**Abstract title:**  
The ebb and flow of social capital in a European Nurse Education Network

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**Background, including underpinning literature and, wherever possible, the international relevance of the research**  
This presentation offers some findings from an iterative case study that explored the practice and sustainability of a European Nurse Education network that has been functioning successfully for over 20 years. Networks are an area of practice that is generally poorly explored with minimal literature analysing the processes, value and impact of educational networks (Mujis, 2010). Yet networks are perceived to be beneficial with multiple versions, ranging from intensive networks with close collaboration to much looser associations through networks. Increasingly universities are relying on networks and collaboration to expand within both general and disciplinary areas through increasing strategic advantage and providing wider educational opportunities for their students and staff. Interestingly, given the lack of understanding of network practice, networks are assumed to be an essential component for a university to meet key aspects of their internationalisation agenda, particularly for internationalising the undergraduate curricula in the UK (Leask, 2015; Wakefield and Dismore, 2015).

**Research question related to this presentation:**  
What is the practice of a European Nurse Education network and what does this mean for the participants?
**Research methodology/research design, any ethical issues, and methods of data collection and analysis**

The research is interpretatively positioned and a qualitative case study methodology enabled the researcher to gather a holistic portrait of the network activity using three different methods of data collection, beginning with a focus group with the participants of the network to collaboratively frame the study. This was followed by documentary analysis of the artefacts/documents produced by the network, this reviewed a significant sample of reports that reflected key points since the inception of the European Nurse Education network in 1994. Findings from the documentary analysis was then triangulated with data garnered from eight interviews with participants of the network using a cross-case analytical framework.

Rigour was maintained throughout this study through reflexivity, respondent validation of themes and the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis tool which greatly enhanced the audit trail.

**Key findings and recommendations**

Findings suggest that network activity is mediated through a form of social capital (Putnam, 2000) that is suggested to have sustained the existence of the network over a period of twenty years. Through strong bonding capital within the network there is a clear reciprocity of activity and trust that lubricates the network practice thus ensuring efficiency and benefits for the majority of institutions involved. This is particularly interesting as the network has not received any external European funding during existence and has been self-governing. Bonding social capital is described as `sociological super glue` and participants appear to value this within their relationships with each other.

However, this is not all positive, as findings also suggested a darker side to social capital which have developed a culture that perpetuates wider inequalities within the network, produces compliance relationships and exclusivity. Findings from this case study indicate a level of practice that is dysfunctional and impacts on the future development of the network.

There are recommendations for senior education managers and educationalists who are responsible for establishing partnerships to consider how social capital can be encouraged which will produce sustainable benefits and commitment from staff. However, that this activity needs to be scaffolded to ensure equality and positive development that is beneficial to all involved.

**References** (Harvard)


**Keywords** (up to five)
- Networks
- Social Capital
- Case Study methodology
- Internationalisation

**Three key points to indicate how your work contributes to knowledge development within the selected theme**
- Insight into practice of network activity
- Social capital as a framework to understand partnership working
- Use of case study within an interpretative paradigm