

## CLINICAL PRACTICE

# Caring in nursing education

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## ABSTRACT

In modern life, student nurses holding a registered nurse license can no longer dedicate themselves full time to further their education. Most of them depend on the financial resources from working in the profession to meet their basic needs and deal with other life challenges. Further, the work that they perform at bedside is very demanding physically, psychologically, and intellectually. It means, the work is very stressful. Reform in nursing education is necessary to avoid added stress and to meet specific needs of students, creating essential conditions for their academic and post-graduation professional-practice success. This includes instructors demonstrating that they care for students by creating a learning partnership with them and making their education personal, creative, and balanced. The goal of this reform is to enhance students' motivation to pursue and achieve a higher academic degree than they currently have.

**Key Words:** Online education, Balanced education, Learning partnership, Student-centered education, Watson, Caring in education

## 1. BACKGROUND

Students enrolled in the Master of Science in Nursing or Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in the USA have a registered nurse license, and most of them work in the profession. The work that nurses perform at bedside is very demanding physically, psychologically, and intellectually. By performing bedside work with the current acuity of patients, nurses are exhausted and drained at the end of their shift. They work eight or twelve hours per workday, or even more if they have mandatory hours to fulfill because of the nursing shortage. In addition, they may be required also to work extra hours to meet employers' requirement during this pandemic time. In addition, they have their own families and themselves for whom to care and the duty to promote their own professional development to maintain their licenses and remain active in the profession. These modern life impositions point toward a necessary reform in nursing education. An important issue in nursing education that

needs to be resolved rests on the thought that full-time students must dedicate their entire days to their education as it was common in the past. However, the possibility of students dedicating themselves exclusively to their own education can hardly be conceived in contemporary life. The great majority of students must work hard to have financial resources to meet their basic needs and deal with other life challenges. Professors, in their role of learning facilitators of student development, must expand their own views on education to make it achievable by most people and compatible with daily life. The proposed reform includes actions as simple as being flexible with due dates for assignments, providing a word of encouragement, offering guidance and resources, focusing learning in the practice of the profession, etc. In summary, it means being in alert to meeting specific needs of students that could facilitate or create essential conditions for their academic and post-graduation professional-practice success. This means to care for students. It means making

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education individualized (personal, creative, and balanced)! This is an important part of open access to higher education, competency-based and student-centered education, and, above all, best practice in education that must be considered. Tuition reduction offered by some institutions is not enough; to be effective, instructors ought to provide education taking in consideration students' modern life commitments and stress reduction. Within this context, having a say in their own learning process and being allowed to exercise some autonomy, after much dialog with the instructor and reflection, empower nurses and enhance their motivation to pursue and achieve a higher degree than they currently have. The same way as we create partnership with our patients by listening to them and including them in the healthcare team which provides care to them, it is important to create a learning partnership with our students in the student-centered education. This partnership forms the basis for the development of affective skills, which are essential for the learning and practice of nursing. Through this partnership, instructors have opportunity to stimulate students' development of empathy and resilience as part of their leaning experience in challenging environments, uniting the affective and cognitive elements of intelligence to handle the learning process holistically.<sup>[1]</sup> The resolution process of this issue rests in caring for students and the reduction of the stress generated by academic and work pressures.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is well known that there is an extreme need for life-long learning in nursing because of frequent new developments occurring in health, medicine, and technology sciences. This life-long learning is a professional requirement for maintenance of a nursing license. It can be fulfilled by formal education until obtention of a terminal degree or, simply, by continuing-education hours. Although both ways are beneficial, the profession and nurses are better served by degree-seeking education because it supports nurses' structured progression across a curriculum and increases nurses' professional marketability, offering more reliable conditions for career progression than through fulfillment of continuing-education hours. It is the duty of universities to meet these needs of nurses by making possible life-long education to those who seek development primarily through formal education.

Human caring influences not only health sciences but also curriculum, andragogy, research, and practice.<sup>[2]</sup> Unitary Caring Science<sup>[3]</sup> can be applied to nursing higher education where nursing educators center thought, purpose, and action are directed to the care, health, and wholeness of oneself and students. It is time to stop dragging the old conceptu-

