Practical Knowledge *through* Practical Training

*A case study of nurse students and nurse instructors*

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Abstract
This study focuses on the nurse education at Uppsala University and more precisely on the final semester of practical training on site, where nurse students are instructed and supervised by their professional equivalents. This training period is supposed to enable the symbiosis of theoretical and practical knowledge for the student, turning her into a fully educated and independent professional. However, the period is however not unproblematic. The aim of the study is therefore to explore this practical training period with particular emphasis on the perceptions held by nurse students and nurse instructors regarding the prerequisites, process and outcome of this training.

Based on a theoretical framework that draws on Wenger’s social theory of learning and its concept of communities of practice a case study is conducted focusing on the municipality of Uppsala. Interviews with three nurse students and three nurse instructors were carried out. The empirical findings suggest that the training period is an essential part of the nurse education where nurse students’ theoretical knowledge becomes instrumentalised. However, the period has many shortcomings such as a lack of continuity and an unnecessary complexity that limit the practical knowledge that can be gained by the nurse students.

Keywords: Nurse education, practical training, knowledge, communities of practice
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1. Introduction

*Knowledge is the individual capability to draw distinctions, within a domain of action, based on an appreciation of context, theory, or both.* (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001:979).

1.1 Background

Upon completion, the nurse education at Uppsala University is designed to enable students the ability to work independently. Having turned into a professional, a nurse must be able to conduct critical judgments by applying her newly developed knowledge in various situations to handle various health conditions of children, men and women. The duration of the nurse education is approximately three years, encompassing several elements of practical training. The latter aspect is an important feature in the education that is designed to provide students with knowledge and training of both theoretical and practical character. Consequently, during the educational period, various teaching methods are used ranging from lectures, seminars and group work to even more hands-on practical training on site (e.g. hospitals). This plethora of methods is supposed to foster a symbiosis of theoretical and practical knowledge necessary for a nurse student to become a professional. (Uppsala University’s webpage\(^1\)).

1.2 Problem discussion

During the last century, society put particular emphasis on formal knowledge thereby underlining especially the explicit dimension of knowledge (Tsoukas, 2005). Formal knowledge and the explicit dimension was emphasized by both educational institutions in their teaching methods and examinational procedures as well as by employers in their human resource strategies. The term explicit knowledge refers to issues that a subject is able to learn through for instance formal (theoretical) education; it regards knowledge about issues that can be articulated and documented by the use of language and in the form of words or formulas such as in a book, a paper or a report. As this type of knowledge can be articulated and documented, it can also be captured and thus transferred between individuals, and what can get captured can also become measured. The emphasis on formal knowledge and more

\(^1\) http://www.selma.uu.se/publik/main?AF=0300andfunktion=utbildnandfakultet=MFandprog=MSS1Yandlasar=07/08
specifically its explicit dimensions carries with it an understanding that views knowledge as a product, an outcome and hence a commodity (Styhre, 2003). Although this is the predominant understanding of knowledge, Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) and Tsoukas (2005), to mention but some, argue for the concept encompassing far more and interconnected aspects than that. The tacit dimension of knowledge and its interconnection to the explicit dimension are issues that have received attention only lately. The term tacit knowledge refers to knowledge about issues that are not easily shared between individuals as they cannot be articulated and documented easily. This knowledge revolves around an individual’s personal experience and is to a high degree situational in nature (Karlsson and Löfgren, 2006). It creates the backdrop of an individual’s understanding and in contrast to explicit knowledge that occupies the foreground, tacit knowledge resides in the background holding an indirect role and hence it does not easily surrender itself to articulation and documentation as in the form of a book. However, although tacit knowledge is difficult to capture and transfer in comparison to explicit knowledge it is nonetheless not impossible. Thompson et al (2001) for instance argue that this can be accomplished by the help of rules and procedures. Their understanding parallels to a great degree that of Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) which by and large views knowledge as comprised of two different types (explicit and tacit) which by mechanisms of transformation can become transformed. Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) and Tsoukas (2005) opposes this dichotomy of knowledge arguing that all knowledge is constituted of background and foreground elements and not ‘formally’ divided into different parts. While the previous authors belong to a group that views knowledge as an outcome, as a commodity, the latter view knowledge as both a process and an outcome. For Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001), knowledge is formed by the very flow of information and attached in the beliefs and commitments of its holder, an understanding that stresses particularly that knowledge is intrinsically related to human practice and action. The process aspect of knowledge refers to situations when new experience and information is gained through human action while the outcome aspect refers to the results of this human action (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Gaining knowledge as a result of involvement by practice is further developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and by Wenger (1998) in their social theory of learning. Knowledge is here seen both as a process and an outcome; the result of an individual’s active participation in a community of practice. The latter term, community of practice, is described by Wenger (1998) as a formation by individuals who engage in a process of collective learning within a shared domain of human endeavour.
1.3 Problem
The element of practical training in the nurse education at Uppsala University encompasses the nurse students engaging and participating in such a community of practice. The ‘newcomers’, i.e., the nurse students, participate on site during a limited time period where they are instructed by a particular group of their professional equivalents, i.e., nurses with an exceptionally long working experience within the field. The latter group, the nurses, acts as masters in instructing and supervising the newcomers (nurse students) in real-life situations. This procedure in the nurse education is developed with the objective to foster a symbiosis of theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. This arrangement has been deemed necessary for Uppsala University to provide as the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education emphasizes and thereby requires that Swedish nurse education must be grounded in tried and tested experience. Such a training period is also asked for by the (Swedish) National Board of Health and Welfare who argue that its outcome enables nurse students upon completion of their education to work independently (Green and Hedström, 2006).

