

Expectations of Transition Bachelor of Nursing Students in the Final Clinical Practicum: A Literature Review

Paige Gibbings

Abstract

Background: The final clinical practicum (CP) is a pivotal transition for Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in Bachelor of Nursing (BN) transition programs, preparing them for Registered Nurse (RN) practice. While research often addresses general CPs, little has focused on transition students who bring prior experience yet face unique challenges in their final CP.

Purpose: This review explores how transition students form expectations before their final CP and how these expectations shape their readiness for independent RN practice.

Type of Literature Review: An integrative review synthesizing findings from 21 peer-reviewed studies (2015–2025) and selected earlier works.

Results: Analysis of the literature revealed the following five themes shaping expectations. 1) Students predicted closing the theory–practice gap through hands-on application but faced misalignment with reality. 2) Supportive environments and mentorship acknowledging prior LPN experience were essential for RN development. 3) The CP was used to adapt established professional identities to RN responsibilities. 4) Emotional challenges were heightened by role ambiguity and competing demands. 5) Structured preceptorships were highly valued, though often limited by resources and inconsistent support.

Implications: This review highlights limited research on transition students' expectations before the final CP in Canada. Addressing this gap requires examining how expectations are formed and how they shape the transition to RN practice.

Keywords: Professional transition, final clinical practicum, transition nurse students, bridging education, expectations, professional identity, mentorship, readiness

Poster

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Background

- The final clinical practicum (CP) represents a pivotal transition where nursing students consolidate theory into independent RN practice (1,3).
- Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) to Bachelor Nurse (BN) transition students differ from traditional students as they bring prior clinical experience but must shift from task-focused LPN work to Registered Nurse (RN) level clinical reasoning, leadership, delegation, and accountability (3, 14).
- Research disproportionately focuses on traditional undergraduates; transition-student expectations for the final CP remain underexplored, especially in Canada/Alberta (4, 1).

Purpose

To explore how LPN to BN transition students in Alberta form expectations for their final clinical practicum and how these expectations shape their readiness for independent RN practice.

Type of Literature Review

- **Type:** Integrative Literature Review
- **Databases:** CINAHL, Plus, PubMed, EBSCOhost (2015-2025, key earlier works included)
- **Inclusion:** Peer-reviewed, English, nursing/healthcare students, clinical placement or final CP focus
- **Total Articles:** 21
- **Key Focus Areas:**
 - Student expectations before CPs; mentorship and supervision; professional development and identity formation; emotional challenges; and structured preceptorships

Results

Theme	Description & Core Findings	Key Sources
Bridging the Theory-Practice Gap	Students expect to apply theory through hands-on experience but face persistent misalignment between classroom and clinical realities. Bridging students also must unlearn LPN habits to adopt RN-level reasoning.	(4, 7, 13)
Supportive Environments & Mentorship	Mentorship quality strongly influences confidence and skill development. Bridging students expect mentors to recognize their prior experience.	(5, 11, 14)
Professional Identity Formation	Final CPs reinforce ethical values, communication, and leadership; bridging students must reconstruct professional identity from LPN to RN.	(2, 8, 13)
Emotional Challenges	Stress, role ambiguity, and legitimacy concerns are heightened for bridging students balancing multiple roles (work, study, family).	(7, 8, 9)
Structured Preceptorships	Students value clear guidance and progression; LPN to BN students require differentiated support acknowledging prior expertise.	(6, 10, 14)

Implications

- Differentiate preceptorships for transition students by acknowledging prior LPN competencies (5, 14).
- Train preceptors to address role ambiguity and support identity transformation (3, 10).
- Incorporate expectation setting discussions early in practicum orientation to align student and preceptor perspectives (5, 10, 11).
- Future Research: Alberta-based qualitative exploration of how transition students construct expectations and manage the final CP transition.

Conclusion

LPN to BN transition students' expectations are shaped by prior professional experience, emotional investment, and perceived support. However, mismatches between expectations and clinical realities persist, underscoring the need for targeted mentorship and context-specific educational supports that bridge the theory-practice divide and facilitate a confident transition to RN practice (5, 10, 14).

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