A Phenomenological Perspective on Preceptorship in the Intergenerational Context

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Abstract

Pairing a student with an experienced nurse through preceptorship is an approach to teaching/learning that promotes critical thinking, cultivates practical wisdom, and facilitates competence. Frequently, nursing students are of a different generation than their assigned preceptors and differences in worldviews and expectations can impact upon the success of preceptorship. A phenomenological study, guided by van Manen's approach to human science research, was conducted to explore preceptorship within this intergenerational context. Data were generated using unstructured interviews with a purposive sample of seven preceptors and seven students recruited from an undergraduate nursing program. The findings reveal three main themes: being affirmed, being challenged, and being on a pedagogical journey. The findings of this study have the potential to enhance generational understanding in the pedagogical context and foster a teaching/learning culture in the clinical practice setting inclusive of divergent generational expectations.

KEYWORDS: qualitative research, preceptorship, generations, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

The pairing of a student with an experienced nurse through preceptorship is an approach to teaching/learning that promotes critical thinking, cultivates practical wisdom, and facilitates competence (Myrick & Yonge, 2005). Within this pedagogical approach, the formation of positive working relationships, predominantly between students and preceptors, highly influences the overall success of the experience. It is most often the case in the preceptorship dyad, that students and preceptors are of different generations, and thus they come to the learning space with distinct values and expectations. Within this context, clashes between the generations may occur.

The four generations described in the literature include: Silents (born 1925-1942), Baby Boomers (born 1943-1960), Generation X (born 1961-1981) and the Millennials – also known as Generation Y (born 1982-2002) (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Differing expectations particularly related to work ethic, has been described as a significant source of conflict between generations and such conflict can be difficult to resolve (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Within the discipline of nursing, negative attitudes toward the younger generation tend to persist and in fact, it was nearly 30 years ago, that Roberts (1983) addressed the notion of oppressed group behavior within the profession. She proposed that developing an understanding of this behavior could empower nurses to break the cycle of horizontal violence (HV). Given the potential for generational tension and misunderstanding within the preceptorship dyad, it follows then that developing knowledge of how generational differences affect the formation of the preceptor-student relationship and consequently the overall success of preceptorship experience, is an important issue for nursing education, practice, and research.

CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Currently, there is a lack of research on the intergenerational context of the teaching/learning process in higher education. Most of the available literature is theoretical and/or anecdotal and has been published within the last five years, primarily in the USA, thus the point can be made that caution must be taken when transferring generational theory to other populations (Earle, Myrick, & Yonge, 2011). In a recent integrative literature review it was revealed that no research has been published on the topic of preceptorship or field education in the intergenerational context (Earle et al., 2011).

There is a growing body of knowledge which highlights a prevailing generational gap in professional practice settings, and in particular it is noted that younger nurses and older nurses have different perceptions of their work

environment (Blythe et al., 2008; Keepnews, Brewer, Kovner, & Hyun Shin, 2010; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008; Leiter, Jackson, & Shaughnessy, 2009; Leiter, Price, & Spence Laschinger, 2010; Palese, Pantali, & Saiani, 2006; Santos & Cox, 2000; Stuenkel, Cohen, & de la Cuesta, 2005; Widger et al., 2007). Of specific concern in the literature are the negative attitudes toward the younger generations evident in at least two studies (Palese et al., 2006; Santos & Cox, 2000), and the high levels of stress experienced by younger professionals (Blythe et al., 2008; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008; Leiter et al., 2010; Widger et al., 2007).

There are many studies which have specifically examined the impact of HV in the nursing profession and the results show serious repercussions particularly from a recruitment and retention perspective (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010; Berry, Gillespie, Gates, & Schafer, 2012; Corney, 2008; Curtis, Bowen, & Reid, 2007; Farrell, Bobrowski, & Bobrowski, 2006; James & Chapman, 2009; Leiter et al., 2010; Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2008; Longo, 2007; Myrick et al., 2006; Rowe & Sherlock, 2005; Shermont & Krepcio, 2006; Thomas & Burk, 2009; Woelfle & McCaffrey, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that the issue of HV in the workplace is not unique to the nursing profession. Research in other disciplines also reveals tension and conflict among working women and a specific type of female bullying, labelled as "relational aggression" (social and indirect aggression), has been reported (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009, p. 98).

