

ARTICULATION AND BACCALAUREATE ENTRY TO PRACTICE: THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

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This is a response to the article "Articulation and Baccalaureate Entry to Practice" by Ruth Gallop, in the Winter 1984 issue of *Nursing Papers*. In the article, she succinctly presented a case against articulation even as a temporary educational alternative for the preparation of a baccalaureate registered nurse, and she concluded that articulation may undermine the very concept of a professional discipline approach. She further asserted that, "In an articulated program the curriculum design would reflect diploma values at the first level" (p. 61) and that, "Articulation is a means by which nursing looks over its shoulder and tries to make up for past mistakes" (p. 61).

The purpose of this paper is to present a case for articulation as one mechanism for achieving baccalaureate entry to practice, with specific reference to the Canadian context. As noted by Gallop (1984), debate about the quality and validity of articulated programs has primarily been carried on in the American nursing literature. Stevens (1981) stated that the battle over whether or not American associate degree nursing programs should articulate with baccalaureate programs has raged for almost twenty years without resolution. The development of anti- and pro-articulation camps has made American nursing vulnerable to charges of disorganization and has weakened it as a political body, "since others see us as unable to reach, let alone enact, a single political decision" (Stevens, 1981, p. 706).

Canadian Nursing Education Articulation

Until recently, articulation of diploma and baccalaureate nursing education has not been as controversial in Canada as it has been in the United States. Canadian post-R.N. baccalaureate programs, particularly in Alberta and British Columbia, have existed specifically to accommodate diploma program graduates. Progress of students from diploma to post-R.N. baccalaureate programs, without loss of time or credit, has been facilitated, at the

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University of Alberta for example, by the elimination of on-campus residency requirement, the elimination of one year's work experience for admission, the availability of part-time learning, the provision for credit by challenge examination, and the granting of transfer credit for both support and nursing courses. During the past seven years in Alberta, the number of nurses enrolling in, and graduating from, post-R.N. baccalaureate programs has increased by almost two hundred and fifty percent, as is shown by Table 1.

Table 1

Numbers of Enrollees and Graduates of Alberta Post-R.N. Baccalaureate Nursing Education Programs, 1978-79 to 1984-85

Academic Year	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Enrollments:							
First Year	100	102	197	213	179	229	295
Second Year	108	119	109	176	208	175	215
Total	208	221	306	389	387	404	510
Graduates	77	98	100	148	182	161	186

Source: Alberta Advanced Education (1983 & 1985)

Articulation attempts in Alberta

Although little attempt has been made to articulate diploma and basic or generic baccalaureate nursing programs in Canada (Shantz, 1985), two notable exceptions have both taken place in Alberta. These exceptions were the University of Alberta's Nursing Education Articulation Project, undertaken in 1980-81 and funded by the Interpresidential Committee, and the University of Calgary's Articulation Pilot Project, funded in 1983 for a two-year period by Alberta Advanced Education.

In June, 1980, the Joint University of Alberta/University of Alberta Hospitals Committee (composed of the Presidents of the two institutions and frequently referred to as the Interpresidential Committee) endorsed a feasibility study with respect to possible articulation arrangements between the Faculty of Nursing and the University of Alberta Hospitals School of Nursing. A major recommendation of the project team selected by the Interpresidential Committee was that a third route to the baccalaureate degree in nursing, other than the existing post-R.N. and generic programs, be

created. This third route would be developed and implemented jointly by the Faculty of Nursing and the University of Alberta Hospitals School of Nursing. It would be available only to students admitted simultaneously to the Faculty and the School. This program would not exceed four years, and would provide the student with an exit and re-entry option prior to completion of degree requirements that would only be available after a minimum of 24 months of enrollment. The intent, however, was that all students entering the third program route would complete a baccalaureate degree in nursing. Although the institutions decided, at that time, not to proceed with development of this third route for articulation, the Faculty of Nursing has continued to encourage closer program articulation between Alberta diploma programs and its post-R.N. baccalaureate degree program.

