

# **Nursing Education Content in Master's in Nursing Programs**

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L'admission à la pratique infirmière au niveau du baccalauréat présume qu'il y a des infirmières adéquatement préparées pour enseigner à ce niveau. Cette étude a pour but de décrire le contenu relatif à la préparation des enseignantes dans les programmes de maîtrise en sciences infirmières au Canada. Cette étude est une répétition partielle de l'étude d'Oermann et Jamison (1989) qui portait sur les programmes américains de maîtrise en sciences infirmières. Un questionnaire et une lettre explicative furent postés aux doyens/directrices des dix programmes de maîtrise canadiens de langue anglaise. Le pourcentage de retour des questionnaires fut de 100%. Sept des dix programmes offrent un ou des cours concernant l'éducation tandis que pour deux des trois autres, il est requis de suivre un ou des cours en éducation offerts par d'autres facultés. Les résultats indiquent que les cours relatifs à l'éducation en sciences infirmières incluent une variété de sujets. Aucun modèle ne se dégage de cette étude quant aux exigences pour la préparation au rôle d'infirmière enseignante. Des questions sont donc posées à savoir si au Canada anglais les programmes de maîtrise en sciences infirmières offrent en ce domaine une préparation adéquate.

Baccalaureate entry into practice presumes that there is a cadre of nurses with adequate preparation to teach students at the baccalaureate level. The purpose of this study was to describe the nursing education component of Canadian master's in nursing programs. This study was a partial replication of Oermann and Jamison's (1989) study of master's in nursing programs in the United States. A questionnaire and cover letter were mailed to the Deans/Directors of the 10 Canadian master's programs where English is the language of instruction. The return rate was 100%. Seven of the 10 programs offered nursing education coursework, while two of the remaining three required education coursework outside of nursing. The findings indicate that the nursing education courses covered a variety of topics, but had no fixed requirements for preparation for the role of nurse teacher. We question whether current master's in nursing programs constitute adequate preparation for the role of nurse teacher in English Canada.

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and various professional associations are in favour of having the baccalaureate degree as the minimal educational qualification for entry into nursing practice by the year 2000. This position requires an adequate number of qualified nurse educators, yet there has been no systematic attempt to determine if Canadian master's in nursing programs are preparing students for the role of nurse teacher. The current study attempts to address this issue by focusing on the nursing education component in master's in nursing programs in Canada.

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### Literature Review

Very few reports have been published on master's education as preparation for the role as nurse teacher. A 20-year review of the literature indicated that the teacher role has been identified as appropriate for master's prepared nurses (McPhail, 1971). Moreover, a study of nurses who had undertaken master's degrees in a clinical area indicated that they preferred a program that also included teaching, administration and clinical preparation. (Donley, Jepson, & Perloff, 1973).

Fitzpatrick and Heller (1980) identified a dearth of qualified nurse educators. They expressed concern about the proliferation of clinically focused master's programs, with a concomitant decrease in teaching and administration oriented programs. This shift toward preparation for advanced clinical practice at the master's level had decreased the pool of nurses who were prepared for the role of nurse educators. These authors identified several problems that arose when clinicians were used to fill teaching roles, including: lack of understanding of the teaching function, curriculum development, test design and evaluation; and poor socialization into the academic milieu. Substantial institutional resources were therefore diverted into educating new faculty members to fill the roles for which they were hired. Moreover, Beare et al. (1980) identified actual and ideal content in master's curricula, and found that of 53 content areas only three were related to the teaching role (teaching-learning process, teaching-learning theory, and testing and measurement). In addition, less than 25% of the programs in their study offered any content related to the teaching role.

McKevitt (1986) compared National League for Nursing-accredited master's programs for 1979 and 1984 to identify trends in master's of education in nursing over a five-year period. The 1979 sample consisted of 81 master's level graduate programs, and the 1984 sample consisted of 118 programs. The data came from program catalogues and brochures, and the 1979 and 1985 editions of *Master's Education in Nursing: Route to Opportunities in Contemporary Nursing*, published by the National League for Nursing (NLN). The data were analyzed, "to identify changes in program admission requirements, program offerings, and thesis or comprehensive examination requirements" (McKevitt, 1986, p. 225). McKevitt found a significant decrease in the number of nursing programs offering education as a primary area of study between 1979 and 1984. This is associated with an increase in specialty major areas of clinical practice and gives credence to Fitzpatrick and Heller's (1980) concerns.

To examine the nursing education component of master's programs in the United States, Oermann and Jamison (1989) conducted an exploratory descriptive study using a mailed questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 26 open- and closed-ended questions. There were three sections to the questionnaire addressing: (a) characteristics of the master's program in nursing; (b) characteristics of the nursing education functional areas; and (c) characteristics of the respondent. For sample questions from each of these sections see Figure 1, next page.

