

BSN Graduates' Perceptions of Liberal Education

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Objectives

- To summarize the results of the phenomenological research study that explored the lived - experience of recent BSN graduates' perceptions of liberal learning.
- To recommend strategies to strengthen liberal and professional learning connections and student leadership development.

Motivation for Study

- AACN (*The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education*), AAC &U, and college literature all proclaim that a liberal education is essential for 21st century graduates.
- Desire to gain an in depth understanding of the lived-experience of recent BSN graduates' perceptions of liberal education to inform curricular development.

Qualitative Study

- Theoretical foundation: Paul Colaizzi's phenomenological psychological philosophy
- Research question:
- *What is the lived-experience of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students in a curriculum grounded in a liberal education?*

Brief History of Evolution of Liberal Education

- *Learning for its' own sake...* memorization for white, Western, Christian, males.
- Dewey (1916) – education should assist in solving societal problems.
- Dressel (1978) – liberal education is not just content but involves process (strategies) i.e. *learning how to think*
- Newell (1989) – championed for the integration of liberal arts *within nursing courses*

Brief History of Evolution of Liberal Education (cont)

- Delattre & Nussbaum (1997) – rigorous thinking obtained from liberal arts courses- all college students need to acquire.
- AAC&U(2002) defined liberal education *as a philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind from ignorance, and cultivates social responsibility* (pg. 43).
- Sullivan (2010) – practical judgment- blending knowledge & values – outcome of education

Evolution of Liberal Education in Nursing Education

- Early 20th century embraced but inconsistent.
- 1970's to present- many nurse educators have developed & integrated creative teaching & learning strategies from the arts & humanities.
- Reed(1987)- *liberal education provides a foundation for understanding human wholeness, human potential and the complexity of human experiences that influence health* (p.37).

Nursing Research on Goals of Liberal Education

- Buttoms (1988)- liberal education made a difference in nurses' personal lives rather than professional lives.
- Peck & Jennings (1989) – students, not faculty, made the connections between liberal education & nursing education.
- Hagerty & Early (1993) – initially unclear, but later conveyed grew as person & nurse.

Nursing Research on Goals of Liberal Education (cont)

- Gillis, MacLellan & Perry (1998) – liberal education goals were realized overtime as nurse.
- Zinsmeister (2004), Debrew (2010) – liberal education courses were identified by students as useful to nursing practice.

Methodology

- **Sample-** 12 recent BSN graduates, ASN/BSN program at a small, private, religious college
Overall homogenous sample; age range- 21-23 years, mostly female & Caucasian.
- **Research Design** – semi-structured interviews, lasting 30 - 45 minutes
- **Procedure** – IRB approval, Informational letter with research question, informed consent and demographic data collected prior to interview; approach modified after 2nd interview

Methodology (cont)

- Initial research questions:
- *Could you describe what your experience has been as a BSN student in a curriculum grounded in a liberal education?*
- *Could you describe any experiences that you feel contributed to your liberal education?*
- *Could you talk about any teaching and learning experiences that helped you in your learning?*

Methodology (cont)

- **Data Analysis – conducted following the 7 procedural steps of Colaizzi's protocol analysis method.**
- **Transcription of 12 interviews**
- **3 researchers independently identified themes, face to face discussion to compare themes, table developed to connect significant statements with themes**

Methodology (cont)

- **Validity of Study- Trustworthiness**
credibility- member checking
fittingness –formulated meaning
auditability – sample audit trail
- **Limitations of Study**
 - Homogenous sample
 - Primary researchers' interviewing skills

Results of Study

- 82 significant statements
- Three clusters of themes
 - Confusion on the meaning of liberal education
 - Value of liberal education
 - Descriptions of the learning experiences

Results of Study – Sample Statements

Theme 1 – Confusion of the meaning of liberal education

- “I think it just means that we are getting a whole, broad education not just focusing on anything in particular.”
- “I think it means more connection to science; extra courses outside of nursing”?
- “I have not heard the definition of a liberal education before; but it sounds great.” “I didn’t know that it was defined like thatI was never really aware”.
- “Everything will help you in the future.”

