to form effective relationships with clinical education staff and to have an opportunity to provide nursing care through a range of nursing interventions. Of itself however the duration of placement may not be the most important influence in the development of graduate skills, knowledge and capacity to provide nursing care. Rather a combination of certain conditions including, effective feedback, a consistent mentoring

relationship with a clinical educator and exposure to a range of nursing care interventions may be more significant in the preparation of a graduate nurse. On the basis of the study findings, an argument is made for Complexity Theory to inform new ways of conceptualising the role of experiential learning and clinical placement in the education of future nurses.

## Statement of Originality

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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