However, concerns have been raised about the nurse education hinting that practical knowledge is often perceived by newly graduated nurses as not sufficient enough (see e.g., Emanuelsson and Funnermark Persson, 2007). For many of these nurses, the conditions of working life may come as a shock as they do not feel prepared enough for the situations they encounter in their profession (Green and Hedström, 2006). The practical training period is at the centre of this debate and in particular the relationship between nurse students and nurse instructors or to use the theoretical terms of Wenger, the relationship between newcomer and master. This relationship is contingent upon the two actors understanding first the purpose and objectives of the practical training period, second, their own role in their interaction with each other and finally, three, in understanding each others abilities.

1.4 Purpose
The main purpose of this study is to explore the role of the practical training period in the nurse education at Uppsala University.

1.5 Research questions
Two main research questions have been designed to answer the above mentioned purpose.
1. What are the perceptions among nurse students regarding the prerequisites for, process and outcome of the practical training period?

2. What are the perceptions among nurse instructors regarding the prerequisites for, process and outcome of the practical training period?

1.6 Delimitations
The study is delimited to nurse students at Uppsala University who are studying in their final educational semester. Geographically, the study is also limited to instructors working at the municipality of Uppsala and thereby nurse students at Uppsala University undertaking their practical training period at the same location.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

Knowledge is gained with values and beliefs and is connected with action. Knowledge is one's capacity to exercise judgement and involves two aspects: the ability to draw distinctions and the location which is a collectively generated and a constant area of action. By having the ability to draw distinctions, we divide the world into this and that and bring the parts of the phenomena that are interesting into consciousness (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Knowledge is not a collection of theories, it is also embrained and a part of a person, community or a profession (Thompson, et al, 2001).

There are two opposite views of knowledge, explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge views knowledge as primarily articulate. This means that knowledge can be separated from a particular situation and actor and made available by writing or language (Werr and Stjernberg, 2003). For a student, it is about learning the applicable and relevant theories of a specific field. Tacit knowledge involves articulate and abstract knowledge and requires a knowing subject. Knowledge is primarily viewed as situated and learning is in doing (Werr and Stjernberg, 2003). Tacit knowledge can come from practice and experience (Thompson, et al, 2001).

Explicit knowledge is personal since it involves participation in its creation and in order to be effectively applied, it needs to be instrumentalized - to be used as a tool. As we learn to do this, we gradually become unaware of how we use it to achieve results. This enables the individual to expand awareness of the situation and refine her skills (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). There is always a gap between what we have been taught and what we actually practice in an organization, but one's education is never complete if it is not applied in a real situation and has proved to work (Nyström, 2007).

Organizations are mainly based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end. Students demonstrate their knowledge by exams and collaborating is considered cheating. The exams test their explicit knowledge. Lave and Wenger (1991) mean that learning is also a social process where learning is viewed as a situated activity. Learning as social participation means active participants in the practices of
social communities and creating identities in relation to these communities (Wenger, 1998). Learning is a matter of engaging and contributing to the communities of practice for individuals. For communities, it is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new members. For organizations it is a matter of sustaining the communities of practice which in turn becomes effective and valuable as an organization (Wenger, 1998:8). They explain this with a process they call legitimate peripheral participation where learners engage and participate in communities of practice. This helps the learners to utilize their knowledge.

Furthermore, Wenger (1998) puts forward a theory of learning and he discusses four premises:

- We are social beings and this fact is a central part of learning.
- Knowledge is a matter of competence.
- Knowing is not only about being tested on ones explicit knowledge. It is also a matter of participating.
- Our ability to experience and engage in the world (Wenger, 1998).

Learning is the vehicle for the evolution of practices and for the growth and change of identities. The components that characterize participation as a process of learning and of knowing are:

- Meaning – learning as experience
- Community – learning as belonging
- Practice – learning as doing
- Identity – learning as becoming (Wenger, 1998)

2.2 Meaning

In order to engage in practice, it is important to be able to act and interact:

“Practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life”

(Wenger 1998:52).

The author argues that meaning is located in a process – the negotiation of meaning. This involves an interaction between participation and reification which form a duality.
Participation and reification are complementary and do not substitute each other (Wenger, 1998). We produce, interpret and use reification by participating. It is a social process and yet a personal experience and reification allows us to coordinate our actions. Our experience and our world are shaped together through a reciprocal relation in this interplay (Wenger, 1998).

