Learning How to Learn: Nurses' Experiences With Failure and Success

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Background and significance: More than 1.02 million new nurses are needed by 2022 for the predicted nursing shortage. A potential way to decrease the shortage is through increasing the number of nursing students entering the workforce. Unfortunately, nursing students in the United States (U.S.) are among the college students with the lowest retention and graduation rates ranging from 30%-70%. This has also been identified as an international problem. Research studies addressing this issue focus on admission criteria, retention, and remediation of students with no consistent findings. No studies exist that utilize nursing students who have experienced both failure and success in a nursing program.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of nurses who have failed at least one nursing course during their Bachelor of Science (BSN) nursing education program, then completed their nursing education and continued to be successful by passing the NCLEX-RN on the first attempt.

Methods: A qualitative design of interpretive phenomenology was used for this study. The conceptual framework focused on the Hermeneutic philosophy and David Kolb's Experiential Theory. A purposive sample was identified by faculty and peers using snowball sampling. Recruitment occurred until saturation was achieved. Participants were registered nurses who failed a nursing course, then successfully completed a nursing program after failing a course, and successfully passed the NLCEX-RN on the first attempt. Using open-ended questions, the researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into Ethnograph 6.0. A naïve reading of the transcribed were completed. Data was then coded, a code book was created, and codes were verified by methods and content experts. Content analysis, constant comparison, and use of field notes revealed two themes. An audit trail was completed to provide an ability to further understand the research study and identification of themes. Trustworthiness of the data was established through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Results: A total of fourteen participants were recruited from five different nursing programs. Two themes emerged, difficulty learning and learning to learn. Participants noted that they did not know how to study for nursing, their prior learning experiences were not helpful, and they did not ask for help. Participants identified the process of learning effective study skills/habits as essential to their success in a nursing program and on the NLCEX-RN. The theme of learning to learn emerged from the interviews.

Conclusions: A unique sample was recruited for this study that provided an in-depth description of the nursing student's experience of moving from failure to success. The participants in this study actually learned how to learn effectively in a nursing program.

Implications for Nursing Practice: The participants revealed information about the process of becoming successful while in a nursing program. Incorporation of the findings of this study were used to provide suggestions for nursing faculty, nursing education administrators, and students with the goal of decreasing attrition, increasing retention, and ultimately impacting the nursing shortage. Further research to valid the findings will need to be completed.
Keywords:
learning, nursing student and success

References:


**Abstract Summary:**
Retention rates are a continuing problem for nursing programs. A qualitative design was used to investigate a unique population that experienced both failure and success within their Bachelor of Science Nursing education. Findings of this study describe the participants’ struggles with ineffective study skills and development of effective learning skills.

**Content Outline:**

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I. Introduction

- Nursing students in the United States (U.S.) are among the college students with the lowest retention and graduation rates ranging from 30%-70%.
- Given the predicted need for more than one million nurses by 2022 in the U.S., retention solutions must be found.
- This has also been identified as an international problem in the United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland, Iran, and Italy.

II. Body

- **Current research focuses on:**
  - Admission criteria, attrition, retention, remediation, and lived experiences.
  - Individual studies investigate potential solutions to the problem of completing a nursing program, consistent solutions are not supported from study to study.
  - Many nursing education published studies are anecdotal and lack scientific rigor.
  - A different perspective for investigating this problem is needed.
  - No published studies explore the identified problem from the perspective of students that have overcome failure to successful complete a nursing program. The population can provide a unique perspective.
  - **Current study:**
    - A qualitative study was completed with data collected through interviews. The data was analyzed using content analysis and constant comparison.
    - An in-depth discussion about the research design, recruitment strategies, description of participants, data collection instruments, and procedure will be included.
  - **Findings:**
    - Themes:
      - Difficulty Learning: Lack of effective study skills
      - Learning to Learn: Development of effective learning skills

III. Conclusion:

- Focus on implications for further nursing research, nurse educators, nursing education administrators, and students will be reviewed/discussed based on study findings.

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Becky Parnell has been a nurse for 35 years. She is an Associate Professor of Nursing and Retention Director at Southern Arkansas University. Her passion is to help students be successful in nursing school. She enjoys working with the at-risk student to recognize their true potential. Dr. Parnell also works as a Clinical Nurse Specialist at the local hospital in the Emergency Department where she continues to nurture new graduate nurses.