



TADD: TRANSLANTIC DOUBLE DEGREE IN NURSING

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The 5 years Transatlantic Double Degree in Nursing (TADD) in project began in October 2009 and ended September 2014. The overall objective is to award undergraduate nursing students a double degree in nursing from one EU and one US institution. The primary aim was to prepare student nurses to understand the current and future trends to globalize nursing care: - for more universal practice in the EU and US. Participating institutions were Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences (MUAS), Savonlinna, Finland (EU-leader institution), University of Szeged (USZ), Szeged, Hungary, Queen's University Belfast (QUB), Northern Ireland and Washburn University (WU), Topeka, Kansas, USA (US-leader institution).

The joint study program consisted of a minimum of 60 ECTS of Common TADD studies and Partner-Specific studies to include distinct nursing courses and one language and culture course, has been offered by partner institutions. The Common TADD Studies courses included: Community Health Nursing, Evidence Based Research and Practice, Leadership & Management, and Ethical & Legal Issues in Nursing.

During the project 23 students from Europe have studied abroad for a minimum of one academic year in the US and 15 ECTS credits in a second EU country. 24 US students have spent similar time periods in two of the three EU institutions. The language of instruction was English however WU students also gained an understanding of Finnish and/or Hungarian. The student mobility started in August 2010.

The double degree in nursing has been a true innovation for the nursing profession. TADD has been globalized nursing curriculum and started the process of government recognition and professional accreditation of this and future double degree initiatives. Internationalization of the curriculum improve the quality of nursing education and provide opportunities for employment in a broader environment than previously experienced. TADD provided opportunities for enhancement of nursing policy, science and practice as professional registered nurses work in an international environment. Nursing students and future nurses benefit by enhanced career mobility, language skills and understanding of culture to facilitate adjustment to a new global working environment.

For faculty, TADD facilitated trust and cooperation between participating universities and heightened cultural awareness that benefits academics working with multicultural societies and populations. Faculty transferred new knowledge concerning educational methodologies, language and cultural sensitivity, and technological advancements.

Keywords: Nursing, Education, Double degree, Curriculum.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to describe experiences of four nursing programs participating to develop a double-degree program for undergraduate nursing students. The 5 years TADD-project developed and implemented a recognized and accredited undergraduate transatlantic double degree in nursing between EU (Finland, Northern Ireland, Hungary) and USA.

European population is ageing rapidly. This increases demand and complexity of healthcare services. The presence of trained healthcare providers is essential to a country's ability to meet its citizens' needs for healthcare services. The global marketplace and new technology are contributing to the rapid globalization of healthcare services and demand of health care professionals. (Hornberger et al. 2014.) Nursing is not exempt from these changes, and must adapt in order to be competitive in a global market. As a result of globalization, higher education is no longer provided solely within national borders. (Collins & Hewer 2014.)

A key element of nursing's call for innovation is a call for reform within higher education by targeting focus on globalization of curricula. To share international educational experiences can be created through increased internationalization efforts such as expanded student mobility exchanges. (Hornberger et al. 2014.) The demand for nurses worldwide has highlighted the need for nurses who are eligible for licensure in countries other than their country of origin and education. The importance of such mobility and universal recognition of qualifications between countries and continents is inherent within the Bologna Declaration 1999.

The idea behind the Bologna Declaration was that Europe would unify their systems of higher education. The Declaration outlined a process to create European Higher Education Area (EHEA 2010), whose goal was to establish a wide and transparent range of high-quality courses, along with universally recognized procedures to foster student mobility and employability. The longterm goal of the EHEA is to make education within Europe more compatible, comparable, and competitive to attract both students and scholars worldwide.

Promoting the mobility of students, teachers and researchers, ensures high quality teaching and incorporates the European dimension into higher education. (Europa 2014.)

