

## ABSTRACT

### STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT INSTRUCTORS DO TO HELP STUDENTS LEARN IN THE CLASSROOM

By Denise R. Parrish

Currently, there are few available research studies examining students' perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate nursing degree program perceive how instructors help them learn in the classroom. The goal was to provide nursing instructors and nursing education administrative teams with positive educational strategies, based on student perceptions, for teaching in the classroom.

Dunkin and Biddle's (1974) Model of the Study of Classroom Teaching was used as the conceptual framework to guide this study. The model describes the many variables that contribute to the instructor and learner experience and also explains how these variables can affect the perceptions and outcomes for the learner and the instructor.

A descriptive qualitative design was used. A convenience sample of 21 senior level nursing students from a college of nursing in the Midwestern United States comprised the sample. Informed consent was obtained from the volunteer sample. A demographic questionnaire was completed along with an unstructured interview. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method.

Results indicated that the sample was comprised of participants ranging in age from 21 to 46 years, with a mean age of 25 years and a mode of 22 years. Three of the participants were male and 18 were female. Twelve of the participants (57%) were in the first semester of their senior year, and the remaining 9 participants (43%) were in the second semester of their senior year. Data analysis revealed that perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn were diverse. The four major themes identified coincide with the presage variables, teacher properties, of Dunkin and Biddle's Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Figure 1): (a) teaching skills, (b) intelligence, (c) motivations, and (d) instructor personality traits.

By understanding the perceptions of senior level nursing students, nursing instructors and nursing education administrative teams can provide students with positive education strategies for teaching in the classroom. Findings may also have implications for future nursing students and curricula in nursing education master degree programs.

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HELP STUDENTS LEARN IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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I would like to dedicate this project, with love, to my husband, Kris, and my children, Zach, Brody, and Mackenzie, and to all my family, friends and co-workers who supported and encouraged me throughout the project to completion. Thank you for believing in me and offering me more support than I could ever imagine.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

According to federal officials at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), more than 1 million new nurses will be needed in the United States by the year of 2020. The HRSA also predict that by 2015, all 50 states will be affected by the nursing shortage (HRSA, 2004). The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) (2008) identifies many factors that are contributing to the shortage – the average age of nurses is climbing, changing demographics signals a need for more nurses to care for the aging population, and increasing patient acuity – which is causing increased stress and driving nurses to leave the profession. Colleges of nursing are increasing enrollment, but not at a fast enough pace to meet the increased demands. The ability to increase enrollment is restricted because of the shortage of qualified nursing instructors (AACN, 2005).

The AACN (2005) recognizes many factors that are contributing to the nursing instructor shortage. Nursing instructors are aging, and a wave of retirees is expected across the United States over the next decade. Also, higher compensation in clinical and private-sector settings is luring potential educators away from teaching. Furthermore, instructor workload, role expectation issues, and job dissatisfaction are all identified as reasons instructors leave academia.

The AACN (2005) reported that if job satisfaction could be improved, fewer nurse educators may leave the profession. The main reason for dissatisfaction in the nursing instructor role was identified as the continually changing environment in higher education. The instructor's role is expanding, and demands placed on the individual are

growing. “In addition to the traditional teaching role, instructors are expected to obtain funding, conduct research, produce scholarship, and offer community and university service” (AACN, 2005, p. 10). Also, the characteristics of students are changing, which creates additional stress and demands for the instructor. Delivering quality education to a group of students presents unique challenges because of compounding variables, such as students’ formative experiences, abilities, knowledge and attitudes, as well as the faculty’s formative experiences, training experiences, personality traits, and intelligence. Other compounding variables affecting education delivery include the ethnic composition of the community, school size, school climate, and funding (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). In the past, traditional students represented the majority in the classrooms; now, almost 73% of undergraduate students are considered nontraditional (AACN, 2005). These nontraditional, mature students commit a significant amount of time and energy to their work and family responsibilities. The nontraditional student prefers a relevant, no-nonsense approach to education. This challenges faculty to plan more creative, practical, and interactive teaching/learning strategies, which can be time intensive to develop and monitor, which can contribute to job dissatisfaction.

