

## FEATURE ARTICLE



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# Post Colonial Scholarship

## Abstract

Post colonial research and scholarship and its potential to transform the experiences of Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) is an area needing consideration in research today. This paper focuses on the personal experiences encountered when teaching and learning with IENs using available literature to question how nursing education is perhaps colonialist and not able to meet the needs of this vulnerable population. Findings suggest that there are macro levels of political and socio-economic influences dominating nursing education. Hence, post colonial research can assist nurses to explore and to challenge the manner in which nursing education is developed.

**Key words:** *post colonial scholarship, research, nursing practice, Internationally Educated Nurses*

Post Colonial scholarship provides nurses with powerful analytical tools to challenge the status quo and question dominant discourses that influence nursing (Kirkham & Anderson, 2002). This research approach moves beyond individual culture to explore the macro levels of politics and socio-economic influences that frame and dominate reality (Kirkham & Anderson, 2002). In this paper, I will attempt to understand how colonialism is situated in nursing education today and how post colonial scholarship can be beneficial in this area.

I currently work at an educational institution and have developed and taught curriculum to Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) who are integrating into the Canadian workforce. These IENs are diverse in terms of their country of origin, experience, level of expertise, age, gender, knowledge, skills, and judgment. In the classroom and clinical setting, I am often confronted by frustrated students who voice concerns about the nursing curriculum. Questions such as “why do we have to take courses such as pathophysiology and theory when we already took them back home”, “why don’t we have more personal classes”, “how is the curriculum developed”, and “whose purpose is the curriculum serving”, are often at the forefront of these students’ concerns. Although, I attempt to listen to these students concerns and perceptions, the underlying roots of this problem never really dawned on me until I learned about colonialism and the importance of post colonial scholarship. The main question that I have been thinking about is the following: How do political, social, and economic factors influence and play a role in dominating IEN’s nursing curriculum? I will analyze the literature to assist in answering this question to gain an understanding of how post colonial research can be applied in my workplace and to other educational institutions as well.

In my quest to discover the historical roots of nursing education, I was surprised to find minimal and many outdated studies on this phenomenon which highlights the need for further research on this area. Holmes, Roy, and Perron (2008) stated that there are dominant discourses and truths that have mapped the nursing profession and discipline. Foucault (as cited in Grant, Giddings, and Beale, 2005) declared that a discourse is an overarching system of meaning which includes social practices, rituals, language, and relations that offer coherent ways of thinking and behaving. In addition, within a discourse is the existence and execution of power relations that is believed to provide structure to a nurse's education and practice (Grant et al., 2005). In citing Grant, et al. (2005), there are many discourses that constitute and surround a nurse's practice but one of the main ones is the scientific-medical discourse. Since the nursing profession has been closely allied with the discipline of Western medicine, this discourse originates from this relationship (Grant et al., 2005). The said influence of such relationship has dominated nursing ever since the profession emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues to prevail today where nurses are often told what to do, how to perform, and what to know (Grant et al., 2005). Hence, nursing education tends to focus and to favor the study of sciences which includes anatomy, pathophysiology, and Western treatments that are believed to be important as they support physicians (Grant et al., 2005). Furthermore, nurses have been led to believe that it is acceptable for the biomedical model to exert control over the entire health care industry (Grant et al., 2005).

After reading and analyzing this discourse, I understood better why IENs should receive a sound understanding of Canadian nursing practice in order to function as a team player in the health care industry. My only concern, however, is if their learning from the biomedical model the only efficient route of discovering knowledge? Furthermore, since nursing is more than just plain science but also an art which is often missed or ignored. I also strongly believe that our curriculum is grounded and influenced by the biomedical discourse which values objective, well-grounded reasons and rationales to inform decisions and practice. In addition, the huge focus in common western practices and treatments is to provide effective care to clients. In sum, I learned why my IEN students have voiced concerns and have also came to question the curriculum as they are not allowed the opportunity to make sense of nursing practice based on their own interpretation of it—which are often the areas they would like to explore.

Furthermore, Thompson (1987) emphasized that undergraduate nursing education is situated in a strong liberal world view that is consistent with white middle class males' ways of defining reality. Although this article is outdated, Thompson (1987) posits several arguments that hold to be true in today's nursing education. Thompson (1987) argues that this liberal perspective includes the following assumptions: the positivist paradigm is favored; functionalism is essential to frame the social

world; and that professionalism is an ideology that legitimizes class divisions. In my nursing curriculum, there is a strong focus to teach students to base his or her decisions on evidenced-based practices which is derived from randomized controlled trials that are considered the gold standard. Why are nurses trained to practice in this manner? Although it is important to adopt best practices, this is not the only method of gathering new knowledge that can be used in nursing. It is evident that the power and influence of the biomedical model plays a huge role in the manner in which nurses' practice, think, and learn. Whose interests are served as a result of this dominance? Nurses must be empowered to challenge this ideology.