Participating is a complex and active process which combines doing, talking, belonging etc and is both personal and social. It is characterized by the possibility of mutual recognition i.e. engaging in a conversation makes us recognize each other; it is a source of identity. By participating in a community, we shape our experience and at the same time it also shapes the community. It becomes a part of who we are and will be carried with us and it is an element of our identities (Wenger, 1998).

Reification describes our engagement with the world as productive of meaning. It refers to the process of giving form and making something concrete. By creating a procedure or writing down a law and concretising it, a certain understanding is provided. People can use the law or the procedure to know what to do and to argue a point. They can use the tool to perform an action (Wenger, 1998).

There is a constant process of negotiation of meaning. Our relations are included as factors in the negotiation and it indicates reaching an agreement between people. By being a member of a community and by participating is a contribution to the negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998).

2.3 Community
The second piece is about communities and how it is associated to practice. Wenger (1998) describes three dimensions of the relation:

- mutual engagement
- joint enterprise – it is a result of a collective practice which is defined by members and creates relations of mutual accountability
- shared repertoire

Learning does not solely exist in books or in tools; it exists in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement. Therefore, membership in a community of practice is an
issue of mutual engagement. By interacting while working is a way of enabling engagement which defines belonging to a community of practice. Each member discovers a unique place and receives a unique identity which becomes clear through mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998). This creates relationships among people and connects members in ways that are complex and different. There will always be arguments and disagreements but that is also a way to participate in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

“Mutual engagement involves not only our competence, but also the competence of others”
(Wenger, 1998:76)

The community of practice has a repertoire that consists of words, a way of doing things, tools etc, which has been implemented during its existence and has become a part of the practice. By sharing this in a community of practice, it becomes easier for participants to see in what ways things should be done (Wenger, 1998).

2.4 Practice
Practice is a shared history of learning and is an ongoing process that requires working together. Learning in practice also involves mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. By evolving variety of mutual engagement, we engage in relationships and can define identities. By understanding the enterprise we learn to become. By developing the repertoire, we can invent new terms (Wenger, 1998). We are always learning in everything that we do. By having an ability to engage in practice and understand why we choose to engage in it has to do with our ability to negotiate meaning (Wenger, 1998). The practice grows and develops by interacting and learning together and from each other. It is also constantly learning and developing by accepting and including new members (Wenger, 1998).

2.5 Identity
Our experience as members in social communities builds our identity. It includes our ability to shape what defines our community and our belonging. Developing a practice necessitates the creation of a community where members recognize and work with each other. In this situation, practice involves the negotiation of ways of being a person (Wenger, 1998). It is
always complex when the past meets the future since newcomers lack self confidence and must gain access in order to participate (Wenger, 1998).

Participants do not have to talk about the specific issue or even address the question directly but by dealing with it; they engage in action and can relate to one another. Our practices make us deal with the matter of how to be a human being and can be seen as a negotiation of identities (Wenger, 1998). Participants learn how to engage with others, how to handle themselves, they can experience competence and be recognized as competence and moreover they are able to understand what they do and understand the enterprise (Wenger, 1998).

A peripheral form of participation can be central in ones identity because it may lead to something significant. A community of practice gives newcomers access to competence and an experience of engagement so they can include it to an identity of participation (Wenger, 1998).

Knowledge has two opposite views, explicit and tacit knowledge. Organizations believe that learning is an individual process and often test ones knowledge explicitly. Wenger (1998) argues that learning is a social process and learning takes place by participating in communities of practice. Participation is characterized by four components: meaning, community, practice and identity. (see figure 1)
Figure 1: Communities of Practice
Source: own
3. Method

As soon as we defined the purpose and a number of general questions at the issue, we began our research for information that would support our theoretical framework. We made a search for papers earlier made by students. This was made for the reason that we wanted to observe what was already investigated about the subject and fortunately we found some papers that were extremely supportive for our study. Different words that were used during our search for literature, articles and papers were mostly in Swedish and some examples translated to English are as follows: nurses, supervisors, instructors, knowledge, knowledge utilization, education, learning etc.

3.1 Primary data

We have conducted a qualitative study. The main reason to why we chose to work with a qualitative study was because we found the opportunity to meet the respondents in person very essential. We wanted to find out what attitudes and how the instructor and the nurse student felt about such a subject. By meeting almost all of the respondents in person, we had a chance to create a dialog and we could create a depth. We believe that this was necessary for our study. This empirical study has been conducted by seven qualitative interviews, which are the primary data in the study. Each interview took about 30 minutes and ahead of the interviews, we worked very carefully with testing the questions so that nothing would be unclear for the respondents. This was done by giving the questions to a woman who has worked within the Municipality of Uppsala. She used to work as head of department for a home-help service area. This helped us improve our questions by letting her comment on the things that could be improved. The interview material consisted of between 8-18 semi-structured questions. This gave us the opportunity to also use some unstructured resulting questions which gave the respondents the chance to develop the conversation by themselves. Besides that, it gave us the chance to control the discussion that took place and it also gave the feeling of a deeper interview (Patel and Davidson, 2003).