Of 139 possible respondents (all NLN accredited master's programs), 92 (66.2%) completed the questionnaire. Of these, 10 (10.9%) programs offered a major in nursing education; 66 (71.7%) programs offered some coursework in nursing education; and 15 (16.3%) programs offered no courses in nursing education. A literature review revealed that no comparable study had been conducted of master's nursing programs in Canada. However, Stinson, Field and Thibaudeau's (1988) overview of "selected characteristics of Canada's 11 nursing masters' programs" 1985-1986 (p. 344) revealed that only three programs offered a nursing education option. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify and describe the nursing education component in Canadian master's in nursing programs.

### **Method**

This was an exploratory descriptive study using a mailed questionnaire. The study proposal was approved by the Faculty of Nursing Ethics Committee. The inquiry was, in part, a replication of a study conducted by Oermann and Jamison (1989) in the United States. We obtained permission to use and/or adapt the questionnaire from the senior author.

The questionnaire was mailed to the Deans/Directors of the 10 master's in nursing programs (where English is the language of instruction) in Canada. A cover letter invited participation in the study, explained its purpose, and gave instructions for completing and returning the questionnaire. Three weeks later, a follow-up postcard reminder was sent to each of the Deans/Directors. Consent to participate was implied by return of the completed questionnaire.

The self-administered questionnaire was designed to collect information about: (a) the characteristics of the master's in nursing program and (b) the nursing education component of the program. Oermann and Jamison (1989) stated that content validity and reliability of the researcher-developed questionnaire were established in a pilot project, but no details are available. In order to adapt the instrument for use with a Canadian population we deleted questions which were not relevant, such as "Is your Master's Program accredited by the National League for Nursing?" and substituted "courses" for "credit hours." A panel of expert nurse educators reviewed the revised instru-

**Figure 1****Sample questions from Oermann and Jamison's (1989) data collection tool.****I. Characteristics of Master's Program**

3. What types of Master's Programs are available to students?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Full-time.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Part-time.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Full-time and Part-time.

6. What degree is awarded upon completion of your Master's Program?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What are the purposes of your Master's Program?

(Check all that apply)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Prepare clinical nurse specialists.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Prepare nurse administrators.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Prepare nurse educators.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Other.

**II. Characteristics of Nursing Education Functional Area**

10. What types of programs do you offer in nursing education?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Major in Master's Program.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Minor in Master's Program.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Other:

12. What is the number of *required* nursing courses? \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is the number of elective nursing education courses? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do students complete education courses other than ones in nursing education?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Yes.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. No.

**III. Characteristics of Respondent**

23. What is your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

25. What is your highest degree?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Doctorate in nursing.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Doctorate in other field.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Master's in nursing.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Master's in other field.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Other (specify)

Note: The senior author provided us with the questionnaire.



ment for validity. Several suggested changes were incorporated into the final version. Although Oermann and Jamison (1989) analyzed their data using descriptive statistics, t-test and chi square, such analysis was not possible in the current study due to the small sample size. Instead, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## Results

### *Characteristics of the Master's Programs*

The 10 master's programs surveyed offered opportunities for full- or part-time study. Admission requirements included: (a) a baccalaureate degree in nursing (although three programs also admitted registered nurses with non-nursing baccalaureate degrees); (b) the minimum equivalent of a B average (one program also required a Graduate Record Examination total score of 1500); (c) all but one program required an undergraduate statistics course; (d) six programs required one or more years of clinical nursing experience; and (e) six programs required a research methods course. In addition, five programs required evidence of current nursing registration or eligibility for registration.

According to our findings, each year approximately 217 to 231 students enrol in master's programs and 160 to 179 students graduate. These figures are not in agreement with the data available in *A Compendium of Canadian Graduate Programs in Nursing 1991* (CAUSN, 1991). The latter reports approximately 171 to 202 admissions ( $n=9$ , one school did not respond), and approximately 141 graduates in 1990 ( $n=9$ , another school did not respond).

In the current study, the number of full-time faculty who taught exclusively in the graduate programs ranged from 1 to 11, with a mode of 6. In one program, the faculty taught in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. For faculty who taught part-time in the graduate program, the range was 2 to 10 with a mode of 5.

Of the nine respondents who answered the question regarding the purpose(s) of the program, all prepared graduates for more than one role: eight prepared advanced level nurse clinicians, eight prepared nurse administrators, seven prepared nurse educators, and four nurse specialists/nurse practitioners. The number of courses/credits required to complete the degree varied from institution to institution. At the end of the master's program, six programs awarded an MN degree, three an MScN degree, and one either an MSc or an MSc (applied).

### *Characteristics of the Nursing Education Courses*

The findings revealed that seven of the 10 master's programs offered nursing education coursework; of the other three, two required students to take education courses from another discipline.

The number of nursing education courses offered in six of the seven programs (the respondent from one program did not complete the page with this information) were as follows: two programs offered one nursing education course, three programs offered two courses, and one program offered a full course plus six half courses. In two of the six programs nursing education courses were required, and in two other programs they were elective. Five of the six programs offered at least one elective, but in one case the elective was offered in alternate years.