Post colonial research is situated in a postmodern and critical paradigm that reaches beyond conventional research methods. Kirkham and Anderson (2002) state that post colonial scholarship provides access into the everyday experiences of marginalization and oppression which have been developed by politics and the macro dynamics of historical and structural power. Although nursing has evolved in many ways, it is still evident that nursing education, including the curriculum I teach, is dominated and oppressed as rooted in a historical context. Hence, this revelation highlights the need to arm nurses to challenge and deconstruct the prevailing and dominant discourses that continue to shape and influence the nursing profession (Holmes et al., 2008).

I have also been made more aware through post colonial scholarship and have, thus, been attempting to understand how I can participate in dominating structures, promoting power and privilege when educating future nurses. Why is the nursing curriculum, within the program I teach, heavily situated in a scientific focus and at the same time, greatly lacking in addressing the theoretical and clinical gaps that IENs are experiencing? Edwards and Davis (2006) and Coffey (2006) state that in the absence of specific bridging programs that are tailored for the IEN population, the alternatives to practice within Ontario include lengthy and costly programs that do not value the perceptions, knowledge, skills, and judgment of IENs. Based on the unique needs of IENs, bridging programs should be designed to include English language assessment and support, personal experiences, theoretical courses on nursing and mentorship networks (Edwards & Davis, 2006; Coffey, 2006)——yet, sadly, this is not the case. Even though a vast amount of literature, primarily using phenomenological inquiry, has been conducted to understand the struggles of IENs while integrating into the Canadian health care system, I think it is also imperative to understand how the political, social, and economic external forces also play a role in this process that lead to a discussion on post colonial research.

Post colonial research is situated in an interpretative paradigm that values subjectivity and believes that there is no single truth in this world. Therefore, its ontology is based on the notion that reality is subjective, multiple, and shaped by history (Kirkham & Anderson, 2002). The epistemology of post colonial

scholarship arises from the perception of individuals who have been affected by colonization. With regards to my paper, this would not only be IENs but also other nurses in general. Anderson (2002) states that knowledge production in this method does not stem from an outsider's perspective as this approach values listening to the voice of those who have suffered the sentence of history which includes domination and subjugation. Hence, post colonial research values dialogue with people who have been affected by history, marginalization, and oppression--- in an attempt to challenge dominant discourses that shape the manner in which society is structured (Anderson, 2002). Moreover, this endeavor to dialogue would be vital especially to nurses in Ontario and IENs who would be given the opportunity to challenge the manner in which the nursing curriculum they are subjected to is developed and how it has been shaped by dominance and power. The importance of this endeavor, as cited by Sochan (2011), is that nursing structures in the past whether knowingly or unknowingly have participated in marginalizing nursing knowledge development and that since the post colonial framework values communication and reflection, the researcher and nurse will then be led to discover truth as rooted in a historical and political context (Streubert Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

Given post colonialism's place in postmodernism, poststructuralist, and critical paradigm, Reed (1995) states that there is no single manner in conducting this research. The exploration of history is a major aim, hence, knowledge can be developed in many different ways where the key is to ensure inclusivity and challenge the status quo (Kirkham & Anderson, 2002). Thus, this study can also be used in conjunction with other theoretical frameworks, such as critical feminist theory and participatory action research.

Through the process of in-depth interviews, textual analysis, and observations, knowledge will be co-produced by those who have been marginalized (the IEN and nurses) and through research can be empowered and given their own voice (Kirkham & Anderson, 2002). Kirkham and Anderson (2002) also stressed that there is a need to redefine what nursing science should encompass as the majority of literature in this discipline has been "written out" by Westerners. Furthermore, Sochan (2011) stated that institutionalization and ascendancy of medicine, combined with hospitals where medical research takes precedence over other disciplines research--- have deliberately marginalized nursing education. Hence, post colonial research is the stepping stone for nurses to challenge predominant ideologies and gain access into the everyday practices that influence nursing education. Research, therefore, will assist nurses, including IENs, to gain independence and liberty to base nursing knowledge on their preferences in promoting care for a diverse population.

In conclusion, through the process of analyzing and understanding post colonial scholarship, I have pondered about nursing education and how colonial discourses have shaped and

influenced nursing knowledge and I had learned that post colonial scholarship is the avenue to promote change and empower nurses to ask why certain practices prevail in nursing today. Such avenue will positively contribute to a more just society that looks at macro levels of understanding rather than limiting it to individuals.

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## About the Author

**Jasmine Balakumaran, RN, BScN, MScN** is a master's prepared Registered Nurse with a background in medical surgical nursing. With her passion for patient care and education, she decided to focus on a different aspect of nursing and teach and learn with nursing students. Jasmine is faculty within the School of Community and Health Studies at Centennial College, for the past 8 years, and has worked in various programs such as the RPN to BScN Bridging Nursing program, Practical Nursing Bridging Program for Internationally Educated Nurses and the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) Collaborative Nursing Degree Program. Along with teaching and learning with a diverse range of students in the classroom and clinical setting, her interest expands to curriculum development and online education.