

IMPLEMENTING AN ADULT LEARNING APPROACH FOR GRADUATE CLINICAL NURSING STUDENTS

Yeow Chye Ng

Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, University of Alabama in Huntsville, USA

Corresponding Author Email: YeowChye.Ng@uah.edu

ABSTRACT

Time management skills have always been a foundation block for students who are successful in the nursing program. One traditional approach in assisting students in managing their time include assigning specific due dates for individual assignments. In an academia setting, students may still request assignment extensions. This short article suggests how an adult learning theory may play a positive role in graduate clinical courses.

Keywords: *Adult Nursing Learning Approach, Graduate Clinical Nursing, Time management skills.*

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framework by Knowles (1990) has contributed and facilitated creative teaching strategies. According to Knowles, there are four characteristics of adult learners: 1) Adult learners are self-directed, 2) Adults incorporate life experiences into their learning, 3) Adults' readiness to learn is influenced by their social and occupational roles, and 4) Adults implement problem-solving approaches into their learning environments. The purpose of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing Knowles's Adult learning theory in a graduate clinical nursing student setting.

In any education setting, students are expected to manage and use their time effectively. Time management skills have always been a foundation block for students who are successful in any program (Mirzaei *et al.*, 2012, Calderwood *et al.*, 2014). One traditional approach in assisting students in managing their academic time include assigning due dates for individual assignments (Fernandez *et al.*, 2014). Even with such methodology, students may still request assignment extensions.

Consequences may be two fold in assignment extension. First, repeated requests for assignment extensions may under value the time management skills for a student. Secondly, faculty may not have enough time to prepare and provide valuable instructional feedback. This creates a stressful situation not only for the student, but for the faculty member as well.

A two stage approach has been implemented for the

two clinical groups enrolled in the graduate advanced practice nursing clinical course. Each of the 14 students must complete a minimum of 168 clinical nursing hours (in a hospital setting). The students must also complete and submit a total of four major graded assignments for the semester. Instead of aligning individual due dates for each written assignment, the instructor specifically lists the due date for the first assignment (Stage 1), and the last date to complete and submit the final three assignments (Stage 2).

Table 1. *Clinical Assignment Due dates Time Line*

Graduate Level : Clinical Course (n=14)				
Stage 1		Stage 2		
	Assignment 1	Assignment 2	Assignment 3	Assignment 4
Due date:	Feb 3 rd , 2014	Student decides when due*	Student decides when due*	Student decides when due*
<i>Note.</i> *All assignments must be submitted by April 9 th , 2014				

Pre-assessment of students: This is a graduate level course, and all of the clinical group students (n=14) are mature adults with families and children. All of them have a minimum of 2+ years in the nursing field and are currently working full time in a medical facility. In addition to this, they are also full time students in the Nursing program.

Rationales:

1. The first due date allows the instructor to assess student progress (Knowles, 1990).

2. The students and faculty regularly meet face to face during clinical seminars as a group to develop a clear understanding of the clinical objectives/expectations (Knowles, 1990). During the same time, the students and faculty also share and discuss each other's concerns (Grell, 2013). Most importantly, these students fully understand that there will be no extension time given after the assigned due dates for all clinical assignments (except under extreme circumstances).
3. All of the participants are full time students with heavy loads. By allowing them to decide when to submit their assignments, they are given options and /or choices (Knowles, 1990). Indirectly, this empowers them to opt in/out of any support they might need. Such flexibility from the clinical component allows the students to juggle their time and deal with issues such as family emergencies, sickness, preparation for exams, or even completing assignments for other courses (Kuiper and Pesut, 2004). In return, this may reduce the stress level that the students perceive (Mirzaei *et al.*, 2012).

RESULTS

First stage: One student did not meet the 1st due date.

Reason: One week postpartum.

Action: Assignment accommodated with alternate due dates.

Second stage: Interestingly, 70% (n=10) of the students,

including the same student that did not meet the due date for 1st assignment, submitted all of their clinical assignments by March 26th, 2014 (two weeks ahead of the actual due date). Twenty three percent (n=3) of the students submitted all of the required assignments by April 2nd, 2014 (one week ahead of the actual due date), and only one student submitted the required assignments on the actual due date.

There are several limitations in this case study. The implementation of this activity only involved one course within the nursing curriculum. The participants were senior students, and assigned into a smaller clinical group setting. Further implementation should be conducted on junior nursing students.

CONCLUSION

Applying Knowles's Adult learning theory in a graduate clinical nursing student setting may be another option in a higher education environment. If students are provided with options and choices, many may voluntarily choose to complete and submit assignments in a timely manner. Self-directed choice is the main key. This may motivate students to exhibit responsible behavior, and perhaps reduce the stress levels of these highly involved students in the Nursing program. motivate students to exhibit responsible behavior, and perhaps reduce the stress levels of these highly involved students in the Nursing program.

REFERENCES

- Calderwood, C., Ackerman, P. L. & Conklin, E. M. (2014). What else do college students “do” while studying? An investigation of multitasking. *Computers & Education*, 75, pp 19-29.
- Fernandez, R. S., Tran, D. T., Ramjan, L., Ho, C. & Gill, B. (2014). Comparison of four teaching methods on Evidence-based Practice skills of postgraduate nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 34, pp 61-66.
- Grell, P. (2013). Review of Learning and teaching in adult education: Contemporary theories. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 63, pp 390-392.
- Knowles, M. S. (1990). *The adult learner : a neglected species* Houston : GulfPub. Co, 1990. 4th ed.
- Kuiper, R. A. & Pesut, D. J. (2004). Promoting cognitive and metacognitive reflective reasoning skills in nursing practice: self-regulated learning theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 45, pp 381-391.
- Mirzaei, T., Oskouie, F. & Rafii, F. (2012). Nursing students' time management, reducing stress and gaining satisfaction: a grounded theory study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 14, pp 46-51.