Before each interview, we began explaining the purpose of our study and the interview so that the respondent could create an understanding of what might be important mentioning. We also thought that this would prevent us from discussing things that may not be of value to us.

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2 by respondents we mean the coordinator of practical training places, the nurse students and the instructors.
We guaranteed the respondents anonymity and chose not to mail them a copy of the questions before the interview because we wanted their first impression, we did not want them to be prepared. Also because the questions were a starting point that they would be further elaborated during the interview. We recorded and transcribed all of the interviews. There are different questionnaires, one for the coordinator of practical training places, one for the instructors and one for the nurse students. With the help of these questions, we wanted to understand and gain information about how the nurse student experiences their practical training and how the instructor tries to support the nurse student when practicing.  

3.2 Selection
This study is based on a strategic selection. We decided to interview students that were studying their last (sixth) semester within the nurse education. We believe that they have an overall picture when it comes to the education as well as their practical trainings. We contacted the coordinator of practical training places who works within the Municipality of Uppsala by being the link between the university and practical training places. We introduced ourselves and explained to her about our study and she provided us with all the contact information to the six nurse students and six instructors. At the same time, we asked her if we could have an interview with her because we felt that she could give us some background information.

We chose to interview the instructors with the most experience because we assumed that they have an ability to adapt themselves towards each student. We called all six instructors and asked them the following two questions:
1) How long have you been working as a nurse?
2) How long have you been an instructor?

By doing this, we could see which ones that had the most experience and could subsequently contact them for an interview. We decided to interview those students that had performed their practical training with the chosen instructors because we wanted to compare their answers.

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3 The questions that were used as a foundation for the interviews can be found in the appendices.
Of the seven interviews, three were made in a café, two were made at the respondents working place and the last two were phone interviews. The reason for that was that the respondents did not have time to meet us. We felt that all the respondents, some more than others, were very positive to be a part in our study and we also felt that they had a lot of thoughts to share with us.

As mentioned, we made two of the interviews by phone and we think that this might have created some negative aspects. First of all, we did not have the opportunity to observe the respondents facial expression and this in turn made it impossible for us to know if the respondent was i.e. thoughtful over a question or if she felt that a question was strange. Secondly, the three interviewed that took place at a café might also have created a difficulty for the respondents because of the fact that the environment was very noisy; the respondents’ concentration might have been interrupted.

3.3 Validity and reliability
We have tried to capture the area of subject by searching and studying different articles and literature in order to achieve a high validity. By doing so, we designed our questions so they could capture different aspects of the study’s purpose.

To achieve high reliability, the questions that were used during the interview were tested by the woman who had worked within the Municipality of Uppsala. We recorded all of the interviews so that we could listen to them carefully as many times as needed. This prevented the fact that sometimes not all the information is documented correctly. We recorded everything, which was accepted by the respondents, and even listened carefully to what was said at the same time as we took actively took part in all of the interviews. When we had finished all of the interviews, we began to transcribe the answers from the recorded version to a written document.

One must take into consideration that though we believe that our study has a high reliability, there is always a possibility that a human beings experience and feelings can change because of different reasons. This could affect the results.
4. Empirical findings

4.1 The practical training

All the interviewed see the practical training as a preperative training and studying period where the students get a view on how a nurse’s working days look like in reality. The nurse students have the chance to create a view on the organization. None of the instructors that were interviewed have any particular education in how to instruct. As one of the instructors said: “I just do the best I can” (Instructor 1, 2007-12-10).

Instructor 3 means that: “It is advantageous when students contact me before the training period starts because then I get reminded of that a student is coming, which I sometimes forget”. When it comes to the instructors, neither the University nor any teacher informs them about what the student is supposed to learn and achieve during the practical training period. “I do not know much at all about the nurse education today” (Instructor 3, 2007-12-12). Furthermore, they do not get any individual information about the students which they are going to instruct (i.e. about specific skills). According to the three instructors, the only thing they get is the name of the student and also information about which semester they are taking. Despite this, Student 2 felt that the instructor could feel fairly well what skills she had.

All the students mentioned that there exist specific goals, a checklist, which they need to fulfill during the practical training. It was only one of the instructors who said that the goals are given from the university to the instructor (Instructor 3, 2007-12-12). On side of those goals, the three students talked about some own individual goals which they are supposed to make and strive to fulfill. Further on, the students made it clear that it is their own responsibility to achieve all the goals and that the instructors only has access to them if the student chooses to show them (which they all did). Two of the instructors did not have any sort of contact with the university during the period. Instructor 3 mentioned that they have a coordinator at the working place and it is he/she who communicates with the coordinator of practical training.

