

TITLE

Fostering Belonging and Connection for Nurse Practitioner Students in a Hybrid Curriculum

Authors

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Background/Purpose: Over 80% of Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) programs offer remote courses, which can lead to student disconnection and burnout. We theorized that when NP students come to campus for in-person intensive training, providing time for team-based self-care and informal social time with their cohort can build needed connections with goal to value their role as NP students, and provide positive experiences with their peers and program/university.

Objectives: This study explored Nurse Practitioner (NP) students' experiences with community-building and self-care activities during in-person 3-day clinical sessions.

Methods: A qualitative descriptive design was used. Students responded anonymously to two open-ended questions about their cognitive and affective experiences. A directed content analysis was conducted. Our NP program requires 3-day on-campus sessions in semesters 4-6, as an important part of their development as an NP. Women's health course faculty planned intentional activities that provided various forms of support, peer connection, and opportunity to increase student engagement with their university itself. These evidence-based self-care strategies (such as mindfulness, emotional debriefing, etc.) are aligned with the literature (Lin et al., 2020). Using two questions "*Name one thing that you felt today*" (affective domain) and "*Name one thing you learned today*" (cognitive domain), we aimed to understand reactions to what they had learned and how they felt. Each student was handed a notecard at the end of each day, when they anonymously wrote their answers to the two questions. This study was approved (Protocol ID: Pro00112027) by the Institutional Review Board at the study site.

Results: Data were collected between 2018 and 2022. After participant statements were read, an initial *a posteriori* codebook was organized and then refined based on team discussions and information from the participants' reflections. The codebook and themes were defined by the study team (the PI, one nursing faculty member, and a PhD candidate in nursing) and discrepancies were resolved by consensus. The following criteria were used to ensure rigor: credibility (e.g., themes present for multiple years), transferability (e.g., detailed description of population, setting and outcomes), dependability (e.g., audit trail of the process), and confirmability (e.g., audit trails, reflecting on assumptions) (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Free text statements were coded by two independent coders, and intercoder reliability (ICR) of greater than 80% agreement was established (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

All students (n=89) reported learning one or more technique or procedure. Most students (92%) had positive experiences, while 8% reported challenges. The majority of comments related to *Name one thing that you felt today*. Data that pointed to identification of three core constructs: 1) community connection, 2) anxieties and difficulties, and 3) feeling supported and grateful. Significant comments revealed feeling connected to their school and university, as well as to each other.

Significance: These themes demonstrate the importance of fostering community and belonging in distance-based APN programs. Building interconnectedness and confidence in distance-based APN students may be an important component of building resiliency for emerging professionals within a discipline that has recently shown high rates of burnout and stress.

References:

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