The Structure of Stress in Nursing Education

A Theoretical-Empirical Analysis

C. E. Betts

McMaster University

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Sources of Data

- Empirical/Feedback (Student Nurse Stress Index)
- Literature (both empirical and theoretical)
- Critical Theorizing
- Pseudo-Critical Ethnography
Professional socialization

Student & graduate nurses learn to think & act in ways defined for them by the traditionally dominant groups within the health system... & which they accept as natural, common-sense views of social reality.

Nursing education does not simply 'process students' or 'process knowledge'; it helps create & legitimize forms of consciousness which reinforce existing hegemonic structures. (Clare, 1993, p. 1034)
Professional socialization is challenged by:

- incongruities between education and industry
- difficulties in formalizing appropriate administrative and functional support for the NG,
- a growing expression by nurses of powerlessness within the health care system.

(Boychuk Duchscher & Cowin, 2006, p. 1034)
must acknowledge, understand, and work to resolve the oppressive socio-political context of the hospital environment

if we expect to replenish and retain a motivated and energized nursing workforce. (Boychuk Duchscher & Cowin, 2006, p. 1034)
The Crisis of Nursing??

“There is mounting evidence that the perception of nursing as a challenging, satisfying, & fulfilling vocation by society’s youth is waning.”
(Boychuk-Duchscher & Cowin, 2006, p. 152)

Challenges are:
- Shortage
- Stress/Burnout/Injury Rate
- Overworked/Underpaid
- Horizontal Violence/Hierarchical Rankism
- Devalued/Oppressed/Subjugated
Resolution: Shift to Emancipatory Foundations

- “[Emancipatory] pedagogy... takes the problems & needs of students themselves as its starting point...”
- a pedagogy based on student experience encourages us to analyze the dominate forms of knowledge that shape student experiences...
- Any emancipatory curriculum must emphasize student experience, which is intimately related to identity formation.” (McLaren, 2002, p. 226)
The level of distress, disengagement, apathy & at times perhaps even desperation, in nursing students, is becoming critical (Gibbons, Dempster & Moutray, 2008; Hall, 2004). Moreover, there are powerful structural aspects to this phenomenon.

“Preparing to become a nurse... is associated with significant emotional distress and may carry a risk to the affective well-being of the student.” (Jones & Johnson, 1997, p. 481)
By desperation, I am referring to the condition of being without hope, feeling less than a full person, and seeing few options.

Such desperation may be fostered, at least in part, by conditions of educational pressures. I refer to students feeling isolated, misunderstood, and dismissed.

I also refer to faculty feeling overburdened with work and academic expectations associated with fulfillment of the faculty role and steep expectations for promotion and tenure.” (Hall, 2004, p. 147)
Is There a Structure to Stress??

- “The relative lack of... organizational level programmes to reduce work-related distress, and the scarcity of interventions targeting aspects of the work environment likely to contribute to such outcomes may have contributed to continuing high levels of distress in trained and student nurses.

- Recommendations regarding the future design, provision and evaluation of such work-site interventions include the further clarification of the structure of perceived stressors, and development of ‘causal’ models of the stress process to identify the job characteristics ‘causing’ work-related distress.” (Jones & Johnson, 2000, p. 66)

- What about organizational (structural/institutional) stress and distress in school???????
Job Demands-Control-Support Model

- states that psychological strain results not from a single aspect of the work environment, but from:
  - the joint effects of the demands of a work situation, &
  - the range of decision-making freedom (discretion) available to the worker facing those demands.

(Karasek, 1979, p. 287)
High Job Pressure + Low Job Control + Home Stress - Social Support

Excessive Strain

Increased Risk to Mental and Physical Health

Infectious and Cardiovascular Diseases
Anxiety, Depression, Hostility
Alcohol, Tobacco, Drug Abuse

Injuries

Source: Best advice on Stress Risk Management in the Workplace, Health Canada, 2000
“Results showed high levels of psychological stress & low levels of satisfaction, are both linked to high demands combined with low control.” (Cotton, Dollard & de Jonge, 2002 p. 147)

“Levels of satisfaction have a direct impact on student performance & mediate the relationship between academic work control & performance.” (Chambel & Curral, 2005, p. 135)
The Job Demands-Control-Support model has not been applied to nursing students... BUT