The University of Calgary's Articulation Pilot Project evolved from interests expressed by members of the faculty and by those responsible for diploma programs at Mount Royal College and Foothills Hospital School of Nursing. The goal of the resultant project "included studying the feasibility of articulation through existing mechanisms as one means of achieving and increasing the proportion of actively registered nurses in Alberta with educational preparation at the baccalaureate level" (The University of Calgary, 1985, p. v). From a detailed comparison of participant program curricula in both diploma programs, it was determined that articulation was feasible at the end of Year One, but not at the end of Year Two. Subsequently, a group of five students from Foothills Hospital School of Nursing was admitted to the Faculty of Nursing during Spring Session, 1985. These students all successfully completed a required science credit course in which they were deemed deficient as well as a non-credit nursing course that was designed to "bridge" the gap between programs and to provide an orientation to the baccalaureate program.

Although the University of Calgary's Articulation Pilot Project was deemed successful in developing a prototype pattern for assessing comparability between diploma and generic programs and successful in identifying a means by which students from one educational institution could enter a different program without excessive loss of time or academic credit, in view of existing enrollment constraints in the baccalaureate programs the process required was not considered cost effective. Baccalaureate program attrition determined the number of diploma students who could be articulated. The Final Report recommended that "Alternative approaches to inter-institutional collaboration and transfer credit warrant comparable careful examination as potential avenues for increasing access to baccalaureate education in nursing in Alberta" (The University of Calgary, 1985, p. ix).

Canadian Post-Secondary Education Systems

Existing articulation of diploma and post-R.N. baccalaureate nursing programs and attempts at articulating diploma and basic or generic baccalaureate programs in Alberta, in particular, emphasize features of some Canadian post-secondary educational systems that facilitate nursing education program articulation. In all provinces, nursing education is a component of the larger provincial post-secondary system; therefore, program changes, such as baccalaureate entry to practice, affect and are affected by these post-secondary systems.

The categorizations developed by Shantz (1985) to describe the overall structure of provincial post-secondary education and the resultant interinstitutional transfer of academic credit are relevant to discussion of nursing education articulation in Canada. She identified three Canadian post-secondary systems: unitary, binary, and ternary.

Shantz's categorizations

The unitary system, found only in Quebec, is a four-tiered educational system composed of primary and secondary schools, the Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEPs), and the universities. The CEGEPs provide both university transfer courses and terminal technical/vocational courses. There are currently forty-two diploma nursing programs in the CEGEPs. Students entering Quebec's university degree nursing programs may do so either after completing grade eleven in the secondary schools and completing their beginning general education courses in the CEGEP system, or after completion of diploma nursing programming offered by the CEGEPs. They then proceed to professional education in the university system. Three years of university study are required for a basic or generic baccalaureate degree in nursing (Shantz, 1985, pp. 94-95).

The binary system of post-secondary education is found in the Atlantic provinces, Ontario, and Manitoba and is characterized by separation of university and non-university sectors. In Ontario, for example, the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) provide non-university education and there is virtually no transfer of academic credit between the CAATs and Ontario universities. All Ontario diploma nursing education programs, except Ryerson's, are presently centred in the CAATs. Ryerson Polytechnical Institute is now a degree granting institution that sponsors both diploma and post-R.N. degree programs. It intends to convert its diploma program to a basic degree program in 1988 (Shantz, 1985, p. 92). Hospital diploma schools of nursing in the Atlantic provinces and Manitoba, similarly, do not offer transfer credits to the universities.

In the ternary system, in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, post-secondary education is made up of three overlapping components: universities, colleges, and technical or vocational institutes. Colleges tend to combine university-oriented education with other types. In all three of these provinces, transfer of credit for courses taken at a college (and in particular at regional colleges) is encouraged. Transfer of credit is coordinated by the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer and, in British Columbia, by the Articulation Committee. Saskatchewan's community college system operates on a brokerage basis; however, these colleges have no fixed campuses, facilities, or on-going programs. Diploma nursing education in Saskatchewan is sponsored by the technical institutes – a situation similar to that of the CAATs in Ontario. In comparison to Saskatchewan, diploma nursing students from colleges in Alberta and British Columbia may be eligible for transfer of credit to university programs within the same province. Additionally, in Alberta, some transfer of hospital diploma nursing course credit to the post-R.N. program at the University of Alberta is possible. Hospital program courses that are eligible for university transfer credit are taught by university or university-approved faculty as an 'off-campus' course.

