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## The meaning of grades: Stories of undergraduate, graduate and doctoral nursing students

**Susan Poorman, Professor and Doctoral Program Coordinator, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Melissa Mastorovich, Senior Clinician, STAT Nursing Consultants, Inc, Trafford, USA**

The grading and assessment of students is an essential part of any nursing program (Skingley *et al.*, 2007). Nurse educators and nursing students have become increasingly concerned about the grading process. O'Flynn-Magee and Clauson (2013) purport that inconsistent grading practices, students' unrealistic expectations about grades and grade inflation may be issues that concern both educators and students. In today's contemporary society, grades matter. For students, parents and teachers, grades often take on a personal significance and emotionality.

This study utilized a Heideggerian hermeneutical phenomenological approach to illuminate and understand the meaning of grades for students at the undergraduate (ADN and BSN), graduate (MSN) and doctoral (PhD and DNP) levels of nursing education. Forty nursing students from 15 different nursing programs participated in this research. Human subject approval was acquired, and informed consent was obtained. Unstructured, one-on-one interviews were conducted in which the students were asked: 'Tell us about a time that stands out to you when you graded. Then reflect on your story and describe what this experience meant to you.' Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Hermeneutic analysis (Andrews *et al.*, 2001; Ironside, 2005) bears witness to how a person experiences something. The researchers engaged in circles of understanding that deepened as the interview texts were read and analysed. Through rigorous interpretation, meaning, experiences, and judgments were conveyed. Data analysis revealed several themes. The themes: Needing the Grade and Struggling with Average will be discussed during this presentation. Excerpts from the student stories will be read and interpretations of the narratives will be shared.

Grading and grades are hotly debated topics among students, faculty and the general population. The purpose of this presentation is not to valorize or demonize the use of grades in education. Rather, sharing these stories may initiate a much-needed discussion among nursing faculty and students about grading (McConlogue, 2012). The presenters will discuss how the students' stories of being graded has changed and inspired them. For students, grades are very powerful. Implications for nurse educators and faculty from other health professions will be discussed. Specifically healthcare educators will be encouraged to open the dialogue about grades with their students. With ongoing dialogue about grades, not only will teachers and students share the meaning of grade experience, they can make a significant difference in student teacher relationships.

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### How this contributes to knowledge development within this theme:

- grading is an essential component of nursing education
- inconsistent grading practices and unrealistic student expectations may create problems
- data analysis revealed two themes that will be discussed: Needing the grade and struggling with average.

## An evaluation of collaborative research partnerships in occupational therapy education

**Kath Ward, Senior Lecturer; Helen Wilby, Senior Lecturer, University of Cumbria, UK**

Stimulating interest in research for pre-registration healthcare students is challenging. Ambitions of students to conduct research in practice settings can be deterred by complexities such as acquiring ethical permission, gaining institutional approval or negotiating access to appropriate sites. As a result many students resort to peer-based projects (Kennel *et al.*,

2009). Practice research comes to be viewed as overwhelming and intimidating whilst the contrived and clinically removed nature of peer-based projects reduces interest in research (Crist, 2010). Students come to view research as something that is for 'others', those with more experience or with higher academic qualifications (Kennel *et al.*, 2009). Consequently many students qualify without any experience of conducting practice related research and the ensuing lack of skills results in a limited amount of research being conducted by practitioners. Indeed, a lack of skills and confidence in carrying out research has been identified amongst qualified practitioners within the occupational therapy profession (Pighills *et al.*, 2013). This has served to perpetuate a practice-research gap in which scientific research carried out by academics bears little relevance to the realities of practice (Kielhofner, 2005). There continues to be a significant need for the generation of pragmatic knowledge to support clinical interventions and contribute towards the evidence-base (Crist, 2010).

An educational approach aiming to address the practice-research divide was planned and implemented for pre-registration occupational therapy students. This comprised the development of research partnerships involving students, practitioners and university supervisors. It was considered that such partnerships could have mutual benefits.

Practitioners working in local NHS Trusts were invited to be involved in collaborative partnerships. They were asked to put forward practice-related topic areas that they would be interested in researching. Once these were identified, students were invited to take part in the projects. Seven research projects were collaboratively designed and executed.

Following completion of these, the partnerships were evaluated from the perspectives of all three parties. The evaluation used an action research methodology. Ethical approval was granted from the university and research governance approval was granted from the NHS Trusts employing the practitioners.