Research also reveals that perceptions of workplace bullying are gender specific and women tend to emphasize emotional abuse and professional discredit more than men (Escartin, Salin, & Rodriguez-Carballeira, 2011) and there are gender differences in responding to conflict in the workplace (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004), such that women may be more negatively evaluated for their responses to workplace conflict (Davis, Capobianco, & Kraus, 2010).

There is no doubt that both preceptors and students want and need a positive preceptorship experience and one that is devoid of HV. Several researchers highlight the importance of the preceptor-student relationship to the overall success of the preceptorship experience (Mamchur & Myrick, 2003; Öhrling & Hallberg, 2000; Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2009).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of preceptors and students within the context of the intergenerational clinical practice setting. The goal was to develop an understanding of the nature and meaning of this experience and subsequently to use this knowledge to enhance our generational understanding in the pedagogical context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that guided this study were as follows: (1) What is it like to precept a student who is of a different generation? (2) What is it like to be precepted by a nurse who is of a different generation?

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research design, specifically phenomenology, was employed for this study. Phenomenology has been described in a broad sense as both a philosophical movement and an approach to human science research (Dowling, 2007; van Manen 1997). Phenomenology is seen first and foremost, as "a *radical* way of doing philosophy", or in other words, as an "anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena,* in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is, as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer" (Moran, 2005, p. 4). Phenomenology aims at discovering "what is this or that kind of experience like?" (van Manen, 1997, p. i). The goal is to develop plausible insight into a phenomenon of interest to the researcher and make this insight available to others who have a similar interest in the phenomenon.

This study was guided specifically by van Manen's (1997) approach to phenomenology as described in his text, *Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Van Manen (1997) draws from the work of influential philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and others to delineate specific methodological guidelines for researchers interested in conducting phenomenological inquiry. His particular approach is 'action sensitive' and he advocates conducting human science research in order to inform and improve pedagogy in a practical way. As a research methodology, phenomenology is appropriate for all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences which seek to understand human experience within various social, historical and/or political contexts. The phenomenon of concern in this study is the preceptorship

experience within an intergenerational context and the lived experience of both preceptors and nursing students was explored.

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

The preceptor and student narratives were obtained during two unstructured interviews with a purposive sample of seven preceptors and seven nursing students recruited from an undergraduate nursing program in Eastern Canada. The goal in purposive sampling is to deliberately look for "information rich cases that capture analytically important variations in the target phenomenon" and select participants based on their knowledge and ability to communicate about their experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 181). With this in mind, we invited students of different age ranges (i.e. Millennials and Generation X), and preceptors of different age ranges (i.e. Generation X and Baby Boomers), as well as both males and females. In order to avoid any perceived coercion, the invitations to participate in the study were distributed by the clinical placement coordinator of the nursing program via email.

Of the seven nursing students, four were female, three were male, two were Gen Xers, and five were Millennials. The Millennial students had been precepted by Gen X preceptors and the Gen X students had been precepted by Baby Boomer preceptors. Of the seven preceptors, six were female, one was male, and all were Gen Xers. We had hoped to recruit Baby Boomer preceptors as well, however none of the Baby Boomer preceptors we approached responded to the invitation. All of the preceptors had at least five years of experience precepting students. The student participants were all in their final year of their nursing program and were reflecting upon their preceptorship courses in both the third and fourth years of the program. It is important to point out that none of the preceptors who participated in this study had worked directly with any of the student participants. Both groups were informed at the outset that we would not be interviewing any matched pairs. To maintain confidentiality and to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Ethical approval was received from the university research ethics board as well as the institution where preceptors were employed.

At the completion of the first series of interviews, preliminary themes were identified through analysis of the transcripts and participants were provided with a summary of these preliminary themes, along with specific quotes from the first interviews that were considered to be particularly revealing. The summary of preliminary themes was explored during the second series of interviews. All but

two of the participants responded to the request for a second interview. The purpose of the second series of interviews was to confirm and/or extend the analysis through hermeneutic conversations in which the researcher and participant reflected on the preliminary themes and attempted to interpret the significance of these in light of the original research question (van Manen, 1997). Recruitment of participants continued until a rich deep case analysis was achieved.

