

Visible, Invisible and Made Visible

Ten Years in a Nordic Network in Nursing Education

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International Exchanges and Internationalisation at Home

Internationalisation is supposed to promote citizens with cultural competence and awareness, who are able to function in multi-cultural societies. Today's multi-cultural society has repercussions on the nursing profession and multi-cultural influences during the training will improve international cooperation. Mobility is often the measure of the extent of internationalisation, but that is not enough. To achieve the aims of internationalisation, its effects need to leave their imprint on the day-to-day activities and be integrated into the work of the entire institution. If not, studies abroad may miss the mark and mobility might be reduced to tourism, including the risk that stereotypical ideas of the host country be maintained.

Internationalisation is an important cornerstone of the work of the university. The value of developing a general cultural competence is globally established. The ideas behind it originate partly from UNESCO and WHO. Internationalisation and mobility is expected to lead to positive effects on academic education in general, on cultural awareness, international understanding, and also on world peace. One claim is that students become good citizens, not only of their own countries, but of the world, thus able to work internationally and interculturally. Many will work abroad, but all will live in multi-cultural societies (1, 2, 3, 4). According to the Nordic Council of Ministers there are positive attitudes to inter-Nordic cooperation, but altitudes and activity are two different things. The Bologna process and increased European cooperation raise questions whether there exists a uniquely Nordic model, examples of "best practice", models of cooperation, and how the Nordic countries could gain more visibility on the international arena. The Nordic Council of Ministers also states that Scandinavia is *not* a homogenous region. The countries are different and student mobility is unevenly distributed. However, Nordic cooperation is also an example of a way to implement the Bologna ideas. Through networks and cooperation Scandinavia can gain recognition as a pioneering region in cooperation. The cooperation works well, but requires consideration of differences and clarification of strategies. Hence, describing and comparing networks could give impulses to expansion and development (5).

Student and teacher mobility have long been the main road to internationalisation. This *internationalisation through import* (6) means however, that it is difficult to know whether a course in a foreign country has developed international or intercultural experiences. The individual concerned probably has gained new experiences, but syllabi and training strategies too, need to be organised so that they enable critical reflection and development. Despite extensive efforts in exchange programmes, mobility has comprised only some ten per cent of the student population. The remaining 90 percent are scarcely affected by the exchanges.

The concept of Internationalisation at Home (IaH) is used to describe aspects including institutions, curricula, education ideologies, conceptions of knowledge and cultural variations in the home institution (7). All higher education takes place in a relatively similar culture, but conceptions on teaching, subject area, and key concepts may vary. They depend on the ideology of the institutions, but also on individual teachers. Internationalisation of curricula may have different foci, such as course contents and training methods, propagation of global perspectives, preparations for an international labour market or a total restructuring.

“*Filling the pot or lighting the fire*” are examples of two ends of the spectrum between which many institutions of higher learning find themselves. The ideologies produce entirely different pedagogical methods. Concepts of knowledge and educational culture need to be elucidated, problemised, and discussed (8, 9).

Nursing education has long worked with the development and definition of a new scientific subject and the ideology of the university, based on scientific method and scrutiny has replaced training that earlier focused on practical actions. This development is not uniquely Nordic, but global. The field comprises interpretation of the human, health, caring, and the professional task, but course descriptions, training contents, and professional demands vary (10, 11). Care and cure, as well as experience of health and disease are culturally acquired, related to the values and public systems of the surrounding society (12, 13). The patient or receiver of care is described with concepts such as holistic vision, individual needs, quality of life, suffering, and the nurse with demands of participation, communication, and empathy. Cultural competence turns into an aspect of professional competence. International cooperation may contribute both to the development of such individuals and to the shared base of knowledge, but globalisation and internationalisation also requires the development of learning methods (14, 15, 16, 17).

Political steering documents state that Nordic unity and common values are the base of cohesion, a common image and cooperation momentum. “Consensus” indicates that cooperation is straightforward, since we are similar. The problem is that we are not similar. There is variation between the citizens and institutions. The concept of Nordic culture, professional commitments, the subject field, and educational ideologies need to be elucidated in international cooperation. A pedagogical conference in a Nordic network had as its theme the increase of knowledge of the training programmes by shedding light on areas with development potential. Before the conference each university delivered materials on formalities and pedagogical or scientific profiles. When discussing the materials, uncertainties and variations emerged in interpretations of concepts, levels of training, and requirements. Furthermore, many of the difficulties associated with international cooperation were illustrated; things are not understood in the same way depending on differences concerning language, culture, and tradition. The subject field, professional requirements, and strategies to obtain the objectives of academic nursing education and internationalisation needed to be discussed. The purpose of the present study was to provide a basis for critical scrutiny and further development of the networking efforts.