All the students and instructors said that the students did not work with only one instructor during their practical training although they have one main instructor but they also got in touch with other instructors that were available when the main instructor was busy etc. When
this happened, she was replaced with other nurses. The instructors said that they sometimes send the student purposely to other nurses and this is seen as positive because in this way the students’ get the chance to catch up with and learn about important things in the environment. According to the instructors, they try to organize the period so that the students get the chance to work with as many different nurses as possible and if there is anything of interest that another nurse is working with (not the main instructor); they let the student take part in that. They mean that this is done so that the students can learn as much as possible with the limited time that they have together.

Due to the fact that different students have different experiences, all the instructors mentioned that they try to adapt what they teach the individual student to what she actually wants to learn. This can be done by following the goals that the university makes and also by following the nurse student’s individual goals. Instructor 1 and 2 mentioned that they worked with these goals as something complementary but instructor 3 believed that these goals are important and she followed them. Instructor 2 said that she simply asks them what they want to learn during their practical training.

Two of the students and two of the instructors meant that the students worked together with the instructors side by side almost all the time, though; sometimes they got to do some things by themselves. However, Instructor 2 and Student 3 said that students do not work independently during this period. According to Instructor 2, the students do not work independently because there is no time for that. This is what one of the students said: “I prefer when I get to try by myself. Someone should be available if I need help but that person should not take over the whole work” (nurse student 3, 2007-12-10). One of the students pointed out that the instructor “tested” her so that she later on could let her work more independently, as the interviewed expressed herself: “She believed in me” (nurse student 1, 2007-12-07). Contrary to all of this, Instructor 3 means that the students get to work very independently.

Nurse student 1 mentioned that there was no contact between the nurse students and the university and that the university was not so helpful (if needed). Further more, Student 3 mentioned that several instructors are not even interested in what knowledge the nurse students have and that there is a big difference between each instructor (how they work and treat the students etc). “Sometimes I felt that the instructor forgot about me and every now and then I only got moved from one place to another. /…/ As a nurse student, I never really
belonged to the organization” (nurse student 3, 2007-12-10). According to Instructor 3, “The best thing would be to have a couple of professional instructors but unfortunately that is not the case”.

It was only the Coordinator of practical training places who claimed that the nurse students, after the practical training, evaluated their practical training place as well as the instructor. The nurse students and the instructors meant that such evaluations do not exist all the time. The instructors pointed out that they evaluated the students by either letting them pass or fail and this evaluation are given to the university. “We can not make any kind of deeper evaluation based on only two weeks” (Instructor 2, 2007-12-11). When the period is longer than two weeks, all the instructors and students pointed out that an evaluation is made and specific aspects are taken into consideration and evaluated by different scales.

4.2 The education and learning

All the nurse students felt that the practical training was a very essential part in the nurse education. Nurse student 3 meant that the practical training helped a lot because it gave exercise in the skills but she also pointed out that the value of the practical training depended on where it took place and it also depended a lot on the instructor and how much the student is allowed to work independently.

Nurse student 2 meant that she had no problem adapting what she had learned at the university with the more practical occasions at the training. On the other hand, nurse student 3 felt that it could be difficult to adapt what books and teachers etc. recommend in a real situation with real persons. “You learn one thing at the university but you can not always use what you have learned in reality” (nurse student 3, 2007-12-10). Nurse student 1 indicated that it should be more of a concrete practical education instead of theoretical because it is not that simple to use theoretical knowledge on a human being.

The nurse students shared the same opinion when it came to the education. They thought that the education should contain more practical training, because it is this period which really helps them to learn about the profession. They also agreed about that the practical training gives them the practical experiences that might be missing in the education.
Both nurse student 1 and 3 thought that there was not enough requirements on the education and Student 1 expressed herself as follows: “I am not satisfied at all with the education”. The following quotation comes from nurse student 3: We do not learn about details on the practical training either because details are seen as being specific to every department/working place”.

5. Analysis

5.1 Meaning
As discussed in the theoretical framework, participating is a complex and active process where doing, talking, belonging etc is combined. Students that were interviewed felt that is sometimes could be difficult to participate and engage since there were different aspects that affected there participation in the practice. An important aspect that was brought up was that several instructors are not interested in the students’ skills and that the students were moved back and forth. This can be seen as a difficulty for students. They may not have the opportunity to act and interact when engaging in practice which Wenger thought was important.

We argued in our theoretical framework that meaning is located in a process – the negotiation of meaning - which involves the interaction of participation and reification and form a duality. By having practical training periods, nurse students are able to participate and use reification. By writing down a certain procedure gives a certain understanding but by participating and acting that certain procedure gives the student the opportunity to create a complete picture. The nurse students that were interviewed thought that their education should contain even more practical training periods. This period can be of help to transfer and use their knowledge that they have gained from different lectures, books etc to reality. They learn applicable theories of a specific field at the university which was discussed in our theoretical framework. One student even mentioned that she preferred to try for herself. By doing that, she is able to create her personal experience and is part of a social process and at the same reification coordinates and is a tool to perform her actions. Their knowledge becomes instrumentalized and they learn how to use it in order to achieve results. This, according to Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001), was important because individuals become aware of the situation and are able to refine their skills. Participation and reification do not substitute each other yet they complement each other as mentioned in our theoretical framework and we can see that the our study about practical training can be seen as a complementary to the theoretical education.

