

Abstract for JoWR special issue: *Towards a blueprint for successive collaborative writing in educational and professional settings*

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Title

The Changing Nature of Interactional Patterns Associated with Learning to Write in One Baccalaureate Nursing Program

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Introduction

Recent developments in academic writing theory and pedagogy in higher education (e.g., Bazerman et al., 2012; Ganobscik-Williams, 2006) have advanced our understandings of best practices for teaching with writing (Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, 2013); of discipline-specific models of academic identity (e.g., Casey et al, 2006; Chaudoir, Oermann, Grant, Glahn, & Waugh, 2014; Lea & Stierer, 2009); and of instructional approaches that address sociocultural, cognitive, affective, and relational perspectives of learning to write in disciplinary contexts (e.g., Anson, Horning, & Chaudoir, 2014; Bean, 2011; Berninger, 2012; Werder & Otis, 2010; Zull, 2002). This has led to a growing consensus among postsecondary and higher education researchers that peer learning, writing, and collaboration are essential for student success (Rijlaarsdam et al, 2008), contribute to (meta)cognitive thinking (Marttunen & Laurinen, 2012), and prepare students for professional practice (Shulman, 2005), particularly in the health care education disciplines, such as nursing education (Benner et al, 2009).

In nursing education, writing is a primary means for teaching content, developing critical thinking, supporting the development of professional identity, and enculturating students into the discipline and profession of nursing. Nursing researchers have demonstrated that collaborative writing and peer feedback in particular improve students' writing proficiency and communication skills, both of which are deemed critical to the practice of nursing (e.g., Luthy et al., 2009; Rooda & Nardi, 1999; Schneider & Andre, 2007; Sorrell, 1988; 1998; Troxler, Vann, & Oermann, 2011; Whitehead, 2002). To our knowledge, little research has considered how baccalaureate writing assignments, as complex sites of interactional patterns, affect students' writing proficiency and communication skills across the 4-year trajectory of their baccalaureate nursing program.

This article reports findings from a case study that explored how nursing students learn to write assignments across all four years of one Canadian baccalaureate program (Chaudoir, 2013; Chaudoir & Liao, 2013). The study focused on the affective complexities and interactional patterns (i.e., individual, relational, developmental interplay) of peer learning and writing of two recurring writing assignments, which students composed in each semester of their program. The goals of the study were to identify and understand: (1) how student-instructor and peer-to-peer interactional patterns enable/constrain discipline-specific writing development across the

curriculum; and (2) how writing assignments shape students' enculturation into the discipline and profession of nursing.

Research Question(s)

1. How do students learn to write assignments in each year of a 4-year baccalaureate nursing program?
 - a. What is the nature of student-instructor and peer-to-peer interactional patterns associated with learning to write assignments across four years?
 - b. In what ways do these interactional patterns influence the development of students' professional identity?

Method

The study design was informed by the theoretical frameworks of rhetorical genre (Artemeva, 2008; Bazerman, 2004; Miller, 1984/1994) and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to explore multiple contexts of textually-oriented and sociocultural systems of writing activity, pedagogical interactions, and discursive/communicative practices of collaborative writing and revision processes. Institutional ethnography methods (Devault & McCoy, 2002; Smith, 2005) were used to focus on the practice and function as well as the intention and reception of collaboratively writing the assignment. Three complementary analytic tools of institutional ethnography methods were:

- (1) *voluntary, semi-structured interviews* with nursing instructors and students;
- (2) *observations* of in-class writing instruction, peer collaboration, group writing, co-writing, and assignment-specific writing supports (such as tutorials by a WAC/WID writing specialist); and
- (3) *textual analysis* of all course materials and assignment instructions.

After receiving ethics and operational approvals, reputational case selection was made via a Faculty of Nursing liaison who invited student and instructor volunteers and facilitated access to course materials and documents (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Collection & Analysis

The sample included 37 participants (31 baccalaureate nursing students and 6 instructional/classroom tutors) from 4 courses and 4 scholarly paper and reflective journal assignments. Content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004a/b; Neuendorf, 2002) and OmniGraffle[®] software tools were used to sort and code course materials, assignment instructions, field notes, and interview transcripts. Documents and transcripts from each year were analyzed separately and iteratively. As categorical themes emerged, parent-sibling codes were established to reflect these themes.

Results

It was anticipated that students would reveal collaborative strategies or recall interesting aspects of peer collaborative writing that (dis)connected to professional growth and intellectual development, or, even, perhaps reveal good/poor teaching instruction in their program. Instead, we discovered a constellation of personal, political, relational, emotional, ideological, social, institutional, and epistemological dynamics across all four years. Findings suggested that collaborative writing needs differed as students advanced/developed through their program. We

grouped findings into two major categories: 1) connections and disconnections to learning; and 2) changing nature of peer collaboration across all four years.

Discussion

We discuss the changing nature of interactional patterns across the 4-year trajectory, its influence on learning to write in nursing, and include participants' suggestions to reform writing across the baccalaureate curriculum. Year 1 students were the most open to peer collaboration and susceptible to confusing writing instruction, which carried across all four years. Year 2 students were resistant to peer collaboration, reported competitiveness in peer-to-peer relationships, and held conflicting interests with instructors. Year 3 students developed a self-selected network of trusted, collaborative relationships that included both academic tutors and professional RNs. Year 4 students were most the most cooperative in peer collaboration and eager to complete their degree programs. Connections to learning included mentoring, trusted networks, strategic talking, and timely feedback. Disconnections included reading deficiencies; assignment-specific writing supports (e.g., WAC-specific supports limited students' writing capabilities); and assignment design that was too detailed/too vague. We conclude the article with participants' suggestions for: (1) effective instructional strategies to enable collaborative, relational interaction throughout the whole period of a nursing student's education; and (2) faculty development that specifically addresses the changing dynamics of learning collaborative writing across all four years of baccalaureate nursing.

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