The revised Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive defines health care personnel professional qualifications between relevant European Member States (EU 2013). Bologna process has bring the competency-based programs, modernization and standardization higher education system. Full implementation of Bologna has been critical for the development of nursing program competencies to accept across borders. (Collins & Hewer 2014.) The European Union (EU) and United States combined efforts to achieve these higher education objectives by creating the Atlantis program in 2007. (EU 2006.) The The implementation of Transatlantic Double Degree in Nursing (TADD) program are responding to the call to develop new models of education that meet the needs of rapidly changing health care environments (Application 2009).

Goals of the TADD Project

The general objective of the grant was to prepare student nurses for more universal practice in the EU and United States. Students and faculty were building new competencies in languages, cultural understanding, and use of technology in the delivery of primary and population-based health care to diverse populations. Although not a primary objective of the grant, the partners did acknowledge the value of preparing graduates able to practice in another country.

Project activities included developing a joint study program, languages and cultural training implementing transatlantic student and faculty mobility. The purpose was to prepare student nurses for more universal practice in the EU and US; understanding the current and futures trends to globalize nursing care, built new competencies in languages and increased cultural understanding among diverse population. (Application 2009.)

Specific Objectives in Cooperation with four Participant Universities Were to

- 1) establish and evaluate a recognized and accredited undergraduate double- degree program in nursing
- 2) expand higher education institutions' and faculties' skills in international education and network development.
- 3) enhance students' personal and professional growth by offering transatlantic mobility with a focus on culture and language studies, professional nursing leadership, research and evidence – based nursing.
- 4) expand faculty worldview as they develop international programs and attain the skills needed to implement TADD. (Application 2009.)

Activities

EU-US faculty compared curricula and its philosophical and pedagogical foundations in the grant partners’ programs to find the consensus of the TADD - curriculum. Eventually the curriculum consisted four common core courses (Community Health Nursing, Ethical and legal issues in Nursing, Evidence based research and practice, Leadership and Management, Language and Culture studies) based on partners’ existing curricula. In addition, each university had partner specific courses; WU simulation, QUB trauma nursing, USZ socially disadvantaged nursing and MUAS primary health care.

The additional studies depended on the requirements of nursing degree in each partner country. At WU depended on the evaluation of earlier education (ECE-evaluation). WU required Health Assessment and Nursing Concept courses and some general topics such as cultural anthropology and sociology. Both MUAS and USZ required the Bachelor Thesis, maturity test and more clinical practice to meet the EU directives of nursing. QUB stipulated that WU students must spend the whole academic year at QUB and complete 60 ECTS credits.

Language and culture studies were required by grant. The USA students studied Hungarian and Finnish language to be able to begin to use professional language during the exchange especially in hospitals and health care centers where they were practicing. Courses were taught in English in Finland and Hungary. TOELF-test was demanded by Finnish and Hungarian students before they could started studies at WU. TOELF- test measures your ability to use and understand English at the university level (ETS 2015).

First of all it was necessary to analyze student workload similarities and differences in each university. Student workload and recognizing earned credits were primary principles in the development of the curriculum. The partners’ grading and credit systems were benchmarked and student workload was compared in the construction of the double degree program. Faculty created a plan for curricular conversion between ECTS, CATS and Credit systems of the four universities to establish equitable workload patterns for nursing students and to add transparency between partners’ nursing programs (table 1). The workload of students is thus comparable.

Table 1. Student Workload comparisons between the four partner university.

UNIVERSITY	STUDENT WORKLOAD IN CLOCK HOURS/ 1 ECTS					
	THEORY			PRACTICE		
	Total	contact	indep.	Total	contact	indep.
MUAS ¹	27,0	14,0	13,0	27,0	27,0	0,0
USZ ¹	30,0	14,0	16,0	30,0	28,0	2,0
QUB ²	23,6	3,6	20,0	incalculable, integrated in theory		
WU ³	30,0	7,5	22,5	45,0	22,5	22,5

Credit system in use: ¹ ECTS
² CATS, 1 CATS=0,5 ECTS
³ CREDIT HOURS, 1 CREDIT HOUR= 2 ECTS

In Finland and Hungary all double degree nursing courses should articulate student learning outcomes and workload expectations using ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). ECTS-system, student workload as well as grading scale (table 2) has been developed together for comparable and all are in use in partner institutions. Partners committed to use the Diploma Supplement, which facilitates the professional recognition for a double degree.