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to delineate his particular approach to human science research, van Manen (1997) identifies an active and ongoing interplay of six distinct research activities: (1) turning to the nature of the phenomenon, (2) investigating the experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it, (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon, (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting, (5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon, and (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (p. 30-31).

During this study we became immersed in the data as a whole by listening to the tapes and extensively reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. Selective reading and highlighting led to the identification of statements that were particularly revealing. The thematic analysis was then written using direct quotes from the transcripts as examples that captured meaning and provided a realistic portrayal of the participants' experiences. The relationships between the themes were also examined in order to reveal the manner in which they fit together to form the essence of the lived experiences.

With regard to structuring a phenomenological text, van Manen (1997) identifies five approaches: thematically, analytically, exemplificatively, exegetically, and existentially. He adds that these are "neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive" (p. 173). A combination of approaches may be used or the researcher may invent an alternative organization. In this study, we have chosen to structure the text using the thematic approach wherein the emerging themes serve as generative guides for writing the research report and the totality of the research findings are explicated under each thematic heading with the recognition that there is inherent overlap among the themes. Van Manen notes that complex phenomena can be further explored using subsuming themes, as was the case in our study.

RIGOR IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Methodological rigor is an ongoing issue in qualitative research and many authors suggest that it is inadequate to apply a quantitative concept of rigor to that of qualitative research (Benner, 1994; Davies & Dodd, 2002; van Manen, 1997. Van Manen posits that the criteria for rigor and rationality in human science research cannot be the same as that of natural science research because a much broader view of rationality is essential. Subsequently, he proposes four evaluative criteria which seem most appropriate for judging the power and convincing validity of any phenomenological human science texts. He states, "Our texts need to be oriented, strong, rich, and deep" (van Manen, 1997, p. 151).

In this study, we aimed for the strongest possible interpretation of the phenomenon through our awareness of the human lived experience and through the writing of a text deep in meaning. Reflexivity on the part of the researchers was instrumental in maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon. Throughout this study, we reflectively explored our observations, pre-reflections, taken for granted assumptions, critical thinking and decision-making. In particular, we acknowledge the following assumptions: a) different generations do not understand each other, b) lack of awareness of generational differences can lead to tension and/or conflict in the preceptor-student relationship, c) tension can have a negative impact on student learning as well as the overall success of preceptorship, d) promoting understanding of generational diversity is an important responsibility of nursing faculty. Van Manen (1997) posits that it is not necessary to 'bracket' such information, but rather researchers have a responsibility to make their knowledge of the phenomenon explicit.

Guba and Lincoln's (1989) classic work is also often cited by qualitative researchers who seek to address issues of rigor. Four distinct criteria have been identified: 1) credibility, 2) transferability, 3) dependability, 4) confirmability. Throughout this study we took deliberate action to strive for trustworthiness in each of these four areas. Credibility was achieved in several ways. As researchers, we worked as a collaborative team to ensure that our expertise covered both the phenomenological methodology as well as the content area under investigation. We conducted second interviews with participants which afforded the opportunity to clarify meanings and examine gaps or blindspots, often referred to as member checking (Guba & Lincoln). Our participants confirmed and extended our initial interpretations which reflects what Munhall (1994) refers to as the 'phenomenological nod', or nodding in agreement when reading or listening to the study findings which is indicative that their experience has been captured by the researcher (p. 189). We also sought to examine our

themes in the context of current research literature (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011) and found the identified themes to be supported by the work of other researchers. In relation to transferability of study findings, Guba and Lincoln note that it is ultimately the reader who determines whether study findings are useful or transferable to other contexts. Transferability is facilitated however when researchers provide a clear and distinct description of the research process, including a discussion of the culture and context, selection and characteristics of participants, as well as a rich presentation of study findings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) and we have endeavored to address each of these aspects in this article. In order to facilitate dependability, we kept a record of decision-making, particularly in the data analysis phase of this research study, such that another researcher could 'audit' this decision trail and possibility arrive at similar results (Sandelowski, 1998). The raw data including all coding and interpretive notes have also been preserved as part of the audit trail. To address confirmability, we have attempted to provide comprehensive information about the original data and the analytical processes used throughout the study and we have endeavored to include numerous direct quotations from the research data in this article.