The findings highlighted a number of benefits for all three parties, as well as some challenges and recommendations for future. The following themes were identified: research with value; developing relationships; professional development; sources of tension.

The partnerships increased students' confidence and understanding of the research process which may help to overcome some of the issues reported by Crist (2010), Kennel *et al.* (2009) and Pighills *et al.* (2013). Experience of conducting practice related research has led to increased motivation and a positive attitude towards future research engagement. Further research involvement from participants in their transition from students to practitioners will be influential in helping to address the practice-research gap described by Kielhofner (2005). This will lead to the generation of pragmatic knowledge to support clinical interventions and contribute towards the professional evidence-base.

The partnerships are considered to be a valuable educational approach to build research capacity and therefore worthy of further application on a broader scale. However, since commitment from students is a significant factor in determining success, participation should be optional. The research partnerships therefore need to be promoted in order to achieve greater uptake by students. The challenges that were highlighted can be addressed through the development of guidance around the definition of collaborative partnerships, documentation of roles and responsibilities, communication procedures and formal written agreements/contracts. Furthermore, the establishment of guidelines around the responsibility to disseminate the research findings and subsequent recommendations arising from the partnership projects would be valuable. Future evaluation will investigate the impact of collaborative research projects on practice development.

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## Key words:

- research education
- research skills development
- building research capacity
- practice-based research
- practice development.

## How this contributes to knowledge development within this theme:

- the work investigates the benefits of and challenges to collaborative research partnerships between practitioners, students and university educators

- the work provides recommendations for the successful implementation of collaborative research partnerships
- the work considers how collaborative research partnerships can facilitate future practice development.

## T3

### **Perceptions and self-perceived knowledge of evidence-based healthcare amongst registered nurses and midwives in rural areas of the Western Cape, South Africa**

**Karien Orton, Lecturer; Anke Rohwer, Researcher, Western Cape College of Nursing, Worcester, South Africa**

#### **Background**

Evidence-based healthcare is a problem-solving approach that integrates the best research evidence, with clinician expertise and patient preferences and values. Delivering evidence-based healthcare, in the context of a caring and supportive organizational culture, results in high-quality care and optimal patient outcomes. It is important that registered nurses know the steps involved in making evidence-informed decisions in a healthcare environment.

Currently, there is no published study that assesses practicing registered nurses' understanding, perception, and self-perceived knowledge of evidence-based healthcare in the South African context.

#### **Objectives**

The objective was to describe registered nurses and midwives' perceptions and self-perceived knowledge of evidence-based healthcare.

#### **Population**

Registered nurses and midwives, working in rural hospitals or clinics in the Cape Winelands district, Western Cape, South Africa.

#### **Methods**

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted, using a validated paper-based questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section consisted of questions related to registered nurses and midwives' demographical data, educational level and understanding of evidence-based healthcare. The second section assessed their evidence-based healthcare attitude and behaviour. Lastly, the barriers to and suggestions for improvement of practicing evidence-based healthcare were explored.

#### **Results**

Overall, the response rate was 52% (125/240). Most registered nurses and midwives indicated that they had heard about the term evidence-based healthcare, as part of their post-basic studies.

Registered nurses and midwives were confident in their ability to perform the steps of evidence-based healthcare and mostly had a positive attitude towards it, although they indicated that they did not engage in the steps of evidence-based healthcare on a regular basis. Identified barriers included: resistance to change amongst older nurses, lack of evidence-based healthcare knowledge and lack of role models. Suggestions to improve the practice of evidence-based healthcare focused on training all nurses through in-service training, attending of conferences and other courses.

#### **Conclusion**

Registered nurses and midwives lacked evidence-based healthcare knowledge and skills they did not engage in evidence-based healthcare on a regular basis. There is a need to improve training in evidence-based healthcare for all registered nurses and midwives. Strategies to increase evidence-informed healthcare decision-making should include all healthcare professionals at all levels – managers, doctors and other members of the multidisciplinary team.

#### **Key words:**

- evidence-based healthcare
- knowledge and skills
- barriers
- nursing
- education.

#### **How this contributes to knowledge development within this theme:**

- to identify barriers in implementing EBHC
- describe the knowledge registered nurses have in applying EBHC