In attempts to improve job satisfaction, the AACN suggests “conducting research to better understand the phenomena of teaching and learning and to document the effects of various educational strategies” (p. 20). Limited research has been done on the perceptions of students in relation to how they perceive nursing instructors help them learn in the classroom. Only one study (Berg & Lindseth, 2004) examined the students’ perceptions of effective and ineffective nursing instructors in the classroom. The majority of published research studies (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Brown, 1981; Knox & Mogan, 1985; Mogan & Knox, 1983; Mogan & Knox, 1987; Nehring, 1990; Sieh & Bell,

1994) have been done in the 1980s and early 1990s and focused on the clinical setting, not the classroom. The more current research (Elcigil & Sari, 2008; Gignac-Caille & Oermann, 2001) has focused on effective and ineffective teaching strategies used by nursing instructors in the clinical setting. Therefore, only a minimal amount of research evidence is available to nursing instructors looking to develop and improve teaching strategies and/or change their personality characteristics based on students' perceptions.

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of students regarding what instructors do to help students learn in the classroom. Findings from this study identified a variety of positive personality characteristics and viable teaching strategies for instructors to implement while teaching in the classroom, which could lead to improved job satisfaction, decreased instructor turnover, and increased retention.

#### Significance to Nursing Education

Currently, there is limited literature on this topic. The AACN (2005) supported conducting research to better understand the phenomena of teaching and learning. By documenting the effects of various educational strategies, instructors may better plan and implement curricula. This could help alleviate some of the current demands and frustrations placed on nursing instructors and, hopefully, deter instructors from leaving academia.

The information in this study can also be used to develop skills and improve content delivery of current instructors through educational in-services and faculty development. The results from this study could also be used to modify curricula in

nursing education master's degree programs to ensure that the proper teaching skills are taught and personality characteristics are emphasized.

#### Statement of Problem

As there are limited research studies available to better understand what instructors actually do to assist students in the learning process, more investigation is warranted. With a better understanding, the demands and frustration of instructors may be alleviated, hopefully deterring them from leaving their educator roles.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate nursing degree program perceive how instructors help students learn in the classroom. Exploring and describing the perceptions of nursing students can offer information to nursing instructors and nursing education administrative teams with positive educational strategies to use in the classroom.

#### Research Question

What are students' perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn in the classroom?

#### Definitions of Terms

##### *Conceptual Definitions*

*Student:* Somebody who studies at a school, college, or university (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2007).

*Perceptions:* Each human being's representation of reality. It involves the process of organizing, interpreting, and transforming information from the senses and memory. It is related to learning and enhances cognitive learning. Perceptions are universal, experienced by all, and are an essential part of living (King, 1981).

*Instructors:* Those who impart knowledge to another; teachers (Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 2009).

*Learn:* "A change in behavior (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that can occur at any time or in any place as a result of exposure to environmental stimuli. Learning is an action by which knowledge, skills, and attitudes are consciously or unconsciously acquired such that behavior is altered in some way that can be observed or measured." (Bastable, 2003, p. 11).

*Classroom:* A room, as in a school or college, in which classes are held. Any place where one learns or gains experience (*Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*, 2009).

#### *Operational Definitions*

*Student:* Male or female student, 18 years of age or older, admitted into the undergraduate college of nursing program at a Midwestern university in the United States and having completed at least three out of the five semesters of the baccalaureate degree nursing program.

*Perceptions:* Each participant's representation of reality. In this study, perceptions of participants will be their reports during interviews of what they believed helped them learn.

*Instructors:* Those teachers in the college of nursing of a mid-western university in the United States who have taught student participants.

*Learn:* In this study, each participant will describe “learn” in their own terms and experiences during an interview.

*Classroom:* In this study, classroom will be defined as a room in which theory classes are held. The clinical setting is not considered a classroom.

### Assumptions

1. Nursing students, who have completed three semesters of the professional major, will have sufficient experience with a variety of classroom instructors to be able to identify characteristics of helpful teaching strategies.
2. Students participating in the study will answer truthfully.

### Chapter Summary

Currently, there is a nursing shortage in the United States that is anticipated to increase over the next decade. The nursing shortage is compounded by a nursing instructor shortage. In order to increase enrollment in undergraduate nursing programs, the instructor shortage must be addressed. The AACN (2005) has called for more educational research to assist instructors in the classroom.

Limited research has been done on how students perceive instructors help them learn in the classroom. Previous studies (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Brown, 1981; Elcigil & Sari, 2008; Gignac-Caille & Oermann, 2001; Knox & Mogan; 1985; Mogan & Knox, 1983; Mogan & Knox, 1987; Nehring, 1990; Sieh & Bell, 1994) have focused on the effective and ineffective teaching strategies used by nursing instructors in the clinical setting. Therefore, limited information based on student perceptions is available to nurse instructors to develop and improve teaching strategies and personality

characteristics in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate degree nursing program perceive how instructors help students learn in the classroom.