FINDINGS

From a phenomenological point of view, three main themes, *being affirmed, being challenged*, and *being on a pedagogical journey*, formed the structure of the participants' narratives and can be said to be interrelated and connected in such a way that each one is essential to understanding what the preceptorship experience in the intergenerational context was like for the participants. Some overlap naturally exists between the themes due to the nature of lived experience or as van Manen (1997) explains, "one theme always implicates the meaning dimensions of other themes" (p. 168). Each of the three main themes was inclusive of a number of subsuming themes and will now be explored in more detail.

Being Affirmed

In the context of this study, *being affirmed* relates directly to the participants' experiences of being validated, strengthened, and consolidated, all of which were identified as rewards of either precepting or being precepted by someone from a different generation. A number of subthemes of *being affirmed* were revealed as well. From the students' perspective, *being affirmed* related to: *having a professional role model,* and *building confidence,* while the preceptors' reflections related more specifically to: *being respected, seeing students grow,*

imparting the legacy, and *strengthening nursing knowledge.* The following comments are representative of the students' views:

> I wanted to go to somebody older than me. I wanted someone who has a sense of the profession, and a model of professionalism which is maybe a bit more old-fashioned model perhaps than some of the younger generation. I've learned skills and knowledge from all nurses, but that issue of finding someone to model professionalism…for me, that's the part that I've appreciated the older generation the most for. (Student - Andrew)

> Actually it was pretty rewarding because, I felt that I could learn a lot from the older generation. They have the skills built up from many generations, really. And she [preceptor] was willing to…share whatever she had, so it was great that way. I had a really positive experience overall. (Student – Mark)

> My preceptor last year, she was 45, and I found that she was excellent…if I said something, she was open to it, and I was so open to everything she said, so I thought we kind of got along really good and we could learn from one another…and I felt that I got a lot more independence and I thought that…when I finished, I felt like I was ready to be a nurse. (Student - Ashley)

Preceptors also highlighted the positive and affirming nature of their experience with precepting younger students. The following reflections reveal the subthemes: *being respected, seeing students grow, imparting the legacy,* and *strengthening nursing knowledge*:

> They come to me, and I've always had that, after I got so many years under my belt, lots of people come to me, and still do, and I like that because I'd rather for them to come to me and ask, and if I don't know, I'll get the answer rather than them go make a mistake. So I encourage that. (Preceptor- Dave)

> Definitely positive overall… the students that I have had, for the most part, have been quite eager to learn and, you know, they're very intimidated initially, but once you make them feel comfortable and you teach them the best you can, you know, for the most part, I haven't had any issues. (Preceptor – Karen)

It kind of reflects back on me when a student is finished and going to soon graduate and become a nurse and whatever type of nurse they are if they spent 8 weeks with me, obviously I've had some impact on them somehow in what they do…and how they behave…and when you find out that you know what, this is a great person, we're so happy we hired them, it's almost like a satisfaction for yourself. (Preceptor - Wendy)

I find that I am so on top of all my policies. I just find that I'm on top of everything, I'm so educated and I learn alongside my preceptee. They bring you new knowledge and new ideas. So you're more open, so it's good both ways, you know? You can learn. (Preceptor - Patricia)

Being Challenged

The theme of *being challenged* focused on the participants' descriptions of situations that were sometimes threatening, provocative, stimulating, and/or inciting within the intergenerational preceptorship experience. A number of sub themes of *being challenged* were revealed: *colliding generational worldviews, encountering conflict, uncovering tenuous social relationality*, and *contending with increasing complexity*. The following reflections from preceptors highlight these subthemes more clearly:

A lot [of millennial students] have attitude. It's like, 'I know what I'm doing. I learned it and I don't need any guidance.' Or they feel that they come out and they do something once and 'okay, I can go on my own and do that.' Not all…but I find that overconfidence in some... a bit flippant. (Preceptor - Wendy)