Table 2. Grading scale of the partner universities.

ECTS	MUAS	QUB	USZ	WU
A Excellent	5	A 70-100%	5	A 91 - 100%
B Very good	4	B 60-69%	4	B 83 – 90.99%
C Good	3	C 50-59%	3	C 75 – 82.99%
				Acceptable minimum threshold for passing
D Highly Satisfactory	2	D 40-49%	2	D 66 – 74.99%
E Satisfactory	1		2	
Fail	0	E < 40% = failed	1	F < 65%
FX (some more work required)				
F (considerable further work required)				

Findings

Students participating the double degree programme were successful. During the 5 year project there has been 23 students from Europe and 24 students from USA studying for a minimum of one academic year in the US and 15 ECTS credits in a second EU partner country. 26 students has completed the double degree in nursing and enhanced their possibility on the global labor market.

The role of nurse was found to be different in each country. It is evident that students need unique knowledge of health systems of each country. Nursing students gained personal and professional experience while studying within other institutions and countries of different cultures. The language and cultural competence to provide nursing care increased though it was found that language preparation is essential. ECE evaluation process is time-consuming.

It was noticed that European students are not accustomed to quantitative assessment strategies and US students are not to the qualitative assessment. The bachelor thesis was challenging for US-students and diploma supplement was unfamiliar to US.

The workload of students is comparable. ECTS-system, grading and student workload have been developed together with European and US faculties. ECTS-credit system and home grading scale are using in all partner institutions. Nursing curriculum and teaching methods are globalized. Undergraduate double degree in nursing is recognized and accredited.

EU-US faculty has put in place the curriculum for a double degree in nursing, which will have benefits for both faculty and students. For faculty the added value will be affording insights into educational methodologies used in partner institutions, and also cultural and technological expertise. Professional networking in areas of curriculum development and teaching and learning methods have provided prospects for completion of comparative research to enhance nursing education and practice

internationally. Faculty has been able to transfer new knowledge concerning educational methodologies, language and cultural sensitivity, and technological advancements.

There is one published article already and in addition four manuscripts are in process.

Conclusions

Double degrees offer the opportunity to obtain the required competencies within each country, though at a slightly higher cost. However, the costs are generally lower than the cost to obtain each degree separately from the two institutions. Similarly, both types of degree programs offer completion in less time than if done separately. Both programs provide for graduates employability options in the institutions' country.

It has been found that among the transatlantic degree programs, the double degrees were much more common than the joint degree programs. Seventy-six percent (76%) of EU institutions offered double degrees and twenty-six percent (26 %) offered joint degrees. In the United States, 68 % offered double degrees, whereas 13 % offered joint degrees. In general, joint degrees are considered more complex because of the requirement of two institutions agreeing upon a complete curriculum that meets institutional and regulatory requirements (Obst & Kuder 2009).

Health problems and global challenges are similar although there is national and narrower local demands for developing nursing profession. Diminished economical resources effects on the structures and practices of nursing. The goal of Bologna process has established a uniform, transparent and efficient development of professionals in a higher education system.

The education is aimed to react in a flexible way to the challenges of increasing globalization and the changes in the labor market. (Betlehem et al. 2009.)

The transatlantic double degree (TADD) in nursing is a true innovation for the nursing profession. Currently, each country must meet specific criteria and regulations to offer the nursing degree. TADD adds value for the proposed discipline and profession and will enhance the professional leadership capability on both sides of the Atlantic. Double degree programme made academic degrees comparable and promotes mobility in EU and USA.

Transparency in nursing education has been one of TADD goals. It would be valuable to evaluate how transatlantic projects like TADD can increase educational transparency and students' working possibilities across the borders.

The project carried out globalized nursing curriculum. The process of government recognition and professional accreditation has established. Future double degree in nursing education initiatives has already accepted. The bilateral Agreement of the Double Degree in Nursing undersigned between Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences, Savonlinna, Finland and Washburn University, Kansas, USA in June 2014.

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