Supporting failing students in practice: The Experiences of Nurse Academics and Implications of Grading in Practice

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Introduction

The focus group captured the experience of 4 nurse academics in practice working at a university in the UK and explores:

*How the role is managed in relation to underperforming students?*
*What are the challenges faced?*
*What support is needed?*
*What are the implications of grading practice?*
Academic in Practice (AiP) Role

To build relationships
- Between the placement provider and the education provider in order to meet the responsibilities outlined by the NMC

To problem solve
- Student placement issues where learning outcomes are not being met

To support
- Mentors and students when students are not meeting their learning outcomes
Literature Review

• Studies have highlighted failing to fail under-performing students (Duffy, 2003; Sharples, et al., 2007; Jervis and Tilki, 2011).
• Research focused on the experience of nurse academics highlight the challenges in roles such as link lecturers such as increased workloads, separation between the education and placement providers.
• The issues of developing academic credibility through research, rather than presence in practice has also been explored (Williams and Taylor, 2008).
• Heaslip and Scammel (2012) assert that whilst assessing under performing students will always be challenging, grading will help mentors to become more discriminatory in their assessment and offer more detailed feedback.
• Donaldson and Gray (2012) Phenomenon of grade inflation and emphasise the importance of evaluating grading tools.
Findings

Four key themes emerged:

• The inevitable dichotomy of bridging two institutions

• Tacit expert knowledge which is unacknowledged within the department.

• Emotional impact of the work, with feelings expressed around guilt and blame

• Grading in practice as a means of rewarding excellence in practice.
Expectations and Conflict

- Student facing vs. mentor facing
- The need for academics to continually do the ‘ground work’ in with services experiencing perpetual change
- Ongoing challenge of placement capacity and student experience
- Unacknowledged pressure to link to very different organisational cultures
Tacit Expert Knowledge

- Two different types of failing students were described:
  - Those students who have been ‘on the radar’ since the start of the course
  - Surprise fails in the final stages of their training
- This could be described as an expert skill and as a result students could gain tailored support
- This could result in bias that may increase the student’s likelihood to fail, due to on-going low expectations
Emotional Labour

• Supporting a failing student was ‘emotionally time expensive’ suggesting cost in terms of emotion, time and guilt.
• Unacknowledged emotional labour by the wider department
• Emotional labour only understood by colleague who shared the role.
• Emotional investment required is in terms of how the role is valued, supported as well as the resources afforded to it.
Motivational Aspects of Grading

- Grading could provide students with more motivation.
- Grading may improve the quality of feedback.
- The importance of identifying ‘rising stars’ via grading.
- Rewarding excellence in practice.
- Importance of adequate pilot and evaluation of the grading tool.
- Resources needed to support students and mentors.
Recommendations

• The need for clarity around roles.
• Dedicated time to share best practice and reflect on experiences.
• Raising the profile of practice facing roles in HE’s.
• The thorough pilot and evaluation of Grading in Practice.
References


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