I'm not always sure if they come prepared…we were in the hospitals day one. I don't know if they come really knowing what they're going to see, and what they're going to do. You see that they're nervous and you can see that sometimes they're really unsure of themselves. When I went into my third year, I could work on the floor…we were in charge, we could work independently…but these girls can't do that. They still need a lot of guidance and that's a challenge. (Preceptor - Colleen)

You know it's the old saying 'eat your young.' I think that now, in our system here, where everyone's coming out with their BN, I think that there is a real underlying resentment, based on education, and there's a lack of recognition for your years of employment, and your years of experience. (Preceptor - Sharon)

> You couldn't relate to them sometimes, because I'm forty plus, and here you've got a twenty-one year old, so her experiences in life wouldn't be the same as my experience…they're getting ready to go out and party on a Friday night, and you're doing whatever, got another family commitment, whatever, things like that. (Preceptor - Dave)

Students also related many examples of encountering tension. Specifically they reflected upon topics such as descriptions of 'nurses eating their young', the notion of preceptors lamenting the past, personality clashes between students and preceptors, as well as the negative attitudes toward the younger generation. The following comments were typical of the student narratives in relation to *being challenged*:

> I think that a Millennial nurse might remember a little more what it was like to be a student. And I think that's ultimately the issue in this, with kind of the older nurses – they don't remember what it's like to be student and to not be sure of things 100% of the time. They don't remember that feeling of paralyzing anxiety. (Student - Sarah)

> I have been in awe…of their knowledge and confidence, but older generations tend to think that they had to work a lot harder than we did, things were just handed to us. They don't want to hear you talk about the new ways. They let you do it your way, because that's the way you're trained…but there's no chance that they're changing the way they do things. (Student - Christina)

> I find that it seems they have experience before they got into the work force, and I think that really comes out. There's a lot of 'oh when I was a student we had to work flat out, and we were counted as staff'…I did find that the older generations were more task-oriented, whereas the younger generation was more one to have the conversation (with the patient), to try to find more issues than the one that was presenting, which was interesting to see. I guess all the theory courses kind of stuck with them, and the holistic care and things like that. (Student – Kayla)

> Our schooling has changed…I find that a lot of older nurses sometimes are kind of stuck in their ways and they don't see how things are changing and stuff, so sometimes it's hard to tell someone who's older than you that, "no, this isn't the way we're taught in school." So you kind of just do what they do because you don't want to stand out. I wish sometimes…that they could understand that there are new ways of doing

things and sometimes they may be better than the old way things were done. (Student – Ashley)

I would hear the conversations they were having that I really couldn't get in on…talk about getting a house, getting married or having children…They didn't leave me out on purpose, but it felt like I couldn't take part in the conversation because I couldn't relate to that. (Student - Justin)

Because my preceptor was a little bit busy…I kind of got fanned out to a bunch of different people…and it caused some challenges for me. (Student - Andrew)

Being on a Pedagogical Journey

The third essential theme revealed in this study was that of *being on a pedagogical journey.* The participants' narratives center on the teaching and learning of nursing and the challenges that present along the way related to the intergenerational context of the learning environment. The actual discovery or learning was manifested differently for each group, yet for both students and preceptors it was described as exploration of teaching and learning within the space of clinical nursing practice; an experience that was transformative for both groups. The students tended to reflect on how they were *navigating the path to competence* (subtheme one) despite the challenges inherent in the preceptorship experience. The metaphor of a journey seems to fit here in that students articulated numerous examples of experiences in which they felt like they were on a voyage of discovery. Students reported that their initial feelings of fear and trepidation were replaced with feelings of *being affirmed* once the confidence level grew. The following statements reflect the students' pedagogical journey:

Each week I could see the transition from student nurse to grad nurse…at the beginning I was like ' oh my God…I'm not ready to go out and be on my own', but when I left…I felt like I could actually just stay there and start work…be able to take my own patient load. (Student - Justin)

At first everything is so new and a new environment, you kind of get to develop a professional relationship and kind of the social relationship and once you kind of get the confidence in one another you can learn…Every day when you return for preceptorship you learn a little bit more and at