Method

The planning and implementation of the study departed from the concept of benchmarking (18, 19, 20, 21) in the sense that activities are investigated in order to find out what is going on. The participants decide what to investigate. The method is partly a strategy to make people think outside their normal patterns, a learning method in which participants identify and compare activities in order to detect strengths and weaknesses, and finally a cooperative process. A project group of five people responsible for internationalisation at three of the institutions and a project leader carried out this work. The first suggested working title was “*Same problems now as earlier*” the purpose of that being to direct the thought towards what had been achieved. During the first months of work a new heading was formulated: “*Still an invisible activity?*” as a result of the difficulties that were encountered at the attempts to find materials for the analysis. Departing from these questions the data collection and analysis were implemented. The data collection refers to the time of the start of the network in 1995 till 2003/2004. The material consisted of political steering documents, documentation of network meetings, official descriptions of the participating institutions, as well as reports from

teachers and students. In the document analyses formal regulations, decision-making paths, and activities carried, were illustrated. Student and teacher experiences from reports were interpreted according to a qualitative approach to research.

Results

The Nordman network

The Nordic Council of Ministers is a coordinating body with representatives of the governments of five countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, as well as three autonomous areas: Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. An organ for research, education and information technology, HÖGUT, has as its primary task to promote Nordic cooperation by implementing, following up, and developing development work and cooperation among teachers and students (the NORDPLUS programme) but also to actualise the issue of Internationalisation at Home. The ambitions of HÖGUT are realised through funding of networks. The Nordman network consists of eight nursing education institutions: two in Denmark, one in Finland, one in Norway, three in Sweden and one on Åland. The work of the network is planned at annual reunions at which applications, distribution, mobility, courses, agreements, objectives, and expansion are discussed. From 1995 till 2004 thirteen network meetings have been organised.

Institutions and mobility

The participating institutions demonstrated great variety. Three were clear-cut nursing training facilities; others were schools or colleges within universities. The enrolment ranged from 48 and 320 in the case of the smallest to 1000 in the case of the largest. The number of faculty varies in a similar fashion. It is unclear, however, how many teacher actually taught within the programmes, since there was variations in the accounting methods, as well as to the names of academic degrees and posts. The “planning, granting, and results” process was indistinct: Neither teachers nor students had travelled to the extent that was planned and for which there was funding applied for. There was a huge gap appearing between the high ambitions and planning of the network and the actual results. The cause of this was traced back to the difficulty of attracting teachers and students to foreign sojourns, as well as to lack of conscious strategies. There was also lack of guidelines for accounting and lack of clarity as to the roles of the coordinators and the managements of the departments. Nobody had requested systematic accounts. The network coordinator accounted for used funds to Nordplus and reported orally to other participants. There emerged a form of familiarity with the coordinator and certain persons in the network.

In the descriptions of the institutions there was a question of whether it had a profile. The purpose of that question was threefold. *Firstly*, nursing students will meet both another university and people in another nursing context. *Secondly*, it regarded how far the school had gone academic, and *thirdly* profiles may give rise to impulses to Nordic modules, research projects, and Internationalisation at Home (IaH). A few examples were listed: One school worked with *reflection as learning method*, another with *ethics, outlook on life and PBL*, a third highlighted the *concept of health*.

Teacher mobility reached some ten exchanges per annum. The teachers participated in teaching and carried out educational visits according to individual requests. The exchanges normally lasted a week. Many were described as enriching on a personal level, but it was not clear whether or how they influenced work, knowledge or the home institution. Some 10 – 25 students per year carried out studies abroad in the form of clinical practice

during four to twelve weeks. Norwegian students preferred going to Denmark, Åland and Stockholm; Danish students opted for Norway and Stockholm; Finnish students chose Stockholm schools and Denmark.

Experiences of exchanges

Six student reports and six teacher reports from all participating schools were studied focussing on cultural and knowledge experiences. There were clear differences between the descriptions by the students and the teachers. Teachers normally had a particular issue they wanted to discuss or learn about from the school they visited, such as distance education or going more academic. Many expressed that it had been interesting and valuable to take part in the experiences of their colleagues, that the exchanges did not give formal merits, and that there was a great deal of extra work involved. Often there was a tug of war between personal interests and work requirements by the institutions. A few examples of pedagogic teamwork were accounted for but as for the internationalisation at home, which was supposed to be promoted by the exchanges, there was no effect noted as a result of the network activities.