“Staff nurses who experienced high psychological stress at work with little control over their job were significantly less empowered, less committed to the organization, and less satisfied with their jobs than those with lower levels of job strain.” (Spence Laschinger et al, 2001, p. 238)

- “[PBL students] reported less distress in their first year of the course, they scored less well on comparable essay assignments and had greater sickness absence totals…” (p. 941)
- “increased levels of support [from small groups]… self directed learning]… less demanding in an academic sense… (p. 949)
- “curriculum innovation was associated with positive changes in student well-being but not on performance.” (p. 941)
Student Nurse Stress Index

- Students were asked to complete index knowing that I believe (with empirical rational) that their stress levels are high.

- As a faculty member I am an advocate and foster facilitation of voice.

- N= 60 Level 4 BScN students
Student Nurse Stress Index

- Quantitative
  See table handout
Student Nurse Stress Index

Qualitative Themes:

1) Workload
   - Content Saturation; Additive Curriculum
     (Giddens & Brady, 2007; Ironside, 2004; Tanner, 1989)

2) Meaningless/Irrelevance
   - Practical Experience/Structural influence of Clinical
     (Rydon, Rolleston & Mackie 2006)
Qualitative Themes:

3) **Powerlessness** (See Fig. 1, Handout)

**Credibility/Rankism** (Clarke, 2008; Curtis, Bowen & Reid, 2007; Hall, 2004) You have no credibility;

Nursing students’ experiences of horizontal violence

“Common sources of stress associated with distress... include academic items such as

- ‘fear of failing’,
- ‘lack of free time’,
- ‘long hours of study’ and
- ‘college response to student need.’” (Jones & Johnson, 1997, p. 480)
Thoughts to consider

- Is education student centered/self directed in terms of autonomy and control when demands are high & control is low? *Resistance*

- *Is education* meaningful in terms of perspectives of nursing and nursing practice? *Relevance*

3) Is education supportive in terms of teacher-student relationships? *Relationships*
Speculative Theory of Structural Aspects of Stress

- Cohort Effect
- Generation Me (Twenge, 2006)
- Clinical Knowledge/Oppressed Group Behaviour
- Resistant Disengaged Entitled Student
- Hidden Curriculum
- Job Demand-Control-Support

Me (Twenge, 2006)
In Praise of a Theory-Practice Gap
Reflect on education using the
Three Cs of Professional/Practical Curriculum

1) Give them what they want? (Correspondence)
   Clinical or Reality Work

2) Better connection between academic work & clinical world? (Coherence)

3) Critical pedagogy (Critical)
Accepting resistance in education – so what?

- Relationships (Honesty)
- Relevance (Critical Thought)
- Resistance (Passion)

Source of student resistance was about much more than students simply rejecting the value of education. Their resistance was often reduced to this by many of the adults involved.

It turns out that their resistance was far more complex and seemingly quite logical...

I don't believe that there is a way to eliminate resistance. In fact, I don't believe that it should be eliminated.

Resistance keeps professionals on their toes. It can be exhausting, physically and mentally.

In the final analysis, however, I believe that a healthy level of resistance can act to make the school the best it can be. This is especially likely when the professionals involved are reflective and willing to make changes. (Sekayi, 2001, p. 420)
Accepting resistance in education – so what?

- Relationships (Honesty)
- Relevance (Critical Thought)
- Resistance (Passion)

- What must be urged is that the concept of resistance not be allowed to become a category indiscriminately hung over every expression of ‘oppositional behaviour.’

- Oppositional behaviour needs to be analyzed to see if it constitutes a form of resistance, which... Means uncovering its emancipatory interests.” (Giroux, 1983, p. 110)

- ... the ultimate value of the notion of resistance has to be measured against the degree on which it not only prompts critical thinking and reflective action, but, more importantly, against the degree to which it contains the possibility of galvanizing collective political struggle around the issues of power and social determination.” (p. 111)
Is Resistance Emancipatory?

- Is Emancipatory Education Necessary?
- Is Emancipatory Education Possible?
- WHERE TO FROM HERE??????????
- Thanks!!!!!
References

References


- Shields, C. M. (2003). 'Giving voice' to students: Using the internet for data collection. Qualitative Research, 3(3), 397-414