When two worlds collide: a Heideggerian interpretive phenomenological study into the experience of assessing “failing” nursing students within clinical practice

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education in Education

at Massey University, Palmerston North
New Zealand.

Sally Dobbs
2015
Abstract

Clinical nurse educators employed by New Zealand polytechnics experience challenges when assessing Bachelor of Nursing students in clinical practice, particularly students who are considered to be “failing”. This phenomenological study sought to explore the experience of clinical assessment and why assessors fail to award “failing” nursing students a fail grade. Fourteen clinical nurse educators, employed within three New Zealand polytechnics were interviewed about their experiences of educating and assessing nursing students’ clinical practice. All participants used a preceptorship model of clinical teaching. The interviews were analysed for key themes using Heideggerian Interpretive Phenomenology. The study revealed tensions for participants between being-in the world-of-nursing as well as being-in the world-of-education. Less than half the participants had not failed a nursing student in clinical practice, despite having concerns about their safety to practice. Participants felt ill prepared for their role as educators and assessors. The phenomenon of care was revealed when assessing failing students. Participants acknowledged that some students are thrown into the world-of-nursing; they wanted to care for students by not failing them and questioned whether assessment should occur in the first year. As students progressed through the programme, participants used the phenomenon of care for the health consumer to make a judgement about a students’ competence. The responsibility to fail nursing students was frequently disburdened to others. The ambiguity of clinical assessment tools, especially the use of competencies, and the lack of progression created challenges for assessors. The threat of students appealing the fail grade inhibited less experienced participants from failing students. Clinical nurse educators lack adequate preparation to educate and assess nursing students. The limitations of this study are its small sample size and lack of generalisability. This study showed that nursing students are passing clinical assessments despite concerns about their competence to practice. Further research is warranted to include a larger sample size and different clinical teaching models, as well as researching the phenomenon of failing from a student perspective.

Key words: Assessment, nurse, failing, phenomenology
Acknowledgements

This doctoral journey would not have been possible had it not been for Tania asking how she was to deal with a student who was failing in clinical practice. The spark had been ignited for a study into the factors that made it difficult for clinical educators to fail students who were not achieving within the clinical placement. So, thank you Tania for giving me the opportunity to research an area that has not been explored within New Zealand.

I am grateful for the time that I was afforded from the research committee at Southern Institute of Technology.

This project would not have been possible without the co-operation from the Chief Executive Officers and Heads of Schools of Nursing that allowed me access into their institutions to interview staff. I am indebted to the staff that agreed to participate and open their hearts about the experiences of dealing with failing students. Some traumatic experiences were re-lived and I am extremely grateful that you found the courage to speak about the guilt, the anger, and fear that you experienced when assessing students in practice. As promised, I will maintain that confidentiality and will therefore not identify the institutions or clinical educators that were involved in the study, but without your help and time, this study would not have been possible.

I wish to thank my supervisors, Dr Linda Leach and Dr Martin Woods of Massey University for your ongoing support and words of encouragement; for challenging me and getting me to think ‘outside of the box’. Thanks must also go to Margaret Walshaw and all the staff at the Graduate School of Education who facilitate on the Doctorate of Education programme. This programme challenged me about research methodologies within educational research and enabled me to think critically about the role of nurse educators in the protection of the public and the world of the nursing student.

I also wish to thank Glynny and Kirsten for your eagle eyes and diligence when reading my thesis. My final thanks must go to my husband, Graham, who has supported me throughout this journey and forgiven me when the housework has not been completed as I have been lost in the world of Heidegger. I could not have completed this journey without your patience and tolerance Graham, and I promise that I have now come back into your life, to share our love of the outdoors and each other’s company.

Ethical approval was granted by Massey University Human Ethics Committee.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT............................................................................................................................................................... ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS................................................................................................................................... iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS....................................................................................................................................... iv
LIST OF FIGURES................................................................................................................................................. xi
LIST OF TABLES.................................................................................................................................................. xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.............................................................................................................................. xii

CHAPTER ONE ........................................................................................................................................ 1
Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 1
Introduction and Background......................................................................................................................... 1
What is Nursing? ........................................................................................................................................ 3
Clinical Assessment........................................................................................................................................ 7
“Failing” student......................................................................................................................................... 8
Research Aim................................................................................................................................................ 8
Research questions ....................................................................................................................................... 9
Thesis Structure.......................................................................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER TWO ................................................................................................................................... 10
Literature Review .............................................................................................................................. 10
Historical Background of Nursing and Nursing Education in New Zealand................................ 11
Nursing as a Profession................................................................................................................................. 13
Current Nurse Education.............................................................................................................................. 16
The Clinical Learning Environment.............................................................................................................. 18
Relationships............................................................................................................................................... 21
Generational differences.............................................................................................................................. 23
Data Gathering Methods ................................................................................................................. 65