The students were vaguer as to the nature of their expectations, but clearer in their conclusions. The major benefit had been the cultural experiences having contributed to personal development. Any language problems had been overcome. The uncertainty of arriving in a new country had been dealt with through hosting students, collective housing and by participating in courses. It was difficult to separate acquisition of new knowledge from the inner development commented on by most as being “*enriching for the soul*”, *leading to their becoming more open and free in their encounters, conducive to growth through challenges, leading to more independence, and leading to improvement of social skills*”. All described differences between the health care systems of the countries and variations in the professional field, but neither *whether* or *how* these differences had been handled, nor if they had affected their personal knowledge.

The reporting routines varied, as did the contents. The mobility was usually described as tourism, enriching for the soul certainly, but with no visible relation to comprehensive objectives or pedagogic strategies. At the presentation of the report during a pedagogic conference in 2005, teachers who had participated stated however, that the exchanges do have a great impact on personal development, despite the fact that it was not apparent from the materials analysed. Areas as distance education and clinical guidance have developed through the network efforts. Students pointed out that teachers who have been abroad relate to that, thus enriching the teaching. In conclusion, international exchanges do leave imprints in the daily lives of teachers and do benefit those students too who meet the teachers in question. Since this is not included in the descriptions analysed it can be seen as a form of tacit knowledge with existing but invisible effects at home.

Intensive courses and educational conferences

Two intensive programmes and one educational conference were carried out in the years 1995 – 2004. The intensive programmes comprised one week (boarding) with lectures, seminars, and discussions. In the first programme “*Supervision in Nursing Care*” 15 teachers and 19 students participated, and in the second “*Clinical Nursing Supervision – Ties between Theory and Practice in Nursing Education*” 13 teachers and 24 students participated. The evaluations demonstrated that the cultural experiences were important, *that* it had been enriching, but not in which way. Simple housing, students and teachers together, and close contacts led to fellowship and exchanges of ideas. The difficult role as tutor in guidance, acting as *the good mother* or *the gardener*, illustrated various pedagogic methods that left their imprints on the

guidance process. In the first educational conference on the theme “*Increased Understanding of the Various Study Programmes and Network Cooperation Development*” 21 teachers participated. From a culturally comparative perspective, ideas, reality, opportunities, and obstacles were treated, as well as methods of understanding oneself and others. Here too, it was underlined that the inspiring setting helped to sustain deep thought and creativity during the time spent together.

Summary of results

The ambitions of the network have surpassed the results of its efforts, mobility has increased a little, and experiences are usually described as individual and free in relation to strategies, knowledge development or Internationalisation at Home. There were effects of the time spent abroad, but they were not often requested and were invisible in the evaluations. Reflection and sharing with others was decisive to achieving optimal outcomes. Week-long courses were most effective as springboards for further development. In the process of completing the report (22) examples of experiences that can be classified as *tacit knowledge* emerged. Analyses and conclusions provoked thoughts so that words could be given to experiences that had not been mentioned in the interviews.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to contribute to the development of the Nordman network. Internationalisation is to promote cultural competence. The efforts have not given the results envisaged, even though the Nordplus activities have been successful. The internationalisation process can be described in four steps (23). The first one is student and teacher mobility, the second curriculum and research cooperation, the third is Internationalisation at Home, and the fourth is to market the results. The Nordman network is on its way towards step two. The benchmarking method has contributed to a deepening of the work on several levels: to increased knowledge on the part of those who have carried out the study, provided data and taken part of the results, as well as to elucidation of hidden aspects. International cooperation requires *preparations and following up*, the *professional field* and *the subject area* needs problemising, *reflection* on experiences needs to be shared, *exchange students need to get involved* in the study programmes, cooperation needs to give regard to the *profiles of the institutions*, if *educational ideologies* on internationalisation are to have the results strived for.

The results can be summed up under the headings invisible, visible, and made visible. *The invisible* refers to political rhetoric on Nordic identity, multi-cultural society, professional field, and pedagogic ideologies. They exist in steering documents and research but do not emerge in the material analysed. *The visible* illustrates the ambitions of the network being higher than its results, that mobility has increased somewhat, that personal experiences have been enriching and that week-long courses have produced good results. *The made visible* means that data collection and interpretative efforts made routines visible, or rather lack thereof, as to planning, implementation, and reporting, as well as the fact that the teaching is indeed influenced and that students do benefit from international experiences of others, but it will remain on a personal level unless it is asked for by someone. Questions whether or why any institution is particularly attractive; whether the mobility expresses a conscious strategy; how the subject field and the professional field vary, or whether the multi-cultural aspects of societies or student groups are exploited can be asked, but not answered as a result of this study.

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