There is always a gap between what we have thought and what we actually practice in an organization, but ones education is never complete if it is not applied in a real situation and has proved to work (Nyström, 2007).
5.2 Community

People who share practice and experience can be seen as a community connected through the specific practice. One is dependent on individual actors (instructors) sharing a practice rather than databases. By talking and interacting is a way of enabling engagement (Wenger, 1998) and by having social interaction, the knowledge can be disseminated by “doing” (Werr and Stjernberg, 2003). The practical training can be seen as social interactions where students get to do things thus learning. The nurse students mentioned that this period was a significant period where they could get a view on how a nurses work day looks like and at the same time get to practice what they have learned. As discussed in our theoretical framework, practice does not exist in books or in tools; it exists in a community of people where appropriation of knowledge is related to action by involving newcomers in the problem solving process and the ongoing work. Student 3 specifically said that the practical training helped because it gave exercise in the skills and all the students agreed that their practical training period was an essential part of the education. It gave them an experience which they felt that they could not receive at the university. In the theoretical framework, it was mentioned that Wenger (1998) believed that a community of practice has a repertoire that consists of routines, words, a way of doing things, tools etc, which has been implemented during its existence and has become a part of the practice. It is easier for participants to see in what way things should be done which is similar to the students. They also felt that they got to see in what ways things should be done rather than just reading about it.

5.3 Practice

Practice is a learning process where the students have the opportunity to see how more experienced nurses deal with different situations. All the nurse students mentioned that there are some specific goals that they need to fulfil during their training period but 2 out of 3 instructors do not have any contact with the university and they do not know much about the nurse education. They have not taken any courses in how to be an instructor and sometimes the students have different instructors; they do the best they can. This does not have to be a negative aspect, on the contrary. These nurses with more experience have a feeling of what they believe is important to know and to learn in order to be a good nurse. Having an experience of working as a nurse for more than 30 years gives one knowledge which can not be gained by reading books or by attending lectures. Their knowledge is abstract and is viewed as tacit and learning is in doing, knowledge through practice (Werr and Stjernberg,
The instructors believed that it is a chance for the students to work with as many different nurses as possible and learn as much as possible. By engaging and interacting, the nurse students can learn from the nurses with more experience and there are opportunities to create new relationships which open up the opportunity to learn even more from other nurses.

As discussed in our theoretical framework, learning in practice involves mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. When nurse students are at their practical training period, they learn how to define different identities such as; who is good at what, who knows what etc which is helpful for students in order for them to fulfil their specific and individual goals. This becomes even more significant because it is the students own responsibility to achieve all the goals. By understanding the joint enterprise and having a shared repertoire gives students a glimpse and also a foundation. They can begin to understand what they have been taught at the university and learning by becoming. They get to be a part of creating routines or even breaking routines and start to understand what the enterprise is about. It was argued in our theoretical framework that it is not only the students that learn but the organization is also learning continually by accepting new members in the community. They can keep developing their repertoire by including new members. By participating and contributing to the practice leads towards forming an identity.

5.4 Identity
According to Wenger (1998), participating in a social community builds our identity. In this case, the nurse students can build an identity of being future nurses. By having practical training periods, they get an opportunity to work with other nurses and in this situation; it involves the negotiation of ways of being a person. They have an opportunity to deal with the matter of how to be a human being and have different roles in different communities. One student commented that they do not learn about specific details at their practical training and this may be the case but one can ask; how important are the specific details in this kind of situation? This question will be further elaborated in the discussion part of the paper.

When asking the students about the practical training period, they all shared the same opinion. They thought that the practical training helped them to learn more about the profession and they got to learn things which they could not learn at the university. As mentioned in our theoretical framework participating gives newcomers access to competence and an experience
of engagement and this can be a reason to why the nurse students wanted more practical training. By having a peripheral form of participation, they can experience competence and be recognized as competence, they learn how to engage with others, they learn how to handle themselves, and moreover they are able to understand what they do and understand the enterprise which was mentioned in our theoretical framework.

During the interviews it was mentioned that different students have different experiences where the instructors try to adapt what they teach. It our theoretical framework, it was discussed that this always is a complex meeting of the past and the future. Newcomers must gain some access in order to participate and make it part of their own identity while old-timers already have the confidence and are aware of the community.
6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore what role the practical training period has within the nurse education. We wanted to see what the perceptions among nurse students regarding the prerequisites for, process and outcome of the practical training period were. What are the perceptions among nurse instructors regarding the prerequisites for, process and outcome of the practical training period? The instructors are most of the time not informed about the nurse student knowledge she has nor is the instructor updated about the nurse education. They are hardly organized or prepared and they are not informed about goals that students have to achieve during their practical training period. This can, as mentioned, create difficulty for the students to participate.

