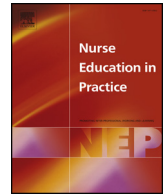




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Issues for Debate

## Internationalizing nursing curricula in a rapidly globalizing world

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## ABSTRACT

Rapid transformations in our globalizing world means there is an urgency for nurse educators to revitalize curricula to prepare nurses better for practice and the emphasis on achieving global health for all has never been greater. Nurses are being urged to collaborate across borders to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, through research, practice, policy and education. Thus, nurse educators and leaders need to consider the critical importance of internationalizing nurses' education at all levels, as well being committed to their roles in curricula reform and using innovative technology. There are challenges to internationalization, but the benefits include helping nurses to grow cultural competence, developing strength in nursing voices globally, capacity building in global health, health policy and advocacy, growing scholarship in nursing across borders, developing the skills and knowledge of nurses from low-income countries, and forming partnerships to work together to achieve global health.

## 1. Introduction

Internationalizing nursing curricula so that nurses are better prepared for their various roles in the 21st century is a critical task in nursing education. However, the internationalization of curricula can be resource intensive and requires sustained commitment. It involves cross-cultural and linguistic challenges, employing innovative pedagogies, garnering institutional and nursing support for change, and considering how best academic quality and content can be achieved (Wihlborg et al., 2018) to provide students and faculty with broader educational experiences and knowledge. Literature on internationalization in nursing education has grown in the last two decades, with many schools of nursing being successful in international networking and partnerships to help students and faculty members take a broader focus on learning about the connections between nursing and health at a local, national and global level, but there are still many that have not embraced this. Nurse educators now need to embrace active partnerships across cultures and countries to help achieve better global health and health advocacy. There is now wider recognition that health transcends national boundaries, impacting on global, political and economic spheres; but "existing evidence suggests that the current global public health workforce is unprepared to confront the challenges posed by globalization" (Mdege, 2019, p.99). This has ramifications for nurses and midwives who constitute 50% of the global health workforce (WHO, 2018), many of whom have not received the education to

prepare them for 21st century work, and who are not using available technology to learn internationally. We provide here some background to the internationalization of nursing curricula, explaining some important reasons, challenges and benefits for this. This includes the growing of cultural competence and the global worldviews of student nurses and faculty members, and embracing technology in internationalization of educational activities.

## 2. Internationalizing nursing and globalization

Preparing nurses for 21st century work is a dynamic endeavour but rapid transformations need to be better reflected in nursing curricula. The migration of populations and the ability to travel has never been greater, with rising dangers of the transmission of new and emerging infectious diseases. Patient populations are older, and more culturally diverse. Nurses are caring for more chronic health conditions and increasing numbers of migrants, and there are serious concerns about global warming and the environment. Nurses too are migrating, challenging countries to maintain standards of practice with an increasingly diverse workforce prepared to different standards in different languages. The emphasis on patient safety initiatives is now key to health reform in many countries. And health professionals are increasingly being called upon to work together globally to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and Universal Health Coverage.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Council of Nurses encourage nurses to think and act globally, to become more involved in policy and advocacy (Catton, 2019). Simultaneously, nursing campaigns such as *Nursing Now* and the *Florence Nightingale Challenge* are helping to drive much-needed emphasis on developing nurses for leadership roles. These campaigns and the forthcoming 2020 Year of the Nurse and Midwife will draw much needed attention to the image, work and potential of nurses and midwives on a global scale, and hopefully be a driving force for change in nursing education. One premise is that such campaigns will attract the recruitment of more people into nursing, now critically important, given widespread nursing shortages, for the WHO (2018) predicts 9 million more nurses will be needed by 2030. Additionally, the World Health Assembly has called on member states to engage the expertise of nurses to engage them in developing human resources for health policies (WHO, 2018). However, most nurses have never had policy training and there is a dire need for this at all levels of the profession (Turale and Kunaviktikul, 2019) and this needs to be part of nursing curricula reform globally.