Results of Study – Sample Statements

Theme II- Value of liberal education

- “It will help me relate better to what patients are going through, that is, the things that we learned in these types of courses”.. “I only look at the liberal education in terms of helping me in nursing.”
- “ While you are taking it you say why am I taking this, but you look back after you’re done and you say, Oh, man, this is why I took that course.” “ Taught us things that we really did not need to know.”

Results of Study – Sample Statements

Theme III – Descriptions of the learning experiences

- “More emphasis on discussion and writing and creativity.” “You got to interact with professors and it was just like actually fun.”
- “Our discussion made me move beyond suburban, white America.” “It made me realize a different point of view at times”. “You definitely have some of your thoughts and biases challenged”.
- “...Hearing different points of view which can make you a better thinker.”

Discussion of Study

- Upon reflection in retrospect, after the meaning of liberal education was understood, articulated a favorable view and generally valued for its' perceived relevance to nursing.
- Some conveyed the value of liberal education courses ; others felt some courses were not needed.
- Most commented... able to connect with the idea of being well-rounded & preparing for the future.

Discussion of Study

- Some described certain clinical learning experiences challenged pre-existing assumptions & biases.
- Overall, learning experiences at the BSN level were described as more active, involved creativity, contained an affective dimension and were satisfying.
- Unclear whether faculty attempted to assist students to make connections between liberal education and professional nursing goals.

Connecting liberal education with local & global learning: leadership development

- **Nightingale**- sense of mission; strong sense of justice, concern with societal good...larger than that of a single profession.
- **Plato**- knowledge is oriented to the good... which is the grounding for human flourishing & happiness
- *The platonic purpose of liberal education is to turn essentially private people into public people who primarily care for the good of the community.*
 - (Source- Plato,trans.1979) Le Vasseur, 1998, p.284)

The Lancet Commissions findings.....

- **Professional education has not kept pace with health care systems challenges**
- **Redesign of professional health education is imperative**

The Lancet Commissions

Reforms...Vision

- **Levels of learning....**
 - **Informative learning**- acquiring knowledge & skills
 - **Formative learning**- socializing students around values
 - **Transformative learning** – developing leadership attributes – purpose to educate enlightened change agents

Connecting liberal education with local & global learning

- *Liberal education*- foundational preparation for fostering....
- *Knowledge* (intercultural)
- *Attitudes* (openmindedness, tolerance, social responsibility)
- *Skills* (critical thinking, problem solving, information literacy)
- To achieve the college outcomes of *Professional Competency & Leadership in Profession & Society*

Connecting liberal education with local & global learning

- *Knowledge* objectives-
- Discuss intercultural knowledge (cultural competence is essential, but not enough).
- Describe an understanding of larger local and global health problems & diseases including the political and economic variables; specifically issues related to poverty, homelessness, gender issues, human rights violations.
- Analyze post feminist perspective theory in relation to inequities in health care.

Connecting liberal education with local & global learning

- *Attitude* objectives – student engagement with the human condition (cultivating compassion & social responsibility)
- Appreciate the moral and professional practice obligations of the nurse extended to local & global populations.
- Recognize the connection between social justice and social responsibility.

Connecting liberal education with local & global learning

- *Skill* objectives – Demonstrate informational literacy and technological skills to develop knowledge on local/global issues.
- Demonstrate relevant nursing assessment, intervention and evaluation skills.
- Demonstrate communication and collaborative skills.
- Demonstrate management and leadership skills.
- Apply relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills in a local and/or global health project.

Recommendations/Conclusions

- **Interdisciplinary faculty development**
- **Integrative learning approaches – more explicit efforts & strategies in assisting students to make curricular connections and congruency of goals between liberal education and professional nursing education.**
- **Senior capstone course experiences/project – merging of liberal education & professional nursing goals – leadership within profession, society & the world.**