An exploration of political awareness amongst a cohort of all field students, in one university in Northern Ireland
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Politics

*Politics can be defined simply as ‘the process of influencing the allocation of scarce resources’ (Chafee et al, 2012, p5).*
Political Socialization

The process of learning and acquiring norms, attitudes, values, beliefs and identity underlying political cultures and systems to engage effectively in advancing health and public policy.

(Brown, 1996).
Political socialisation- nursing students and education

- Politics as a subject is largely absent in nursing curricula - USA and UK, thus nurses are not politically astute (Byrd et al, 2012)

- Students are not politically socialized during their pre-registration education programmes (Vandenhouten et al, 2011)

- Lack of political or health policy education (Carnegie & Kiger, 2009)

- Nurse educators lack requisite skills to impart political or health policy education - ‘individual enthusiasts’ (Fyffe, 2009)
Political socialisation- nursing students and gender

- Nurses seem to emerge from the educational processes, with an internalised perception of being less intellectual and thus expect their opinion to be discounted (Grebbie et al, 2000)

- Nursing is often equated with women’s work – under resourced/analyzed – internal ambiguity – question status and unequal partners in policy arena (Davies, 2004)
Resulting in nursing students viewing politics as:

- Politics is complicated (Chan & Cheng, 1999) and even deviant and dirty (Ehlers, 2000)
- Policy content is thus abstract and intangible (Byrd et al, 2012)
- Results in the political invisibility of nurses – nationally and internationally
- Nurses also lack influence in policy making - at all levels
But little is known about how best to achieve this and how or if undergraduate students are influenced politically during their practice/academic experiences?
Continuum Model - Move from political disinterest to political awareness, engagement and onto political literacy

1. Political socialisation involves developing the requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills to enable nursing students to develop political consciousness.

2. Political consciousness – the belief that all nurses develop the critical ability to understand and analyse the socio-economic and political background to the services of which they are part, as a potentially powerful group of health care workers (Shrock, 1977).

3. Leading to the development and utilisation of political awareness with a move towards political engagement and activity.
TADD Student's
Visit to the N Ireland Assembly
The study: aims

1. To explore nursing student’s political interest and knowledge during a three-year undergraduate nursing/midwifery degree programme.

2. To explore factors which influence nursing student’s political interest and knowledge, prior to and during an undergraduate nursing/midwifery degree, at four time points.
Study design

1. Longitudinal design using a self-completion questionnaire (23 questions and one open question) at T1, T2, T3 and T4.

2. Questionnaire design based on EUYOUPART and NILTs surveys

3. University school ethical approval gained

4. Sample - one all field cohort (n=353) Nurses - adult, learning disability, mental health, children’s and midwives.
Study design

1. Pilot undertaken
2. T1 – October 2013  F to F - 68% response rate
3. T2 – October 2014
4. Data analysis – SPSS 21.0 using descriptive statistics
Sample characteristics

94%  6%
Sample Age

Mean Age

23

76% between 20-26 years
Educational attainment

- Degree: 18%
- Access Course: 17%
- A Levels: 52%
Membership of Professional organisations

- RCN Member: 56%
- Unison Member: 17%
If there were a General Election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?

- Broadly unionist 22%
- Broadly nationalist 32%
- Alliance 5%
- Don’t know 37%
- Other? The Greens, NI21 and Socialist party
Political interest

- Not Very Interested: 40%
- Very or fairly Interested: 28%
- Not At All Interested: 31%
Fields of practice and political interest

1. Adult Interested – 24% Not interested – 74%
2. Children’s - Interested – 19% Not interested – 81%
3. Mental Health - Interested – 38% Not interested – 62%
4. Learning Disability - Interested – 32% Not interested – 63%
5. Midwifery - Interested – 40% Not interested – 60%
Politics seems so complicated that I can’t really understand what is going on?

1. Agree – 48%
2. Neither agree nor disagree - 28%
3. Disagree - 20%
political knowledge

- A Fair Amount: 15%
- Not Very Much: 81%
Influences on political interest

- Teachers 26%
- Friends 14%
- Family 10%
- Degree university 4%
- Not applicable 47%
How often do you follow politics via the media?

- Everyday/several times weekly – 20%
- Once/twice a week - 20%
- Less often/never - 60%
Political Knowledge

- Knowledge about local Northern Ireland’s politics
  - A lot - 35%
  - A little - 47%

- Knowledge about national Westminster politics
  - A lot - 20%
  - A little – 78%
Nursing Student comments 1

- “was studying a Phd in political science ...” “strong need for health professionals to be politically aware – local politics very important.”

- “I have only recently started to watch the news and follow politics. I was never educated on it.”

“I look more at ‘political issues’ that affect me, rather than political parties. I don’t believe any political party in Northern Ireland truly represents the people or the needs of all the people living here. I focus personally on issues that I am interested in, like conservation.”
Nursing Student comments 2

- “Being part of the Students Union council at BMC and taking part in NUS USI national conference and Women’s conference. The fact politicians do nothing in my area and we have to argue. The fear as a nurse I will have no support.”
- “Too young to vote in previous elections but would have wanted to take active role in nursing politics.”
- “I studied politics in school and it kept me interested in politics today.”
Limitations

- Convenience sample, not representative of the general nursing/midwifery student population
- Questionnaire design
- Reliability and validity
- What’s next? T2 data analysis
Influencing pedagogy?

- Bringing the Northern Ireland Assembly to QUB
- Academic presence across all fields in all three years (packed curriculum)
- International collaboration
THANK YOU

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References


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