The internationalization of higher education has been a strategic initiative of universities in many countries, particularly in the west, for around 25 years. Universities have sought internationalization that was really an expression of globalization, reaching outside of their usual spheres of operation to capture market potentials and drive their economy (Allen and Ogilvie, 2004), in the 'privatization and marketization of education', setting up teaching programs and campuses in other countries, or growing numbers of international students in their host country. Globalization has entered into the lexicon of 21st century education, and is now firmly entrenched into higher education intellectual nomenclature. But globalization has many downsides, including increasing health inequities, lowering of wages, the rich owning most of the world's wealth, and forcing record numbers of migrants to seek better lives. Globalization continues to rise, as nations become increasingly interdependent on one another economically, culturally, socially and environmentally (Clark et al., 2016).

Today there are calls for nurses to become global citizens in a world with increasing health inequities, to examine how local and global health challenges are interconnected, working together to find solutions to these challenges (Mill et al., 2010). This encompasses influencing standards in practice, research, education and policy development to effect better global health, so nursing curricula need to be focused not only on local and national health issues, but within the global lifeworld of health for all.

### 3. Innovating curricula to incorporate global perspectives and technological innovation

Nurse educators cannot bury their heads in the sand and ignore the need to revitalize curricula to prepare nurses for a globalized world. Curricula prepared for nurses of 20th century needs radical change to eliminate and update redundant content to transform health and caring practices. Opening up nursing education to a range of internationalization activities can be a force for positive change, providing unique learning opportunities across borders for students and educators alike, as well as for patients. Enriching learning about and from other cultures can add immeasurably to nursing care quality and for people from diverse cultures. This is a crucial matter since mass migrations of people have challenged health care professionals and systems to develop new ways of caring for people, as well as being a driver to learn from other countries.

Today students entering nursing are the so-called millennials. Their entry into the world of nursing is like no previous generation of students. They are used to getting fast access to information wherever they are located, but many nurse educators still use teaching methods that millennials quickly tire of. For example, transformative teaching can involve the student-centred flipped classroom model where students "read current evidence-based articles, listen to online lectures, videos,

and complete a variety of other content learning activities prior to class" (Towle and Breda, 2014, p.110). Technology can thus enable students to access up-to-date information utilizing mass media, with a global perspective on learning. With curricula innovation, mobile phones can also be used effectively by students to access information, and gain critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This is a better solution than blanket bans on phones in classrooms. Asking students to find and share information from their phones, for example from the Global Health Observatory website of the World Health Organization, can provide class members with quick access to data on national and international global health topics that are contemporary and meaningful, and self-directed. Using podcasts, Facebook groups or other applications can readily become learning opportunities for students away from traditional classrooms.

Many educators already use such learning technologies but this needs to be more widespread across many countries to connect students and other health professionals in different cultures, so they can learn more about international and global perspectives of health and nursing. Live transmission of classes taught elsewhere direct into the classroom is a cost-effective means to harness the power of learning from different cultures and employ the expertise of speakers from elsewhere, particularly when it is not possible to travel for international exchanges or teaching face-to-face. Virtual collaboration across cultures using technology can enhance international perspectives in the classroom (Wihlborg et al., 2018).

When reforming curricula, nurse educators will also find significant benefits to communicating across countries with other educators through technology or face-to-face visits. Standardizing nursing education, and thus nursing practice, to international best practice standards can only be undertaken when one learns what best practice is, and what best evidence entails. And those who have received excellent education in nursing can share ideas, information, teaching and learning, and international experiences with nurses in high, medium and low socio-economic countries through such technology where available, thus helping to improve their education of nurses and eventually the health of their people.

As Mill et al. (2010) observed, nurse educators can be challenged or not committed to balancing curriculum content in local, national and global settings. This reluctance may be overcome by them being involved in international exchanges, to learn from others in different countries and become immersed in cross-cultural understandings of what constitutes best nursing education practice.