In this chapter, the research problem and purpose were identified. The significance of the problem, the research question, conceptual and operational definitions, and assumptions were identified.

In the next chapter, an overview of the conceptual model used as a framework for this study, the Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974), will be outlined and described related to the pertinence to the study. The concepts of the model will be explored, and their use in this study will be explained. A review of pertinent literature will also be included.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate nursing degree program perceive how instructors help students learn in the classroom. In this chapter, the conceptual framework for this study, the Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching by Dunkin and Biddle (1974), will be explored. The model's relationship and relevance to the study will be described. Finally, a review of pertinent literature study will be presented.

#### Conceptual Framework

Although each teaching situation, each classroom, each student, and each instructor is unique, there are many aspects of the teaching/learning process that are similar regardless of the setting. The Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Figure 1) developed by Dunkin and Biddle (1974) was used to guide this study, since it identifies many variables that influence classroom teaching and outcomes. This model was chosen because of its usefulness in explaining how personal characteristics and life experiences affect the learner/instructor process. In the model, arrows are used to represent a contributory relationship. The scheme offers a useful map and organizing format for research on teaching. The Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching distinguishes four main categories of variables: presage, context, process, and product.



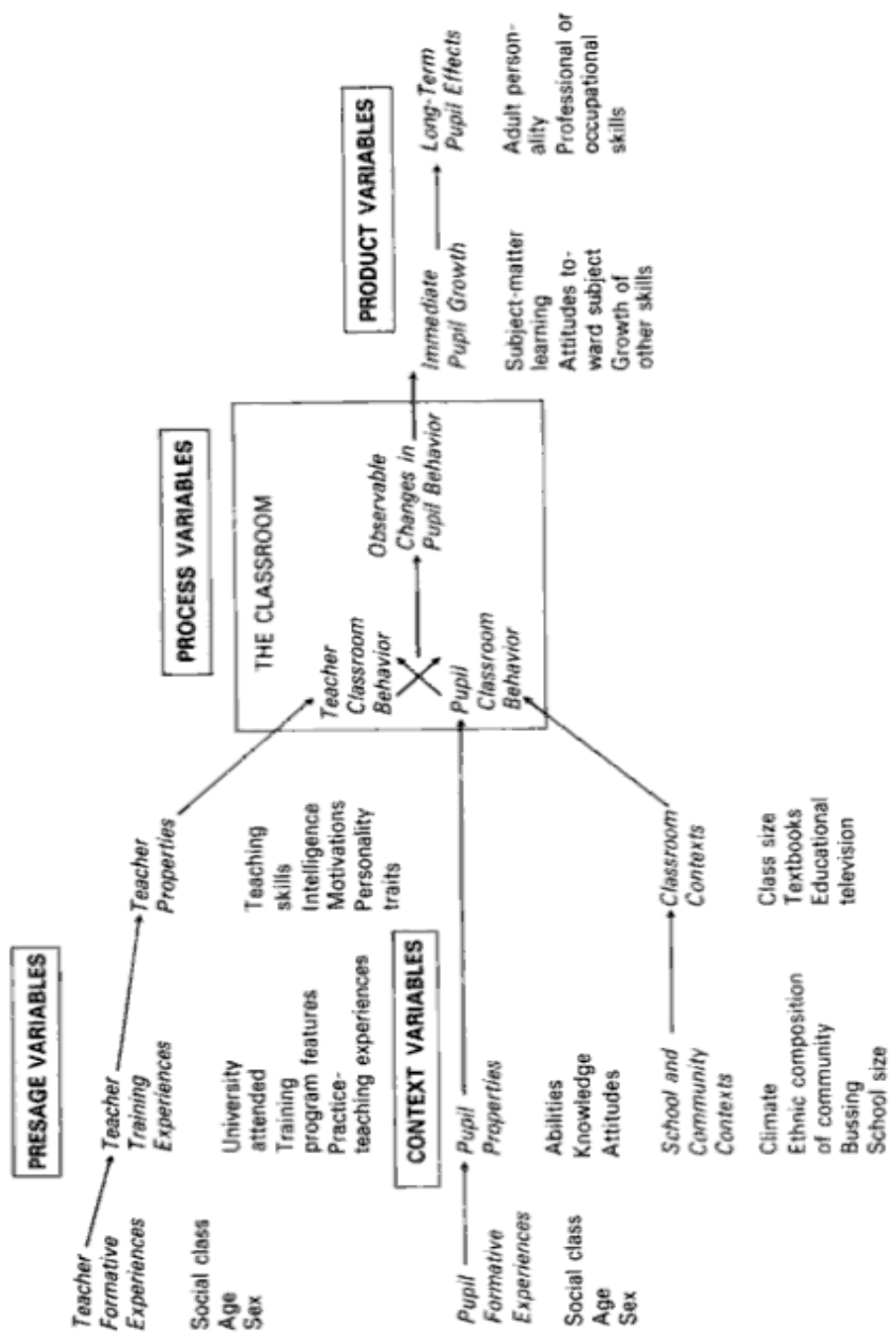


Figure 1. A Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching. Dunkin, M. and Biddle, B. (1974).

