Journey together through the three years:
An evaluation of the personal tutor system, a student support model embedded in a Bachelor of Nursing programme in New Zealand.

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

Doctorate in Education

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Kathryn Maree Hoare

2015
Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Abstract

Student support is an important part of tertiary education with different models, systems and approaches used internationally and nationally. The personal tutor system is one such approach to student support embedded within a new Bachelor of Nursing curriculum in a New Zealand tertiary institution. Through the personal tutor system students were assigned a lecturer, an academic member of staff, at the commencement of their study, for the duration of their programme. The purpose of the personal tutor system was to offer students support with their academic development and personal guidance that involved: scheduled and ad hoc meetings; monitoring of progress; personal assistance; and directing some students to seek additional support.

Using a mixed methods design, the personal tutor system was evaluated at the time the first student cohort completed the new programme. The study focused on factors that influenced the personal tutor system experience. Third year students and lecturers were invited to participate in two-phase data collection that involved the completion of a questionnaire (third year students: n=86 and lecturers: n=19) followed by semi-structured interviews (third year students: n=38 and lecturers: n=10).

Most participants confirmed that their personal tutor system experience was positive. Interpersonal interaction between students and lecturers was a key factor, as relationships were central to the personal tutor system. Flexibility was important as the personal tutor system was not a one-size-fits-all approach to student support. At times, competing responsibilities gave rise to undue tension particularly with lecturers’ availability and accessibility for support. Unfamiliarity with the personal tutor system guidelines led to different interpretations for use and consequently confusion with support expectations. However, almost all participants acknowledged the value and potential for the personal tutor system in the BN programme.

Recommendations for changes to the personal tutor system included: the creation a proportional co-ordination role for ongoing management; a review of the guidelines that linked to support resources; time integrated into the BN programme for flexible arrangements with meetings and contact; and a time allocation for lecturers’ workload with resourcing for associated responsibilities.
Acknowledgements

I want to express my sincere thanks to all the people, who have supported me during this study. My thanks to students and lecturers who participated in this research, without you, this study would not have been possible. Thanks also to my current and previous work colleagues in the School of Nursing, for your support.

To my academic supervisors, I am grateful for your different and complimentary skills and expertise. Thanks to Dr Linda Leach for your focused guidance and constructive suggestions that have been invaluable in the development of this work. Thanks to Dr Cat Pausé for your broader direction and helpful insights that directed and shaped this work.

My sincere thanks to incredible family, particularly my Mum and my daughter, and all the friends who have been with me from the start and amazingly are still present at the end. I am so grateful for your support, which has kept me going throughout.

Finally, I acknowledge my Dad, Francis (Frank) Hunter Hoare - (31 January 1931- 3 July 2010) who encouraged me to begin this journey. It has been a long and arduous, undulating trek to finally reach the summit. Dad, I wish you were here to share this moment, but in your absence, I guess I get to have a rare last word.
Table of Contents

Chapter One: An Introduction to Student Support

A Personal Context ........................................................................................................ 1
An Overview of the Global Context ................................................................. 2
The New Zealand Context ............................................................................. 4
The Nursing Context ....................................................................................... 6
Innovation within a Bachelor of Nursing ...................................................... 9
An Evaluation of the Personal Tutor System .................................................. 12
Statement of purpose ..................................................................................... 12
Structure of the thesis ..................................................................................... 13

Chapter Two: A Literature Review of the Personal Tutor System .............. 15

A Brief History ..................................................................................................... 15
The Literature .................................................................................................. 16
The Terminology ............................................................................................... 18
The Three Models ........................................................................................... 19
Purpose and Role ............................................................................................. 22
Makes Economic Sense .................................................................................. 31
Summary and Conclusion .............................................................................. 33

Chapter Three: The Research Design and Process .................................... 35

The Research Design ....................................................................................... 35
Mixed methods .................................................................................................. 35
Evaluation and research ................................................................................. 39
Data collection and analysis ........................................................................... 42
Ethical Considerations ...................................................................................... 49

The Research Process ...................................................................................... 53
Research participants ....................................................................................... 54
Phase one: Questionnaire development and data analysis ......................... 54
Phase two: Individual interviews and data analysis ..................................... 58
Integration of findings ..................................................................................... 61
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 61
List of Figures

Figure 4.1. Percentage of student and lecturer respondents from the School of Nursing ........ 63
Figure 4.2. Students’ age at commencement of the BN .......................................................... 64
Figure 4.3. Students’ highest academic achievement prior to BN ........................................... 65
Figure 4.4. Length of lecturers’ employment in education at this institution ....................... 66
Figure 4.5. Students’ rating of personal tutor system in relation to aims ................................ 67
Figure 4.6. Lecturers’ rating of personal tutor system in relation to aims ............................. 67
Figure 4.7. Students’ rating of the personal tutor system guidelines .................................... 71
Figure 4.8. Lecturers’ rating of the personal tutor system guidelines .................................... 71
Figure 4.9. Personal tutor system communication methods used ......................................... 81
Figure 4.10. Students’ year one personal tutor system meetings ........................................... 82
Figure 4.11. Lecturers’ year one personal tutor system meetings .......................................... 83
Figure 4.12. Students’ year two and three personal tutor system meetings ......................... 84
Figure 4.13. Lecturers’ year two and three personal tutor system meetings ......................... 85
Figure 4.14. Initiation of additional meetings ......................................................................... 88
Figure 4.15. Focus of personal tutor system discussions ...................................................... 89
Figure 4.16. Student use of the personal tutor system .......................................................... 91
Figure 4.17. Lecturers’ experience of students’ personal tutor system use ............................ 91
Figure 4.18. Support for Students with BN related matters ................................................... 93
Figure 4.19. Lecturer referrals to wider institutional centralised services ............................. 94
Figure 4.20. Overall student and lecturer experience with the personal tutor system .......... 96
Figure 4.21. Overall success of the personal tutor system for student support ..................... 96
List of Tables

Table 3.1. Sequential two phase data collection ................................................................. 38
Table 3.2 Planned analysis of data, presentation and integration of findings. .................. 47
Table 4.1. Lecturer time and number of meetings with each student each year.............. 77
Table 4.2. Students number of meetings with PTS lecturers each year........................... 77
Table 4.3. Lecturer time and number of additional meetings for students each year......... 78
Table 4.4. Reasons for change of personal tutor ............................................................... 79