> the end you kind of feel your best and the most confident. (Student – Ashley)

> It is a journey because you've been in the classroom and …this is your first time sort of really nursing…and this is the reality of what nursing looks like. So there was an inner journey for me in terms of both my learning curve and kind of an emotional journey, I guess, to try and figure out 'is this matching what I thought I was going to be doing'… We all have these perceptions at the beginning sort of that draw us to the profession but…it rarely, I suspect, looks that way, so yeah, it was a really important journey. (Student - Andrew)

The preceptor narratives showed a deep reflection on their own *pedagogical approaches* (subtheme two) along the journey of discovery. In particular, examples of nurturing, laying the ground rules, coaching, and providing feedback were highlighted in the following quotes:

> It's tough going to a new place, and you need to be nurtured, and you need to be supported…A preceptor will not put you out there to let you sink…she's there to help you, and…you've got to feel safe where you're working. (Preceptor - Sharon)

> You take them in and you want them to learn as much as they possibly can from you, get the most out of the experience and the most knowledge possible, so that they can go on and be the best nurse they can possibly be. That's my hope for them. (Preceptor - Wendy)

> Usually by week one or two they know what I expect and then they're stepping up to the plate. (Preceptor - Colleen)

The true significance of the pedagogical journey was revealed when participants reported an increased understanding and awareness of generational differences and highlighted the importance of this knowledge in promoting a successful preceptorship experience. The third and final subtheme of *being on a pedagogical journey* was *cultivation of tolerance* (subtheme three). The following excerpts from both preceptors and students bring this subtheme to light:

> I'm glad I participated in the study just because it certainly has made me look around at some of the dynamics and see some of my fellow students differently and try and think about… just the change in nursing work and how nursing education has changed, and how to separate that out from the

generational changes is definitely something you really made me think about. (Student - Andrew)

We can all get a better view of what the other is thinking (Student - Ashley).

You understand a lot more after reading all the comments of how both sides feel, and its positive information…I learned a lot from it" (Preceptor -Wendy).

I find since I've read all this that you have sent me, like I've kind of taken that to work with me...I've been thinking about it and…I've relaxed a little in my way too...It goes two ways. Like I'm trying to sum up what their attitude is and I'm sure it's widespread as to what their opinions of us are and I've tried to, kind of, not be as 'life is work and everything has got to be done 1, 2, 3'…I try to relax a little that way now…I've, kind of, been sitting back and observing more now. (Preceptor - Lisa)

It'll probably give me that little bit more patience that I need…we have to learn to adapt, to move on…we were all new, we all didn't come out knowing everything. (Preceptor – Patricia)

DISCUSSION

Data derived from this study generate knowledge about the different generations, namely Millennials and Gen Xers, and the influence of generational diversity in shaping the teaching/learning process in the professional practice setting. The first theme, *being affirmed*, showed that both preceptors and students found the experience to be positive and rewarding and highlighted the fact that the rewards were manifested differently for each group. Student affirmation as it relates to the presence of a professional role model as well as building confidence, as found in this study, is congruent with previous research (Callaghan et al., 2009; James & Chapman, 2009; Myrick, Yonge, & Billay, 2010; Öhrling & Hallberg, 2000; Ralph, et al., 2009; Secrest, Norwood, & Keatley, 2003 ; Zilembo & Monterosso, 2008). Previous research also confirms that preceptors value such intrinsic rewards as: teaching, role modelling, contributing to the future of the profession, moulding students, and enhancing one's pedagogical skill (DeWolfe, Laschinger, & Perkin, 2010; Hallin & Danielson, 2009; Henderson, Fox, & Malko-Nyhan, 2006; Hyrkas & Shoemaker, 2007; Leners, Sitzman, & Hessler, 2006; Marincic & Francfort, 2002; Stone et al., 2002; Usher, Nolan, Reser, Owens, & Tollefson, 1999). Identifying the affirming aspects of preceptorship is

significant as it allows others to understand the nature of the rewards inherent in the experience and this can have a positive impact on preceptor recruitment.

