One of the common goals for nurse educators is to help nursing students to retain the information from one course to the other and to the NCLEX; then apply all the information to care for their patients. We use the metaphor of connecting the dots to explain the situation. Most students do not have a clear understanding of the big picture. They view courses as separate concepts (scattered dots) unrelated to others. For instance, nursing students will question the value of mathematic or writing course toward their career. These students do not predict necessity of math skills for medication administration or writing skills for documenting their work. Most nursing students do not remember mental health topics when studying for maternal newborn. Yet, these concepts are interrelated; and it may be easier to grasp the new concepts easier when previous concepts are readily available (Beers, Bowden, 2005).

Challenge of retaining information may be greater among students of an accelerated program where the students are expected to learn, comprehend, and retain information faster than traditional programs.

As instructors in an accelerated nursing program we recognize a great disconnect between concepts from one course to the other. With attention to the importance of information retention for nursing students, we started investigating the level of retention and recall among students. Three of us started a project to assess retention of information among our students and identify ways to improve retention. Greater retention may allow them to see the big picture/ connect the dots which will result in greater success in the program and NCLEX.

We teach in first course of core, fourth term course in core, and the sixth term in core. Thus, we could track the information retention from the beginning of core courses. We began by using classroom assessment techniques (CATs). At the end of each class the students were asked to answer 2 questions.

1. What 2 points did you learn today

2. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being the least and 5 the highest learning) how would you rate your learning today? _____ Please explain

It was somewhat disappointing that students did not remember much from previous courses. More alarming was the fact that they did not recall information from earlier lessons in the same course. Instructors from beginning courses (fundamentals) visited the fourth term course (nutrition) asking students to discuss what they remember from the fundamental course and how would they connect the concepts with the current course. Also the instructor from nutrition course visited the fundamentals class discussing the importance of the information in the course as it relates to their success in the program as a whole. On the final exam students were asked to recall information from the visit or discuss a concept from the other course as it relates to their overall success. Answer to these questions were not clear, some students did not recall the visit or the concepts discussed during the visit…