

Sasakawa Nursing Fellowship Progress Report 2025-2026

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1. Introduction

In the fall of 2025, I began my master's degree in the Adult Learning and Leadership program at Teachers College, Columbia University. My experience supporting the growth of nurses in a hospital and university motivated me to pursue further education.

During my first year, I explored theories across individual learning, organizational learning, and leadership development, gaining insight into how to apply them in nursing education. Furthermore, I gained an important perspective on the role of well-being in supporting lifelong learning.

This report presents an overview of my academic progress and personal development over the past year, focusing on how adult learning theories have reshaped the way I see and approach nursing education.

2. Coursework

- Introduction to Adult and Continuing Education

Through this course, I built a foundational understanding of adult education theory. In the group project, I explored how adult learning theory can be applied to individual and organizational grief.

- Adult Learning and Education: Theory and Practice

I explored the three core pillars of adult learning, including Transformative, Experiential, and Self-Directed Learning, and how they can be leveraged in today's VUCA world. This course allowed me to see how these frameworks can be critically and adaptively applied to challenges individuals face.

- Facilitating Adult Learning

By designing and facilitating sessions using adult learning theory, I deepened my understanding of how theory can be applied not only at an individual level but also in group settings.

- Leveraging Emotional Intelligence (EQ) to Enhance Organizational Effectiveness

I developed knowledge and skills for effectively leveraging emotions, and through peer coaching, practiced supporting others in enhancing their emotional intelligence.

- Leadership for Adult Development

Based on Constructive Developmental Theory, I examined my own assumptions about mentorship and leadership. This helped me uncover blind spots I had not previously recognized and identify areas for growth. Applying the theory in group work deepened my understanding of

how to recognize others' developmental stages and provide support and challenge for their growth.

- Research on Organizational Learning

I gained insights into the factors that shape organizational culture and the knowledge needed for organizations to continue learning. I also strengthened my foundational understanding of qualitative research methods through the lens of organizational learning frameworks.

3. Key Insights

In this section, I will reflect on key insights from adult learning theory that have shaped my perspective. First, I learned that facilitating adult development requires a balance between support and challenge. In a clinical setting, unexpected situations often force learners to perform beyond their capacity. Through this learning, I realized that it is essential for nursing educators to assess a nurse's readiness and provide scaffolding, including both structural support and emotional support. I recognized the importance of adjusting this temporary support to help learners move toward independence rather than permanent reliance.

Second, I gained a deeper understanding of reflection. While reflection is widely practiced in nursing education, I relearned that reflection is a process of critically examining one's own assumptions. To facilitate this, I realized it is essential to establish psychological safety. If learners perceive a judgmental attitude, they may focus on providing the "correct" answer rather than engaging in reflection. Therefore, I realized that educators need to create a safe environment where learners engage in reflection through sharing the intentions and perspectives behind their nursing practice.

Finally, one of the most significant insights was that adult learning is not only about gaining knowledge and skills but also about altering underlying beliefs and meaning-making. I learned that simply improving technical skills is not enough when facing "adaptive challenges," where both the cause and the solution are unclear due to their complexity. In a nursing educational context, for example, when a "mismatch" occurs between a nursing educator and a novice nurse, just refining teaching techniques is often insufficient; educators are also required to critically examine their own educational values and assumptions. For this reason, I aim to support informational learning and facilitate transformative learning in the future.

4. Personal Growth

My first educational experience abroad transformed not only my skills but also my worldview. Firstly, I found the educational style in the U.S. significantly different from my previous experiences. While most of my past classes were lecture-based, this program was discussion-centered. Initially, the language barrier and this unfamiliar style felt overwhelming. However, most courses established shared norms in the first session to foster a supportive

atmosphere. This psychological safety, rooted in mutual respect, allowed me to express my thoughts without fear of failure and gradually gain confidence in participating.

Furthermore, the challenge of articulating my nursing context to people outside the medical field fostered both my communication skills and a broader perspective. Since my classmates came from diverse areas such as finance and consulting, I was required to explain my ideas without medical jargon. It allowed me to re-examine my own practice objectively by finding accessible language and exchanging perspectives with people from different professions and countries. As a result, I realized that what I had taken for granted in nursing and education in Japan was not necessarily the norm elsewhere, providing me with a different lens through which to view my field.

Finally, through group work with members from different cultural backgrounds, I deepened my understanding of inclusion. At first, I found myself trying to fit into the existing dynamic of the group. However, as members actively asked for my opinions and respected different perspectives, I realized that inclusion is not about entering a circle that already exists, but about expanding the circle together by embracing diverse ideas.

5. Well-being

I learned that supporting learners' well-being is essential in sustaining their learning. The university offered various workshops on topics such as sleeping challenges and academic pressure, along with regular surveys checking in on student life, including diet, rest, and social relationships. Participating in them made me realize that considering not only adult learning theories but also the well-being of the learners themselves is essential.

To maintain a healthy balance, I spent some enjoyable time outside of my studies. For example, I joined a flower arrangement workshop on campus, watched a Halloween parade with my cohort, and interacted with students from other programs. These experiences reminded me that active rest is just as essential as physical rest for maintaining balance and sustaining the energy to keep learning.

Furthermore, I participated in a conference on Well-being and Education at Teachers College. In this conference, I engaged in interactive sessions with educators from various countries. Through these sessions, I gained insights into how teacher wellbeing is understood and supported across different educational contexts, further deepening my perspective on the importance of wellbeing in education.

6. Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Sasakawa Health Foundation for their financial support. This scholarship enabled me to live in New York and pursue my graduate studies at Teachers College, Columbia University. This support made it possible to maintain a stable daily life, which allowed me to dedicate myself fully to my studies.