



Challenges of implementating a doctoral program in an international exchange in Cuba through the lens of Kanter's empowerment theory



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ABSTRACT

The literature in international education focuses primarily on the experiences of western students in developing countries, international students in western universities, the development of an educational program in a developing country, or internationalization of curricula in western universities. There is little in the literature that addresses the challenges students and participating faculty face when implementing a graduate program in a developing country. The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze the challenges of implementing a doctoral program in an international exchange through the lens of Kanter's theory of empowerment. Recommendations to address these challenges will be made.

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Introduction

One of the most significant challenges of nursing education in the developing world is the preparation of nurses to the doctoral level to improve leadership in nursing education, research, and practice embedded in the local context. When doctoral education in a developing nation is absent or limited, nurses continue to provide care based upon rituals and routine practices rather than evidence, and lack empowerment within their workplaces. This challenge is exacerbated in a country in which there are limited or no doctoral programs (Evans and Stevenson, 2009). Between 2004 and 2011, a team of Canadian nurse scholars and educators collaborated with the Dean of Nursing, University of Medical Sciences - Havana (UMS-H) to prepare the host country's first cohort of doctoral nursing students. This article examines the challenges experienced by Canadian faculty members and a Cuban doctoral student in the implementation of a nursing doctoral program. Through the voices of the authors and the other doctoral students, Kanter's (1977; 1993) theory of empowerment provides the lens to critically analyze the evolving experiences of the educators and learners over the course of the doctoral program.

Project background

In 2004 the project, *Strengthening nursing practice through education & research*, was funded (\$1,000,000) by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Human Resource Development (HRD) is a major priority of the host country government and nursing was identified as the health profession most in need of development. The goal of the project was to improve health and well-being at the community level by strengthening nursing's capacity. The partners in the project were the Faculty of Nursing (FON), University of Manitoba and the FON, (UMS-H), the leading medical university in the host country. There were four components to the project: i) development and implementation of a PhD program in Nursing, ii) revision of the existing Master of Nursing program and conversion of some courses to distance delivery, iii) replication of five Canadian FON research projects, and iv) continuing education. The relationship between the partners is long standing, built on mutual trust, an excellent working relationship, commitment to achieving the desired outcomes, and underpinned the success of the development project. This article will focus on the implementation of a doctoral program in the host country.

In thinking about the need for doctorally prepared nurses, the decision of the partners was to establish and teach a PhD program at UMS-H, rather than bring a few students to Canada for PhD studies. The decision of the partners to establish the PhD program at UMS-H rather than bring a select few students to Canada for doctoral study was predicated on maximizing the number of students who could benefit from doctoral studies and grounding the

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PhD program in the policies and requirements for doctoral education at Cuban universities. Most importantly, establishment of a PhD program at the host country university enhanced sustainability and built capacity in the developing country institution so that at the project end, a PhD program was sustained and recognized by the host country. The doctoral students were graduates of the Master of Nursing program, UMS-H, experienced educators, and practiced as nurses. Characteristics of the doctoral students (28–35 years) were similar to some international doctoral programs (Evans and Stevenson, 2011; Kim et al., 2009), but younger than many doctoral students in other programs (Cleary et al., 2011; Effken, 2008; Nagata et al., 2012). Canadian faculty were experienced educators who had taught in undergraduate and graduate programs.

The International Network for Doctoral Education (INDEN) was established in 2004 to provide standards and criteria for PhD programs (retrieved June 28, 2010 <http://www.umich.edu/~inden/quality/qsci12040>). A PhD program in nursing science (which met INDEN standards) was developed and approved by a national body responsible for new university program approval in Cuba. Establishment of the doctoral program in nursing was a milestone in the host country's nursing's history as this program enables nurse educators to sustain doctoral education after the completion of the project, enhancing the capacity of nursing to develop nursing knowledge relevant to their country's needs and issues. Approval of a new doctoral program in nursing signaled the importance of nursing and advanced nursing scientific education to the broader university communities and the country.

