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

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## 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

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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