By participating in a community of practice, nurse students learn how to engage with others, how to handle themselves and are able to understand what they do. It is a possibility for them to see how things should be done rather than just reading about it and they learn by becoming. This was experienced as difficult sometimes for the nurse student since all nurse students felt that the instructor was not interested in neither the nurse student nor what they could. The practical training period are social interactions where students get to learn new things and this period completes the theoretical education. Participating is a complex and active process where doing, belonging, talking etc. is combined and the nurse student felt that participation could sometimes be difficult.

By doing this study, we have come to understand that the practical training periods are a significant part of the education where the nurse student gets a view on how a nurses work day looks like and at the same time get to practice what they have learned. They get to develop their experiences while performing their practical training and it helps them to create meaning. They get the opportunity to create a complete picture by participating and using reification. They learn to use their knowledge as a tool and learn how to use it in order to achieve results. All nurse students gained experience which they felt they could not receive at the university; their knowledge is increased through practice. There is an opportunity for them to create new relationships and learn from nurses with a lot of experience but it is always a complex meeting between the past and the future. Sessions were not either adapted for each student. Each instructor decided, with respect to the checklist, what she felt was important to learn.
7. Discussion

When interviewing both students and instructors, we noticed a not so coordinated and organized practical training. This afflicted the students and some of them even meant that they felt unwanted which we believe can affect their participation. One instructor said that she sometimes forgot if a student was coming but this maybe should not be any surprise since it seems that there is an obvious lack of communication between these organizations. This was mentioned repeatedly by both groups but especially the students. They felt that they were sent back and forth, between different nurses. The instructors may have a reason with sending them back and forth, which they had but it was not talked through between the instructors and other nurses’ judging by what the students said. Still, the instructors do not seem to be updated about the nurse students’ education and its goals. Sure, they have been working as nurses since several years back but this situation has its effects on the students.

In our analysis we started discussing the importance of specific details in the practical training. One nurse student told us that this was a disadvantage but our question is, is it not more important and is it not the purpose with practical training periods, to help the students complete their theoretical education rather than learning those details about every division? Maybe the specific details are more interesting when they start working because then they really become a part of the organization.

We believe that an evaluation is very important for each activity even if the duration is a short period of time. An evaluation can be seen as a tool for improvements of the practical training activity. The quality of the practical training is dependent of an evaluation between two parties – the students and the instructors. Moreover, an evaluation can be of help for the instructors to improve their way of working by being updated about the education and being able to improve their own way of instructing students.

By having different instructors have its advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that the student meets other nurses with different experiences and ways of working which leads to more practical knowledge. The disadvantage can be that the students become confused and scared. Different students are in different phases of development during their education. Some students still have not developed their self confidence and their identity as a nurse and this can be a reason for becoming confused and scared.
8. Future research directions

This study has explored the practical training and its role when it comes to nurse students who perform their practical training within Municipality of Uppsala. Thus, the study is limited to Municipality of Uppsala. To get a complete view on this topic, we would like to see some more research within the subject. We find it interesting to see if the same investigation at Uppsala University Hospital would give the same answers. This can be of interest because, during the interview with the coordinator of practical training places, she briefly mentioned that Municipality of Uppsala and Uppsala University Hospital do not have the same prerequisites when it comes to instructing students. Another interesting aspect is that there are also environmental differences between Municipality of Uppsala and Uppsala University Hospital. With environmental differences we mean i.e. that the factor of stress might differ, that the number of spontaneous occasions might not be the same which in turn can lead to nurses have to be more flexible.
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**Interviews**

Coordinator of practical training places, Interview at the workplace, 2007-12-03, 10:15

Instructor 1, Phone interview, 2007-12-10, 15:15

Instructor 2, Phone interview, 2007-12-11, 15:00

Instructor 3, Interview at the working place, 2007-12-12, 13:00

Student 1, Interview at a café, 2007-12-07, 15:15

Student 2, Interview at a café, 2007-12-12, 15:20

Student 3, Interview at a café, 2007-12-10, 12:30
Appendix 1: The Respondents

The coordinator of practical training places
The interviewed works with coordinating practical training places within Uppsala Kommun and she has been working with this position since 2003. She has earlier been working as a project leader within the reorganization and before that she was a teacher. Her responsibility is to arrange the right number of the communal practical training places to the university. In other words, she just has to make sure that the supply and the demand is identical and she does not take each individual student into consideration.

When dividing the practical training places, she uses a tool called Klipp which, according to her, makes the whole organizing easier. She gets orders from different educations, universities and schools where it says how many places they need. Every year, she is responsible for about 1200 practical training places. She can be seen as a middle link who communicates with all the practical training places and also with the practical training coordinator at the university. After she receives the orders, there is a specific date when she has to be finished with the dividing. She has about two months (for example between 15 October and 10 December when preparing for the spring term) to be finished with all the work before the practical training.