Questionnaires ................................................................................................................................. 65

Observation ........................................................................................................................................ 66

Journals .............................................................................................................................................. 66

Interviews ........................................................................................................................................... 66

Analysing the Data .............................................................................................................................. 68

Research Validity ............................................................................................................................... 70

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 72

CHAPTER FOUR .................................................................................................................................. 73

Implementation of the Research Process .......................................................................................... 73

The Research Journey ....................................................................................................................... 73

Research proposal ............................................................................................................................. 73

Research questions ......................................................................................................................... 74

Ethical approval ............................................................................................................................... 74

Sampling ........................................................................................................................................... 76

Conducting the semi-structured interviews .................................................................................. 77

Interview transcription ..................................................................................................................... 80

Findings ............................................................................................................................................. 81

Research Validity ............................................................................................................................... 85

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 87

CHAPTER FIVE ................................................................................................................................... 88

Findings: Being-a Clinical Nurse Educator ..................................................................................... 88

Heideggerian Concepts ....................................................................................................................... 89

Being-a Clinical Nurse Educator ....................................................................................................... 91

Becoming a clinical nurse educator ............................................................................................... 91

Preparation to become an educator ............................................................................................... 93
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Being-a professional</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being-disrespectful</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being dressed inappropriately</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using inappropriate language</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of borderline students</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being-safe</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe medication administration</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge deficit</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being-with-others in a team</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Challenged as a Nurse Educator</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions being overturned</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Responsibility for Failing Students</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students fail themselves</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

Discussion: Entering the Clearing .................................................................156

- Tensions Between Two Worlds .................................................................157
- Becoming a nursing student .................................................................157
- Accrediting nurse education programmes ........................................159
- Preparation for *Being-a* clinical nurse educator .................................160
- Clinical education in the *world-of-education* ......................................163
- Clinical assessment in the *world-of-education* .....................................164
- *Being-with-others* in a clinical placement ...........................................166

Tensions between *Caring for Students* and *Caring for Health Consumers* ......................................169

- Failing as *caring for* the student ..........................................................169
- Failing as *caring for* the health consumer ..........................................172

Clinical Assessment Tools .........................................................................173
CHAPTER EIGHT...............................................................................................................................184
Conclusion and Recommendations ...........................................................................................184
Clinical Nurse Educators Experiences of Clinical Assessment..............................................184
Factors Influencing Participants’ Assessment Decisions .................................................... 186
The Impact of the Clinical Teaching Model ........................................................................... 186
The Feelings of Clinical Nurse Educators who are Assessing “Failing” Students ............ 187
Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 188
Contribution to Nurse Education in New Zealand ............................................................. 189
Limitations ......................................................................................................................................... 190
Recommendations .......................................................................................................................... 190
Further Research ............................................................................................................................. 193
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 193

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................................ 195

APPENDICES ........................................................................................................................................ 212
Appendix A. NZQA Qualifications Definitions and Levels Descriptors ............................ 212
Appendix B. Education Programme Standards for the Registered Nurse ......................... 216
Appendix C. Competencies for Registration as a Registered Nurse (NZNZ, 2012a), Registered Nurse Scope of Practice ................................................................. 217
Appendix D. Essential skills clusters (2010) and guidance for their use (guidance G7.1.5b) ........................................................................................................................................ 229
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Four elements of the research process (Adapted from Crotty, 1998, p. 4) ................................................................................................................................................................................... 49

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1: Participant qualifications and who had failed students .................................................................................................................................................................................... 92

Table A1: NZQA Qualification definitions and level descriptions (NZQA, 2010) .................................................................................................................................................................................. 212

Table D1: Essential Skills Cluster (NMC, 2010) .................................................................................................................................................................................. 231

Table I1: Individual profiles of each participant .................................................................................................................................................................................. 283
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEI</td>
<td>Approved Education Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>American Psychological Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BN</td>
<td>Bachelor of Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEU</td>
<td>Dedicated Education Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHB</td>
<td>District Health Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESC</td>
<td>Essential Skills Cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPCA Act (2003)</td>
<td>Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNC</td>
<td>General Nursing Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICN</td>
<td>International Council of Nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUGSE</td>
<td>Massey University Graduate School of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCNZ</td>
<td>Nursing Council of New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMC</td>
<td>Nursing and Midwifery Council of the United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZNO</td>
<td>New Zealand Nurses Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZQA</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Objective Structured Clinical Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Regulatory Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCN</td>
<td>Royal College of Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEC</td>
<td>Tertiary Education Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>