Figure 1 on the next page describes Shantz's (1985) categorization of Canadian post-secondary educational systems.

Downward planning

Quebec's unitary post-secondary system and the ternary system found in Alberta and British Columbia provide evidence that it is theoretically and practically possible to design college nursing programs that articulate with baccalaureate nursing programs. Such downward planning has been described by Stevens (1981) who demonstrated that diploma programs can be planned so that graduates are prepared to meet the constraints of the baccalaureate program to which they aspire. In downward planning, the focus is on what can be done in the lower-level program to prepare the student for advancement to the higher-level program, not on what accommodation the higher-level program must make to accept the student from the lower-level program. Downward planning allows functional curriculum planning in all articulated programs. Its advantages include avoiding superficial information in early programs, espousing antithetical philosophies, and admitting students who are incapable of higher-level advancement (Stevens, 1981, p. 705).

Technical and professional nursing

Another uniquely Canadian factor that facilitates articulated baccalaureate nursing education is the absence of any clear-cut distinction between so-

Unitary System: eg. Quebec



Binary System: eg. Ontario



Ternary System: eg. Alberta

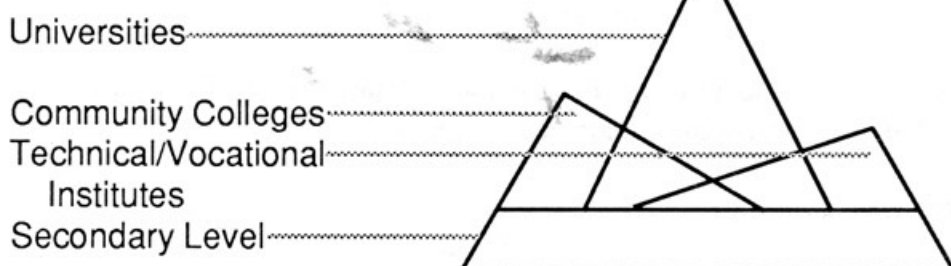


Figure 1: Canadian Post-Secondary Education Systems

Reproduced with permission from the author (Shantz, 1985).

called 'professional' and 'technical' nursing practice. The American Nurses' Association's 1965 and 1978 position statements on entry to practice drew a clear distinction between such practices. Technical nurses were to be prepared in associate degree (diploma) programs and professional nurses in baccalaureate programs (American Nurses' Association, 1980). Further, in 1978 the ANA adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of a mechanism for deriving a comprehensive statement of competencies for these two categories of nursing practice by 1980 as well as a resolution that ANA ensure that the two categories of nursing practice be clearly identified and titled by that year (American Nurses' Association, 1980). This formal distinction polarized American nurses. Articulation opponents perceived associate degree nursing education as being unique, terminal, and different from baccalaureate nursing education (Kramer, 1981; Montag,

1980). Pro-articulation forces expressed belief in the need for career progression for nurses (Church, Brian, & Searight, 1980). Stevens (1981) commented that the history of articulation in American nursing is one of politics disguised as facts!

Baccalaureate Entry to Practice in Alberta

Implementation of the Canadian Nurses' Association resolution that the baccalaureate degree be the minimum entry to practice in nursing by the year 2000 has promoted consideration of articulated baccalaureate programs as a planned educational change in some Canadian provinces. In Alberta, collaboration among directors and deans of Alberta's prelicensure nursing education programs, with respect to increased cooperative offerings for diploma and generic baccalaureate programs, is presently the concern of the Alberta Nursing Education Administrators Group. Members of the Faculty of Nursing have recently been asked by the diploma nursing program of Red Deer College to consider a collaborative approach to development of an articulated baccalaureate program that would be jointly sponsored by both Red Deer College and the University of Alberta. Such collaboration may eventually see diploma nursing programs becoming affiliates of the universities.