Instructor 1
This interview was carried out with a woman who has been working as a nurse and an instructor for 30 years. When it comes to the instruction part of her job, she does not have any particular education for instruction.

The work with students does not take place on a regular basis, yet she instructs them every now and then. She is responsible for a home-help service area within Uppsala Kommun and has been employed there since 1977. Before that she worked as a nurse within the county council (Instructor 1, 2007-12-10).

Instructor 2
The nurse that we interviewed has been working as a nurse since 1965 and she works within Uppsala Kommun with care of the elderly. On side of that, she has also been working as an
instructor since 1965, without having any specific education for instruction (Instructor 2, 2007-12-11).

**Instructor 3**
This nurse has been working within the health care sector since she was 15 years old. She is very experienced and has earlier worked as a nursing assistant etc. She has been working as a nurse and instructor for 12 years and has no particular education in how to instruct. Today she is responsible for care of the elderly, for people with dementia and she has also a coordinating responsibility regarding students and their practical training period.

**Student 1**
The interviewed student is 27 years old and she is only weeks from becoming a graduated nurse. She is now on her last (sixth) semester in Uppsala University and has newly been on a practical training for two weeks.

**Student 2**
This student is 23 years old and is now on her last (sixth) semester in Uppsala University and has newly been on a practical training for two weeks.

**Student 3**
The student is 28 years old and she finished her practical training period, which lasted two weeks, one week ago.
Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Interview questions for the coordinator of practical training places

1. Skulle Du kunna berätta lite om Dig själv och Dina ansvarsområden?
2. Hur går samordningen av praktikplatser till?
3. Vilka faktorer tas hänsyn till under samordningen?
4. Fattas besluten gällande praktik enbart av Dig?
5. Finns det någon kontakt mellan Dig och studenten/handledana/universitet under praktiken?
6. Gör Du några besök på praktikplatsen under praktiken?
7. Vad har Du för roll/ansvar när praktiken börjar närma sitt slut?
8. Finns någon rutin där studenterna och handledana får göra en utvärdering av praktiken?

Interview questions for the instructors

Meaning

1. Hur går det till när Ni får in en student som ska praktisera sin sista termin?
2. Hur mycket vet Du om studenterna innan praktiken börjar?
3. Går studenten med samma handledare under hela praktiken?
4. Får studenterna medvetet gå med olika handledare? Varför/varför inte?

Community

1. Vad är syftet med praktiken?
2. Hur självständigt arbetar studenterna?
3. Vad händer efter praktiken?

Practice

1. Skulle Du kunna berätta lite om dig själv och Dina ansvarsområden?
2. Hur länge har Du arbetat som sjuksköterska respektive handledare?
3. Har Du någon handledarutbildning?
4. Skickas det mål från universitetet till Dig som visar vad studenterna bör lära sig under praktiken?
5. Brukar studenterna ha med sig mål som är menade att uppfyllas under praktiken? Om ja, får Du se dessa mål?
Identity
1. Anpassas det som lärs ut till den individuella studenten (exempelvis till vad hon kan/vad hon behöver lära sig)?
2. Har Du som handledare kontakt med någon från universitetet (exempelvis angående vad studenterna har lärt sig i sin utbildning)?
3. Kommer lärare/kursansvarig/praktikplatssamordnare på besök under praktiken?
4. Gör Du någon utvärdering av praktiken eller studenten efter praktikens slut (exempelvis angående vad studenten behöver träna mer på)?
5. Interview questions for the nurse students
6. Skulle Du kunna berätta lite om Dig själv?
7. Hur tilldelades Du Din praktikplats och din handledare?
8. Fick Du lämna önskemål om vart Du ville praktisera?

Interview questions for the nurse students

Meaning
1. Gick Du med samma handledare under hela praktiken? För- och nackdelar med det och varför?
2. Kom lärare/kursansvarig/praktikplatssamordnare på besök till praktikplatsen?
3. Vad anser Du om praktiken?
4. Hur mycket visste Du om praktikplatsen och handledaren innan praktiken?
5. Hur självständigt arbetade Du?

Community
1. Vad var syftet med praktiken?
2. Vilka för- och nackdelar har Du upplevt under praktikens gång?
3. Fick Du mål från Universitetet som var menade att uppfyllas under praktiken? Om ja, fick handledaren tillgång till dessa mål?
4. Vad hade Du för kontakt med universitetet under praktiken?

Practice
1. Anser Du att Du kunnat koppla den teoretiska undervisningen till det praktiska under praktiken?
2. Anser Du att det har det vart lagom mycket praktik och teoretisk undervisning i utbildningen?
3. Känner Du att något fattas i den teoretiska utbildningen efter att ha slutfört Din praktik?

Identity
1. Känner Du Dig självsäker i Din roll som blivande sjuksköterska?
2. Anser Du att handledaren anpassade det som lärdes ut till det Du kunde och det Du ville/behövde lära Dig? Visste handledaren vad Du behövde lära Dig?
3. Kunde handledaren läsa av Dig när det gäller vad Du redan kunde osv.?