A number of *challenges* were identified in this study that related to being precepted by or precepting someone from a different generation and developing strategies to address these challenges is crucial to the future success of the preceptorship model of clinical practice. Differing generational perceptions between younger nurses and older nurses are well documented in the literature (Blythe et al., 2008; Hu, Herrick, & Hodgin, 2004; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008; McNeese-Smith & Crook, 2003; Palese et al., 2006; Santos & Cox, 2000; Stuenkel et al., 2005; Widger et al., 2007). To address the colliding generational worldviews between Millennials and Gen Xers, we posit that an important starting point is to acknowledge these and examine the specific nature of the collisions. It would appear that both Millennials and Gen Xers need to be willing to consider the perspective of the other and in so doing, accept and celebrate differences (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

The negative attitudes toward the Millennial Generation as noted in this study, and corroborated in the literature (Palese et al., 2006; Santos & Cox, 2000) are particularly troublesome, so the question now becomes how can the pessimism be overcome to uncover the positives that seem to "remain hidden behind clouds of elder doubt and suspicion" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 24). Preceptors in other studies describe similar challenges related to working with the younger generation, specifically their attitudes and lack of preparation for the realities of clinical practice (Leners et al., 2006; Smedley, 2008). From a nursing recruitment and retention perspective, it is vital to take proactive measures to inspire the future generation of nurses rather than stifling their spirit and assertiveness. We posit that it is necessary for educators to explore the topic of generational diversity with both preceptors and students as part of the preparatory process as this could greatly contribute to promoting cohesion in the workplace.

A second challenge identified in this study was encountering conflict. The culture of HV described by participants is cause for concern. The exigent culture of HV in the nursing profession is well documented (Benner et al., 2010; Corney, 2008; Curtis, Bowen, & Reid, 2007; Farrell, Bobrowski, & Bobrowski, 2006; James & Chapman, 2009; Leiter et al., 2010; Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2008; Myrick et al., 2006; Rowe & Sherlock, 2005; Shermont & Krepcio, 2006; Thomas & Burk, 2009; Woelfle & McCaffrey, 2007). Insidious HV results in lasting repercussions, not only in relation to recruiting and retaining students, but also leads to feelings of self-doubt, humiliation, intimidation, decreased confidence and productivity, and ultimately oppression of students (Curtis et al., 2007; James

& Chapman, 2009; Longo, 2007; Myrick et al., 2006; Thomas & Burk, 2009). It is worthy of noting that Millennials expect to contribute and collaborate in the workplace and they will likely be tougher to bully than older generations because they are accustomed to standing up for themselves (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

The third challenge revealed in this study was the somewhat tenuous social relationality that exists between preceptors and students from different generations. Fitting in on a social level and developing a sense of belonging cannot be underestimated. Researchers report that these factors are key to students' perceptions of positive clinical placements as well as prerequisites for clinical learning (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2008; Yonge, Myrick, Ferguson, & Luhanga, 2005; Yonge, Myrick, & Haase, 2002). We believe that educating preceptors and students about generational diversity in the workplace during the preparatory process would go a long way toward promoting the formation of a cohesive working relationship. It is obvious that differences will exist, but being open to and aware of the differences can be conducive to strengthening the experience.

The fourth and final challenge identified as a subtheme in this study relates to the ever increasing complexity of today's health care environments. Similarly, acknowledging and recognizing the challenge allows for more appropriate identification of strategies to deal with the workload issue of preceptors. Concerns regarding a lack of time to teach students and the stress related to the extra work of precepting are corroborated by other researchers (Bourbonnais & Kerr, 2007; Duffy, 2009; Hautala, Saylor, & O'Leary-Kelley, 2007; Leners et al., 2006; Luhanga, Dickieson, & Mossey, 2010; Smedley, 2008; Stone et al., 2002; Yonge, Krahn, Trojan, Reid, & Haase, 2002).While it is difficult to affect change in the level of complexity of the work environment, educators can offer more guidance and support to preceptors and mangers can play a role in adjusting the workload of preceptors while they are taking on the extra work of precepting a student.

