Sasakawa Nursing Fellow 2025 Annual Report

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I Purpose & Overview

This report aims to present and reflect on my learning experiences at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). Through my prior work in nursing education, I have recognized that many educational practices rely heavily on tradition, experience, or intuitive judgment, and are not always systematically informed by learning theories or cognitive science.

Through my studies at HGSE, I have come to understand that learning is not simply the transmission of knowledge, but is shaped by learners' cognition, relationships, and the design of learning environments. In addition, I have learned that the appropriate use of emerging technologies, including AI, is an important component of effective learning design. However, technology should not be seen as the central driver of learning; rather, it should be positioned as one of several elements that support and extend learners' thinking and learning experiences.

In this report, I organize my academic learning into three key areas: (1) Curiosity and Learning Processes, (2) Developmental Relationships, and (3) Learning Design and Implementation. For each area, I discuss what I have learned and consider its implications for nursing education.

II Academic Learning

1.Curiosity and Learning Processes

In the area of curiosity and learning processes, I first explored how curiosity influences learning outcomes through the course Curiosity in Learning and Development, particularly focusing on early childhood to elementary education. Through learning theories, classroom activities, and discussions based on academic literature, I developed a deeper understanding of how fostering curiosity can significantly enhance students' engagement and learning. One key insight was that curiosity is not simply an individual trait, but something that can be actively supported through intentional learning design. Research suggests that curiosity-driven learning is strongly associated with academic achievement, as it encourages learners to ask questions, explore ideas, and actively construct knowledge. In our final project, my group designed an intervention that promotes curiosity through structured questioning strategies, demonstrating how even small pedagogical changes can create opportunities for deeper learning.

My understanding was further expanded through the course on Visible Thinking, where I learned the importance of making students' thinking processes visible rather than focusing only on correct answers. In today's increasingly complex world, meaningful learning requires more than simply acquiring knowledge; it involves engaging in deep thinking, reflecting on one's reasoning, and communicating it to others. Since factual knowledge can be easily accessed through technology, the ability to think—and to make thinking visible—has become more important than ever. In this context, the concept of "lifeworthy learning" had a strong impact on my thinking, emphasizing learning that remains valuable over time and can be applied in new situations, rather than knowledge that is only memorized for short-term use.

Another concept that significantly shaped my understanding was the "believing game," which involves temporarily accepting another person's idea in order to understand it more deeply by

entering their perspective. Importantly, this does not mean agreeing, but rather suspending judgment to prioritize understanding. In classroom settings, this approach shifts the focus from evaluating answers to understanding how students think. At the same time, I learned that the believing game must be balanced with the "doubting game," which supports critical evaluation. Together, these ideas reshaped my understanding of education, shifting my focus from correct answers to thinking processes. I also came to recognize the importance of designing thinking routines and creating a "culture of thinking together," where students can share and build on each other's ideas. Overall, these experiences helped me understand that curiosity and thinking are closely connected, and that effective learning design should support both individual cognition and collaborative thinking.

2. Developmental Relationships

In the area of developmental relationships, I explored how human development is shaped by the quality of relationships through the course Empowering Human Relationships Across Developmental Contexts. I learned that learning and development do not occur only within individuals, but are deeply influenced by the relational environments surrounding them. The course emphasized that relationships are not merely supportive, but foundational conditions for development and well-being, especially in contexts of adversity . One key insight was the need to shift from evaluating outcomes to observing and understanding everyday interactions, focusing on how people relate to one another rather than only on results. In deepening this perspective, the concept of "positive deviance" was particularly influential. Instead of focusing on problems, this approach highlights individuals who are already building effective relationships under the same constraints, suggesting that valuable insights already exist within the current context .

This perspective led me to reflect on my own practice as a nurse educator. In a communication training course I previously taught in Japan, students analyzed nurse–patient interactions to understand supportive communication. However, I struggled with how to teach relational skills effectively and realized that nursing education often focuses more on problems than on successful practices. Through this course, I came to understand the importance of identifying and analyzing effective relational practices within the same context. My understanding was further strengthened through the concept of "relational health," which highlights that relationships are fundamental determinants of health and well-being. This perspective is especially relevant in healthcare settings, where patients' well-being is closely tied to the quality of their relational experiences.

In my final project, I created a relational map of interactions among nurses, patients, and families in hospital settings , which helped me understand how these relationships are interconnected. I also identified structural barriers such as time constraints and workload, while recognizing that small actions—such as calling a patient by name or making eye contact—can still improve relational quality. Through this course, I came to recognize not only the importance of focusing on relationships, but also how to observe and apply relational processes in practice. This experience has influenced my approach to nursing education, leading me to reconsider how learning environments can support both cognitive and relational development.

3.Learning Design and Implementation

Through the course offered by the Teaching and Learning Lab (TLL) at Harvard Graduate School of Education, I learned how to design learning experiences based on learning theories, cognitive science, and the use of emerging technologies. Reflecting on my previous experience in nursing education, I realized that many courses rely heavily on tradition, experience, or intuitive decision-making, and are not systematically updated based on learning theory. In particular, I recognized the importance of incorporating perspectives such as cognitive load, memory processes, and assessment design. I also came to understand the significance of authentic assessment and assignments, which require learners not simply to reproduce knowledge, but to apply their knowledge and skills in contexts similar to real-world professional settings and make judgments while engaging in complex tasks.

In addition, my perspective on the use of AI has shifted significantly. Rather than viewing AI as a tool that replaces human thinking, I came to see it as a collaborator that can extend the thinking and creativity of curriculum designers. I also reconsidered my assumptions about online education. I realized that online learning is not inherently boring; rather, the quality of the experience largely depends on how it is designed. Based on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, I learned the importance of redesigning learning environments by incorporating the three key elements—teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence—and adapting face-to-face instruction to online contexts.

Furthermore, I am currently participating in a project to improve existing online learning materials at Harvard. In this project, we are continuously examining how information should be structured and presented from a communication design perspective, including when, where, and how much information should be delivered to learners. In particular, I have been working collaboratively with the university's technology team and designers to explore how and when to effectively integrate infographics into the learning experience.

While the limitations of online education in the healthcare field were widely discussed during the COVID-19 pandemic, more recently, changes in educational guidelines have led to reduced clinical training hours in nursing education. In this context, I believe that a learning design perspective is becoming increasingly important. Even in online environments, it is possible to enhance the quality of learning through intentional design. The experience I am gaining through this project provides valuable insights for improving learning design in nursing education.

III Personal Growth & Key Insights

Through my learning at HGSE, I encountered many ideas that helped me make sense of the frustrations I had previously experienced in nursing education. Questions that I had struggled to articulate—such as why students could not apply knowledge in practice or why teaching often relied on intuition—began to be explained through learning theories, cognitive science, and instructional design frameworks. This allowed me to reframe these challenges as issues that can be addressed through intentional design.

However, I also recognize that education cannot be transformed by an individual alone. In the nursing field, where traditions and fixed assumptions are deeply rooted, meaningful change requires collaboration with diverse stakeholders. Therefore, one of my key challenges moving forward is how to integrate what I have learned at HGSE into the nursing field while working collaboratively with others.

At this stage, rather than immediately returning to a classroom setting, I have developed a strong interest in roles such as curriculum design and educational consulting, where learning experiences can be systematically designed and improved at a broader level. Therefore, I am also considering gaining experience in the private sector. In the long term, I aim to pursue a PhD in order to further explore learning design from the learner's perspective and contribute to the field of nursing education. Through this path, I hope to contribute to transforming nursing education into a more theory-informed, learner-centered, and sustainable system.

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