alization in which instructors hold the absolute knowledge and students are submissive to them. Watson<sup>[3]</sup> proposed to invert the process and place caring as the highest ethical ideal one can offer society and humanity and the basis for a new ethos. Based in Caritas (caring), education is the pursue of science/truth (Veritas). The "Unitary Caring Science embraces all ways of knowing, being, doing, becoming, belonging – ethical, intuitive, personal, empirical, and aesthetic – allowing spiritual/metaphysical, mystical, unknown ways of knowing and being, transcending being."<sup>[4]</sup> Student autonomy and pace of learning should be honored as much as possible through collaboration between the student and educator. The foundation of the Unitary Caring Science is in the amalgamation of the values caritas and veritas, restoring the essence of nursing, which is compassion and goodness. Nursing, like teaching, "[...] is a life-giving and life-receiving career for a lifetime of growth and learning."<sup>3</sup> Influenced by the philosopher Sally Gadow, Watson identified caring as an end and the highest ethical ideal.<sup>[3]</sup> The educator, being a nurse, serves and respects the dignity and integrity of the person (mind, body, and soul) in the practice of nursing, including in the practice of nursing education. However, before offering sincere caring, equanimity, compassion, forgiveness, gentleness, and wisdom, educators must cultivate them in themselves, explore self-learning and caring, and then, share those resources. One must cultivate them and have plenitude to be able to allocate them to others, abundantly, within a professional parameter and as a condition for further development of the profession. Watson<sup>[5]</sup> included as one of the Caritas Processes, "Engaging in transpersonal teaching and learning within the context of a caring relationship; staying within the other's frame of reference." While seeking creative educational strategies through caring processes, the educator must keep in mind the student's frame of reference and gently let it expand through those processes.

## 3. RECONSTRUCTIONISM IN NURSING EDUCATION

Effective and caring reconstructionism in education must be conducive to students' needs, include differentiated instruction, have consideration of the parts of the intelligence, and focus on stress reduction. The educator must provide opportunities for students to develop the three parts of the intelligence identified by Sternberg,<sup>[6]</sup> connecting experience and intelligence: analytical, synthetic, and practical. Solutions for traditional academic problems require analytical intelligence. The application of knowledge from previous problems to new situations involve synthetic intelligence. Practical intelligence is necessary to cope with changes in the environment through the application of current knowl-

edge.<sup>[6]</sup> Different aspects of the intelligence are at work according to the situation.

Within the context of adaptation to the environment, which is per se the definition of intelligence according to Sternberg<sup>[7]</sup> curriculum and courses should be developed in harmony with the environment, and especially reflect the students' life demands, style, and other variables, such as the high prevalence of student stress, which is well recognized in the literature. Stress is related to academic demands, changes, pressure to succeed, financial concerns, and it can affect the individual's mental health and lead to medically unexplained symptoms when excessive and chronic.<sup>[8,9]</sup> Today, adult learners are responsible for their own learning. Nursing educators facilitate this learning process and the students' adaptation to the new knowledge. As educators, we ought to ask ourselves from a student's perspective if attending our classes is a transformative experience for them. Do our class materials offer the perspective of relevancy to their lives and, considering the areas covered, are they enough to support the beginning of a career in that specialization? Education should reflect concern with modern life demands, reduction of stress, and student success.

#### 4. FLEXIBILITY AS A POSSIBLE STRESS REDUCER

Instructors must provide students with resources according to their individual needs, which lead them to the plateau necessary to grow together as class members in academic courses. A course calendar which includes discussions, assignments, and respective due dates serve to keep most students progressing together in an online course. However, stress can be a factor both in nursing practice and academia impeding progress and leading to student's failure. It is essential the implementation of interventions that have potential to reduce stress and facilitate student academic progress. Flexibility on due dates is an important intervention which allows for reduction of stress at a time when academics (including life-long learning) and professional life coexist as a normal part of daily life. Due dates of assignments should have a new meaning, that of guideline dates. The structure of the course progression through a set curriculum is maintained with the use of the term "due date." However, the possibility of a flexibility should be introduced as an item in the syllabus where students communicate their need for a change in due date

and propose the new date as a catch-up plan up to the last day of class. Evidently, all the academic work must be completed by the last day of class, unless an incomplete grade is requested in case of extenuating circumstances and is approved by the instructor. After verifying that the university policy on this matter applies to the specific case, the instructor uses discretion to evaluate the student's need for more time to complete the course. In the case the incomplete grade is granted, the student will have a new date set to complete the course in the following semester.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This article raises a concern regarding the nursing education of students at a time of ongoing pandemics. Most nursing candidates for admission to a graduate or Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program are employed full time and might come from different baseline formations, but, notwithstanding, they meet the qualifications for admission into a university and/or college program. The decision on a student competence to outstand higher education is made at admission. From that point, it starts the students' journey to their degree through research, learning, and service. The goal of higher education is not to cause an educational-cultural shock with expectancy for the survival of the strongest or most-effective learner. It is the faculty responsibility, role, and expectancy from admission and up to graduation to actively participate in the educational team of each student to provide them with the means to arrive successfully at the end of their journey while leading a normal, balanced, and productive life. The use of Caritas and Veritas in the form of empathy and support are strong factors in the early recognition of stumbling blocks that could be detrimental to the students' development and academic progress, and lead to interventions that could increase the number of graduating students.

#### ETHICAL APPROVAL

This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors and follows The Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the literature research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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