If a workable model of collaborative programming, or articulation, that 'meshes' current diploma resources and baccalaureate programs in some way can be developed, achieving provincial government approval of baccalaureate entry to practice could become a reality. In its November, 1977 *Position Paper on Nursing Education*, the Alberta government expressed disagreement with making a baccalaureate in nursing mandatory for practice. However, it did recommend an increase in the number of baccalaureate prepared nurses and subsequently provided a significant increase in funding to both generic and post-R.N. degree programs.

Presently, Alberta has a total of eleven diploma nursing programs, two generic baccalaureate programs, two supplementary programs to enable registered psychiatric nurses to upgrade to registered nurse status, and three post-R.N. baccalaureate programs. Of the eleven diploma programs, four are hospital-based and seven are sponsored by colleges. A comparison of numbers of enrollees and graduates from Alberta hospital diploma programs, college diploma programs and generic baccalaureate programs is presented in Table 2.

Between 1977 and 1985, enrollees in Alberta hospital diploma, college diploma, and university generic baccalaureate programs increased proportionately 36%, 82%, and 33%, respectively. For the same time period, graduates from Alberta hospital diploma programs decreased

proportionately by 4%, while those from college diploma and generic baccalaureate programs increased proportionately by 39% and 20%, respectively. During the early 1980s, based on proportionate increases in numbers of both enrollees and graduates, diploma programs sponsored by colleges constituted the fastest growing segment of Alberta's prelicensure nursing education system. This rapid growth was attributable to the significant increase in funding and placements made possible through government actions. Since 1983, there has been a levelling out of numbers of enrollees in college and hospital sponsored diploma programs.

Table 2

Numbers of Enrollees and Graduates of Alberta Prelicensure Nursing Education Programs, 1977 to 1985, by Type of Program

Academic Year	Enrollees			Graduates		
	Hospital Diploma	College Diploma	University Baccalaureate	Hospital Diploma	College Diploma	University Baccalaureate
1977/78	401	278	115	406	221	80
1978/79	417	302	112	345	204	62
1979/80	411	291	114	287	188	78
1980/81	386	318	116	314	157	62
1981/82	422	333	124	308	196	84
1982/83	520	440	143	286	230	92
1983/84	546	511	170	311	259	82
1984/85	546	506	171	388	308	96

Source: Alberta Health and Social Services Disciplines Committee (1981), and Alberta Advanced Education (1985).

In terms of absolute numbers of enrollees and graduates, Alberta hospital diploma programs are still slightly ahead of college diploma programs and both types of diploma programs are far ahead of the generic baccalaureate programs. For each generic baccalaureate program enrollee in 1984-85, there were three hospital diploma program enrollees and three college diploma program enrollees; for each generic baccalaureate graduate in Alberta, there were four hospital diploma graduates and three college diploma graduates. As shown in Table 3, the ratio of generic baccalaureate enrollees and graduates to diploma enrollees and graduates in Alberta has not improved during the past eight years.

Table 3

Ratio of First Year Enrollees and Final Year Graduates from Diploma Programs to First Year Enrollees and Final Year Graduates from Generic Baccalaureate Programs in Alberta, 1977 to 1985

Academic Year	Baccalaureate Enrollees	Diploma Enrollees	Ratio	Baccalaureate Graduates	Diploma Graduates	Ratio
1977/78	115	679	1:6	80	627	1:8
1978/79	112	719	1:6	62	549	1:9
1979/80	114	702	1:6	78	475	1:6
1980/81	116	704	1:6	62	471	1:8
1981/82	124	755	1:6	84	504	1:6
1982/83	143	960	1:7	92	516	1:6
1983/84	170	1048	1:6	82	570	1:7
1984/85	171	1052	1:2	96	696	1:7

Source: Alberta Health and Social Services Disciplines Committee (1981, 1984 & 1985) & Alberta Advanced Education (1985)

Planned Nursing Education Articulation

Data presented in Tables 2 and 3 clearly support the assertion that progress to date toward implementing baccalaureate entry to practice in Alberta has been minimal (Richardson, 1986). It is likely that the situation is similar in other Canadian provinces, for, as Shantz's 1985 national survey concluded, planning for the expansion of generic baccalaureate degree programs was at a very early stage in the spring of 1985, and the immediate pressure for most degree programs came from the increased demand for post-R.N. degree placements. Unfortunately, increasing post-R.N. baccalaureate program capacities will not alleviate the pressing need for expansion of generic baccalaureate programs to permit baccalaureate entry to practice. Presently, about 12% of Canadian nurses have baccalaureate preparation in nursing and in Alberta this proportion is no more than 16% (Statistics Canada, 1985).

