Forming a nurse
– a race against time

Vibeke Ren Noer, RN, MScN, PhD
VIA Faculty of Health Sciences / VIA Ageing & Dementia Center for research,
DK-8200 Aarhus N, Denmark

Introduction
The research project zooms in on the formative processes of nursing students and newly educated nurses. The study had two primary aims:
1. To develop a more precise understanding of how nursing students handle the fundamental conditions and challenges of nursing education as well as the classic conflict between scholastic and practical elements.
2. To explore professional formation related to nursing education and transition from ‘life as a student’ to ‘life as a professional’.

Methods
Multi-sited educational ethnographic studies using multiple data collection methods: participant observation, spontaneous dialogues, interviews, digital letters and video diaries. The fieldwork covered a class of Danish nursing students during the last 18 months of their bachelor programme and the first 6 months after graduation. Based on the rich, diverse and intimate empirical collection, the educational programme was reconstructed as a formative educational journey, focusing on turning points and decisive moments of learning.

Findings
Paradigm portraits illustrating the formative educational journey reveal how nursing students attempt strategies of opting out and strategies of separation - to try to handle an educational programme dominated by crowded agendas and expectations of ‘high speed’.

Surprisingly, the high pace was not confined to the clinical learning contexts but also permeated the scholastic learning context. The alternation between learning contexts seemed embedded in the students’ awareness of being part of a profession-oriented program. However, the frequent and hasty contextual shifts between clinical settings and classroom amplify experiences of pressure and a study life being all about handling and structuring a busy schedule, overloaded curricula and coping with the constant pressure from a continuous flow of assignments, assessments and own ambitions.

Left with only little time to reflect their understanding of nursing and their sense of identity, nursing students articulated doubts about 1) their choice of profession, 2) the adequacy of their competences, and 3) their capacity to act in a practice, all leading to a constant fear of making mistakes and fear of being left alone with a high degree of responsibility.

Concluding perspectives
The findings of this study suggest that nursing educational programs with an articulated ‘need for speed’ have undesired consequences for the formation and practice of nursing students. In addition, the strategies nursing students adopt as a response to an educational programme dominated by busy agendas do not handle the demands of professional practice and are periodically transformed into survival techniques, to cope with the transfer of responsibility involved in this transition.

Creating a nursing curriculum that foster formation and reformation is needed and calls for a change of speed.

E: vino@via.dk
Twitter: @VibekeRNoer
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/vibekeroennoer