Typically, respondents indicated that the purpose of the nursing education coursework was to prepare the graduates for teaching in a college/university setting (e.g., diploma/baccalaureate nursing programs). Graduates from one program were also prepared to teach in a clinical setting such as staff development, or patient/health education. Each year a total of approximately 47 to 55 students chose nursing education coursework and between 41 and 48 of the graduating class completed nursing education coursework.

In four programs the required courses in nursing education included content on learning theory, curriculum development theory, teaching methods, testing, grading/marking, evaluation theory, clinical teaching and evaluation, teacher evaluation, and academic advisement and counselling (Table 1). Only one program included content on multimedia and computer-assisted instruction. Four programs offered electives in nursing education. The electives included course content in curriculum development theory, teaching methods, evaluation theory, clinical teaching, program evaluation, and accreditation. Only one program offered a practicum elective.

The nursing education courses provided students with a variety of learning experiences. The most frequently reported experiences were: curriculum/course development, classroom and clinical teaching, academic advisement and counselling, test construction, development and use of media, grading/marking student assignments, clinical evaluation of students, evaluation of classroom teaching, and program evaluation (Table 2). In two programs, students who chose nursing education coursework were required to take an elective(s) in education.

The number of faculty teaching the nursing education courses in each program ranged from 1 to 3, with a mode of 1. The highest academic degree held by these faculty members were as follows: doctorate in nursing, two;

doctorate in other than nursing, four; master's in nursing, two; master's in other than nursing, two.

### Discussion

All the master's programs provide opportunities for full- or part-time study, allowing nurses who are employed to pursue graduate education as part-time students. Emphasis of the master's programs is primarily on the preparation of advanced level practitioners. Hence, the programs provide opportunities for students to develop knowledge and clinical expertise. One positive result of this focus is that it ensures aspiring nurse educators are

**Table 1**

**Frequencies of Course Content/Topics in Required and Elective Courses, as Reported by Respondents (N=7)**

<sup>1</sup> Content	Required n	Electives n
No required nursing education courses	1	
No elective nursing education courses		2
Learning theory	4	
Curriculum development theory	4	3†
Teaching methods	5	2†
Instructional design	2	1†
Multimedia	1	—
Computer-assisted instruction	1	—
Testing	4*	1†
Grading/marking	4	—
Evaluation theory	5	2†
Clinical teaching	5	2†
Clinical evaluation	5	1†
Program evaluation	3	2†
Accreditation	2	2†
Teacher evaluation	5*	1
Academic advisement and counselling	4*	—
a) Other: Brief discussion of student/teacher rights; and philosophy of education	1	—
b) Other: Historical examination		1

\* One of the respondents reported limited coverage of these content areas.

† For one program the elective is a practicum.

1 Source: M.H. Oermann and M.T. Jamison, *Nursing Education Component in Master's Program* questionnaire. Unpublished.

**Table 2**

**Frequencies of Types of Learning Experiences in Master's Programs, as Reported by Respondents (N=7)**

<sup>2</sup> Learning Experiences	n
Classroom teaching experience	3
Clinical teaching experience	4
Academic advisement and counselling	3
Clinical evaluation of students	4
Curriculum/course development	6
Test construction	4
Grading/marking of students	3
Development of media	3
Use of media	3
Evaluation of classroom teaching	3
Program evaluation	5
Other (please specify):	
Post conference teaching; and either lab teaching or seminar/lecture	1

1 Source: M.H. Oermann and M.T. Jamison, *Nursing Education Component in Master's Program* questionnaire. Unpublished.

competent practitioners. Practitioner competence for teachers was identified as "the single most important finding" of McLane's study (1978, p.53).

Seven of the 10 master's programs offer some coursework in nursing education. Furthermore, these programs all claim that one of their purposes is to prepare nurse educators. In other words, students who enrol in any one of these programs can pursue a program of study to prepare them to be teachers of nursing. Our conjecture is that the nursing education component provides only an overview of curriculum design, test construction, clinical teaching and evaluation methods, instruction strategies, and technology. These have been identified as "basic competencies" for nurse educators (Fitzpatrick and Heller, 1980). Graduates of these programs may therefore not acquire the in-depth knowledge and skills that are considered foundational to the teaching role. In addition, although significant gains are being made in the availability of computer aided instruction programs, multimedia teaching aids, and interactive videos, only one program provides any opportunity for learning about these.

In order to achieve in-depth knowledge in the relevant areas, more extensive nursing education coursework would be required. However, this does not



mean that all of the courses must be taught by nursing; some, such as test construction, instruction strategies, and technology, could be taken as electives in other disciplines. Courses in curriculum design, clinical teaching, and evaluation methods should be taught by nurses, as the content for these courses must be relevant to the perspectives and goals of nursing.

In conclusion, we found that seven out of 10 Canadian master's in nursing programs offer nursing education coursework. But, inasmuch as each course covers a variety of topics, and the number of nursing education courses in any program is very limited, it may be that Canadian master's in nursing programs are not adequately preparing students for the role of nurse teacher. To pursue this issue from a different perspective, we are planning a future study to explore what nurse educators have to say about their educational preparation for teaching.

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