The present educational, financial, and political reality in all Canadian provinces is not only that diploma nursing programs exist, but that each year they continue to prepare a significant proportion of the nurses who become eligible for licensure. Diploma nursing programs are neither likely to 'fade away' gradually from a deficit of applicants, nor are provincial governments likely to 'legislate them out of existence' in the near future.

Economically speaking, and in terms of current licensure, a nurse-is-a-nurse-is-a-nurse. Generic baccalaureate graduates must pass the same national examination as diploma graduates and usually begin their nursing careers in the same kinds of practice environments. Provincial governments fund all nursing education programs and are cognizant that, from a manpower point of view, diploma prepared nurses enter the labour force in half the time required by generic baccalaureate nurses and at probably half the cost.

In several Canadian provinces articulated baccalaureate nursing education programming is one viable mechanism for working toward baccalaureate entry to practice. Downward program planning for articulation can ensure quality of education in articulated baccalaureate programs. Post-secondary education systems in several provinces – notably Alberta and British Columbia – have been planned and developed to facilitate transfer of credit between colleges and universities. An environment supportive of articulated baccalaureate nursing education already exists in these provinces.

Additionally, articulated baccalaureate nursing education need not be synonymous with the so-called 'two plus two' approach that is philosophically opposed by many university nursing faculty. Replacing diploma programming with university transfer programming constitutes a broader approach to articulation. Replacement programming is a significantly different way of thinking about articulation as no diploma exit is involved; that is to say, the first two years do not stand alone as a distinct and complete program and there is no 'graduate' to receive a diploma or enter nursing practice. Conceptually, this type of articulation might be described as 'collaborative' or 'decentralized' baccalaureate programming. Hospital or independent diploma programs, as well as those offered by colleges, could become directly affiliated with universities and serve as off-campus locations for decentralized baccalaureate programs. Such articulation could occur in the Atlantic provinces, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia. University transfer of credit is fundamental to any conceptualization of articulated baccalaureate nursing education. Innovative solutions are required in Ontario and Saskatchewan, where diploma programs are entrenched in technical institutions that have no mechanism and no mandate for credit transfer. In Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia, where inter-institutional transferability is already well established, a broad interpretation of articulation opens up many programming possibilities.

As Stevens (1981) aptly noted, "Faculty must remember that articulation (or the lack of it) is a design decision, not a universal truth" (p. 706). Articulation need not be an attempt to correct nursing's past errors in the educational process, but rather a planned educational change that takes into account economic, political, and post-secondary education realities in Canadian provinces.

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RÉSUMÉ

Articulation et admission à l'exercice de la profession après le baccalauréat dans un contexte canadien

Cet article est une réponse à celui de Ruth Gallop, "Articulation et admission à l'exercice de la profession après le baccalauréat", qui a paru dans le numéro d'hiver 1984 de *Perspectives en nursing*. Le but de cet article est de présenter des arguments en faveur de l'articulation comme mécanisme visant l'admission à l'exercice de la profession après le baccalauréat, particulièrement en ce qui concerne le contexte canadien. On y met en lumière l'articulation actuelle diplôme-baccalauréat de la formation des infirmières en Alberta et on y discute la portée du nombre d'inscriptions et de diplômées dans les différents programmes de formation des infirmières en Alberta. L'auteur identifie les systèmes éducationnels post-secondaires dans les provinces canadiennes, qui facilitent l'articulation des programmes et le transfert de crédits universitaires entre les établissements. Elle y souligne l'importance du concept de Stevens (1981) de nivellement par la base pour l'articulation. Le présent article conclut que la formation des infirmières dans des programmes articulés de baccalauréat constitue, dans plusieurs provinces canadiennes, un mécanisme viable vers l'admission à l'exercice de la profession après le baccalauréat.