The third essential theme of this study was that of *being on a pedagogical journey*. Data related to this theme provides a preliminary understanding of how the intergenerational context of the learning environment in preceptorship shapes the learning experience for both the student and the preceptor. The students appreciated the concrete 'real world' experiences afforded during preceptorship. The importance of support and the relationship with the preceptor were identified as factors that contributed significantly to the students' learning. As well, the importance of direct feedback from the preceptor was highlighted. The fear and trepidation verbalized by the students revealed how their learning occurred

through apprehension and subsequent reflection on their experiences. The student descriptions and interpretations related to their *pedagogical journey* revealed in this study are consistent with those reported in other studies (Benner et al, 2010; Holland, 1999; Newton, Billett, & Ockerby, 2009).

An important aspect of the *pedagogical journey* for students was their preceptor's teaching style. The pedagogical competence of preceptors, more specifically, how preceptors teach and the specific strategies they employ within the learning space are not well documented in the literature (Carlson, Wann-Hansson, & Pilhammar, 2009). Consistent and constructive feedback on clinical performance is identified as a fundamental expectation of preceptees (Callaghan et al., 2009; Hardyman & Hickey, 2001). In this study, both students and preceptors commented on the *pedagogical approaches* and in particular, examples of nurturing, laying the ground rules, coaching, and providing feedback were highlighted.

The increased understanding and awareness of generational differences as reported by both groups in this study exposed the real significance of the *pedagogical journey*. Both preceptors and students highlighted the importance of this knowledge in promoting a successful preceptorship experience. Evident in the participants' reflections, particularly during the second interviews, was the notion that a sense of *tolerance* for generational differences had been *cultivated* along the *pedagogical journey*. Participants identified new generational insights that they had never reflected upon previously and this is perhaps not surprising given that phenomenological research "is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness and tact, and so on" (van Manen, 1997, p. 162).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, this study has direct implications for nursing education and research. We propose that promoting awareness and insight into generational diversity is an important role for nursing faculty. As they facilitate the preceptorship experience, faculty must engage in dialogue with preceptors and students about generational differences in learning styles, working styles, and world views to promote the development of successful relationships (Earle & Myrick, 2009). In light of the paucity of literature regarding preceptorship in the intergenerational context, and given the generational diversity that exists in today's nursing clinical practice settings, it is important to design future research studies, particularly qualitative studies, to promote further understanding of the nature of the preceptorship experience in this context.

This study indicates that generational differences are one source of conflict between the generations and we suggest that further research is needed to substantiate this finding and explore options for addressing it. It is incumbent upon educators, managers, and other leaders within the profession to confront the issue of HV, let the voices be heard, and construct a new norm of respect within the profession. No longer can the behavior continue to be enabled within the profession. Myrick et al. (2006) appeal to educators to acknowledge and address the reality of oppression which is occurring in preceptorship and/or field education and eliminate the 'rippling tide of silence'. Bartholomew (2006) suggests that the silence pertains to the prevailing fear that acknowledging the problem will somehow make it worse.

Further studies are also needed to examine the complexity of the learning space from an intergenerational perspective, both within nursing and in other disciplines. Interdisciplinary studies would be particularly useful, not only in determining the transferability of the current study findings to other contexts of higher education which involve field education or preceptorship, but also in establishing a foundation for knowledge utilization. It is apparent within Canada that genuine interest in such research has been voiced (Wimmer, 2008).

CONCLUSION

This study makes an original contribution to knowledge development in the area of nursing pedagogy and as such is directly relevant for nurse educators, students, and nurses in clinical practice. We believe that findings of this study can be used to improve nursing pedagogy, more specifically in the preparation of both students and preceptors for the challenges that inhere in preceptorship that relate directly to the intergenerational context of the experience. Through the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology as described by van Manen (1997), we sought to provide a rich, deep interpretation of the real life experiences of both preceptors and students as they negotiate the teaching/ learning process of preceptorship within an intergenerational context. The thematic analysis has served to externalize the participants' narratives and bring their experience to light in a deeper way. The influence of generational diversity of the teaching/learning process in preceptorship is significant because "generational diversity is not just a trend that will come and go...generational diversity impacts everyone and is here to stay…and is something to get excited about" (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. 46).

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