Literature review

Partnerships are a recurring theme in the international nursing education literature (e.g., Foster, 2009; Hammond and Davis, 2005; Pieper and Larcher Caliri, 2002; Sherwood and Liu, 2005; Sochan, 2008; Zheng et al., 2001). The literature concludes that the relationship between the partners in an international development or exchange project is considered essential to successful project outcomes. The literature primarily describes experiences of western students in an international exchange (e.g., Button, et al., 2005; Callister and Cox, 2006; Egenes, 2012; Evans and Stevenson, 2011; Jon, 2012; Lee, 2004; Levine, 2009; Saenz and Holcomb, 2009; Wilson, 2002), international students in western universities (e.g., Evans, 2007; Terada and Thompson, 2012; Tran, 2011), the development of an educational program in a developing country (e.g., Ketefian, et al., 2005; Leask, 2006; Ogilvie et al., 2003; Schaal et al., 2000; Ross, 2009; Sherwood and Liu, 2005; Sochan, 2008; Wollin and Fairweather, 2011), or internationalization of curricula in western universities (e.g., Allen and Ogilvie, 2004; Bartell, 2003; Parker and McMillan, 2007).

There is little or no acknowledgment in the literature of the experiences of students in developing countries who are engaged in an intensive graduate program which challenges their way of being and thinking about nursing and nursing practice. Moreover, the experiences of faculty working in the field to deliver graduate nursing education programs are not addressed in the literature. Therefore, this article makes a unique and necessary contribution to our understanding of the challenges which faculty and students experience when engaged in the implementation of a graduate program in the field. McAuliffe and Cohen (2005) contend that the description of faculty and students' experiences in these exchanges needs to include a theoretical perspective. For these reasons, the authors used Kanter's (1977; 1993) theory of empowerment as a lens through which we can examine the challenges experienced in the implementation of a doctoral program in Cuba.

Theoretical framework

Kanter (1977, 1993) contends that structures within the organization facilitate empowerment. Although Kanter's theory was developed to explain empowerment within an organization, the utility of her theory for this paper lies in the concepts and their relationship to empowerment. Power is the capacity to mobilize resources to accomplish work and identifies structural characteristics within an organization that influence an individual's ability to access and mobilize the resources of job related empowerment (Kanter, 1977, 1993; Spence Laschinger et al., 2010). Kanter (1977, 1993) accepts two types of power – formal and informal. Formal power is acquired by excellent performance of job related activities that are extraordinary, visible, or attract attention to others, and are relevant to the solution of pressing organizational problems. Informal power results from political and social alliances with sponsors, peers, and subordinates in the organization. Kanter (1977, 1993) posits that there are structures in the organization related to power: i) support, ii) information, iii) resource, and iv) opportunities. There are several types of support that are relevant in the context of this project, for example, guidance and feedback received from superiors, peers, and subordinates. Information refers to data, technical knowledge, and expertise required to function effectively in one's position. Resources are the materials, money, supplies, equipment, and time necessary to accomplish the goals. Opportunity structures enable the individual within the organization to pursue learning and development opportunities. In this article we will connect Kanter's concepts of power, support, resources, and opportunity to the experiences of the authors and other doctoral students.

Power

The capacity to mobilize resources through formal and informal power to achieve desired outcomes is essential to empowerment (Kanter, 1977, 1993). Power in relationships between students and faculty is acknowledged as an issue in the literature (e.g., Finn, 2012; Hebenstreit, 2012; Kantek and Gezer, 2010; Jon, 2012; Terada and Thompson, 2012); a participatory approach to teaching and learning is fundamental to sharing power between faculty and students (Humphreys, 2012; Jon, 2012). Understanding power in the teaching and learning relationship was a challenge for both faculty and students.

The students selected for the PhD program moved to a new paradigm of teaching and learning – one that was unfamiliar in a traditional teaching and learning environment and a relationship in which sources of power in the teacher/student relationship were shared (Humphreys, 2012; Jon, 2012). Initially, Canadian faculty members who taught the early nursing courses were unprepared for the lack of participation of the students in the classroom. Courses and assignments were developed based on *their* expectations for student learning, engagement, and shared power common to a Canadian context. Critical analysis, critique of ideas, and reflection as strategies to address scholarly issues required further development in the doctoral students. Canadian faculty quickly realized they needed to change their initial beliefs regarding learners so students could learn it was acceptable to voice their ideas and thoughts regarding the course material. Furthermore, faculty had to alter the pace of classes, create a learning environment that was safe to challenge ideas, and allow time for the students to learn how to engage in ideas foreign to their ways of thinking and beliefs about nursing (Hebenstreit, 2012; Humphreys, 2012).

Within the group of students, camaraderie developed in which peers supported one another. "*We didn't know each other when we*

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