### 4. Growing cultural competence in nursing through exchanges

Sustaining holistic care, and avoiding cultural insensitivity (Almutairi et al., 2017) requires nursing exposure to diverse health beliefs, values and attitudes to meet today's care needs. Developing cultural awareness requires theoretical, reflective and practical approaches in academic and practice settings. And the immersion of students in exchange visits can provide cross-cultural experiences that traditional classroom teaching cannot achieve, since there is evidence that students given international study experiences report higher competence at graduation (Nilsson et al., 2014). Transcultural opportunities provide students with valuable global perspectives while supporting work experience in diverse settings with often disparate resources. While there are growing numbers of educational institutions that offer international experiences and exchanges for their students and faculty, these are often limited and dependent on funding and the interest and ability of academics. Few courses offer semester or year-long placement in an institute in another country (Baernholdt et al., 2013). One exception is Sweden where a legislated act promotes student internationalization at all program levels, and provides government financial support. Whilst many countries cannot financially support lengthy exchange programs, longer periods of cultural immersion can enhance students' cultural competence (Nilsson et al., 2014) and

when students and faculty are involved in dialogues about poverty, immigrant health, and disparities in health status, this contributes to a sense of global citizenship (Mill et al., 2010).

## 5. Conclusion: Some practicalities to prepare for internationalization

Successful internationalization requires strategic thinking; adequate resource allocation; committed nurse educators and institutions; and identifying and forming close relationships with suitable international partners. We believe it is best to start with one exchange partner and build on this relationship, rather than taking on too many partners at once and spreading resources thinly. Avoid over-enthusiasm by not signing memorandums of understanding with too many international exchange partners at once. In our experience, this a recipe for failure and unsustainable in the long-term. Beginning the first partnership may start with an individual researcher's collaborations (Gimbel et al., 2017) or by a chance meeting of educators at a conference. Another method to purposefully search the internet to find potential international educational partners that seem well-matched by location, culture and educational offerings. Direct contact and face-to-face meetings will then help decisions about whether to embark on a mutually-agreed exchange program. The sustainability of a partnership needs to be driven by individuals or small groups (Gimbel et al., 2017), depending on the priorities and sustainability of the partnerships. As international expertise grows and resources allow, then educators can seek additional partnerships to further the aims of the school. Implementing student and faculty exchanges is often labour and time intensive. There are many considerations to take into account, including language differences, cultural sensitivity training, the numbers of staff and students involved, length, content and intensity of programs, the possible need for health and insurance pre-departure preparation, and pre- and post-program evaluation. Funding exchange visits is often problematic, causing exchange visits to become one-sided, so schools may need to become entrepreneurial to find funds.

A global view on health and nursing requires curriculum reform after identifying relevant competencies for learners. This will involve educators having to become educated themselves about global health and cultural competence, being brave enough to step outside their comfort zones, considering the technology to support international learning activities in the classroom, and sharing experiences through networking. Of benefit is the increasing literature on internationalizing nursing curricula experiences and research studies, including a systematic review of the global health and public and community health competencies for nursing education (Clark et al., 2016).

In summary, our globalizing world is challenging nursing education institutes from several directions: preparing nurse educators who need to prepare nurses to care for diverse populations; incorporating international students and faculty in their populations; and implementing internationalized curricula better focused on preparing nurses for today's technological and globalizing world with an emphasis on global health (Baernholdt et al., 2013). Providing nurses with international experiences and partnerships is an influential way of engaging nurses to become global citizens who can share the burden of improving health, and encourages connectedness between the local and the global (Mill

et al., 2010). In this discussion paper we have argued for the continuation of efforts to internationalize nursing curricula in an increasingly globalized world. We have outlined some issues, challenges and benefits of this, including the growing cultural competence and global world views of students and faculty members, and the need to embrace technology in internationalization activities. We encourage educators around the world to take stock, to ask the difficult questions around whether or not they are preparing nurses through transformative curricula activities, that involve global responsibility for health and the provision of experiences in different cultures and countries.

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Not applicable.

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

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