### *Presage Variables*

Presage variables are those individual characteristics, experiences, or qualities of instructors that may be examined for their effects on the teaching process (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). The instructor's formative experiences, instructor-training experiences, and instructor properties influence the teaching style and strategies that the instructor will utilize. Dunkin and Biddle (1974) report that much of the successes and failures of teaching are a result of the personality characteristics of the instructor in the classroom, which are a result of the presage variables.

Formative experiences include all of the life experiences before the individual attends instructor training (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). Everyone has had different experiences growing up depending on their social class, sex, age, and family size. These lifelong experiences persist in the instructor's adult personality and teaching behavior.

Teacher-training experiences include the college or university attended by the instructor. It is also influenced by courses taken, the attitudes and styles of their own past instructors, experiences during clinical teaching and in-service, and postgraduate education, if any. It is speculated that this is an area that can be manipulated more easily than formative experiences to improve teaching personality characteristics and student outcomes (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974).

Teacher properties consist of measurable personality characteristics, such as authoritarianism, anxiety, attitudes toward pupils, and personality inventory scores. Instructors take these traits with them into the classroom. Teacher properties are the result of individuals taking pieces of their formative and instructor-training experiences into the classroom when teaching (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974)

### *Context Variables*

The context variables consist of conditions within which the instructor must operate, such as the school, the community, its environment, and the pupils themselves. These create the contexts of classroom education and are likely to affect the processes of teaching (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974).

Students come to the classroom with formative experiences of their own. Students differ depending on their social class, age, sex, language, and life experiences. Each student also comes with different abilities, knowledge, and attitudes (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974).

Other context variables can be found within the school and community. Each school and community varies greatly in the climate, ethnic composition, size, resources available, physical facilities, and homogeneity of instructor and student populations. Schools are constrained by laws and customs. All of these variables affect the teaching/learning process (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974).

The final context variable that affects learning in the classroom is the classroom contexts (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). Classroom variables include size, lighting, equipment, layout, and noise level. Other classroom contexts include the curriculum and accepted conduct (established rules) of class members. All of these factors influence students' perception of what instructors do to help students learn.

### *Process Variables*

Process variables involve the actual classroom activities (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). This involves what the instructors and students do in the classroom, for example, asking questions, giving answers, explaining assignments, and correcting inappropriate behavior. Two main process variables are the instructor classroom behavior and the

student classroom behavior. These variables focus on all instructor and student observable behaviors.

### *Product Variables*

Product variables involve the outcomes of teaching -- changes occurring in the student as a result of the classroom activities between the instructor and the student (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). It is usually expected that these outcomes are positive. In reality, these outcomes can be either positive or negative as a result of the classroom experiences. The ultimate goal of education is the long-term effects on students. It is hoped that students will acquire the information and motivation needed to enter their profession.

The Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974) provides a framework for this research project. It demonstrates the constant and continuing interaction between instructors and students and how these interactions can influence the perceptions that the two have of each other. The model demonstrates the many factors that influence the perceptions students will have of what instructors do to help them learn.

## Review of Literature

### *Introduction*

The majority of research conducted on nursing students' perceptions has been completed in the clinical setting. Studies included in this literature review are on effective and ineffective personality characteristics and strategies of nursing instructors in the clinical setting, as well as the classroom, since available studies on only the classroom are outdated and limited.

### *Perceptions in the Classroom*

Only one recent study was found that examined students' perceptions of effective and ineffective nursing instructors in the classroom (Berg & Lindseth, 2004). Berg and Lindseth conducted a descriptive, qualitative study to identify students' perceptions of the characteristics used to judge the quality of a classroom nursing instructor. The researchers developed a questionnaire consisting of three parts: demographic information, two open-ended questions to identify characteristics used to label instructors as effective or ineffective, and two questions about the grading techniques and individual coursework required by an instructor. The questionnaire was distributed to 252 students. Completing the questionnaire were 172 students (68%). Results identified students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective and ineffective instructors. The 10 top characteristic themes of effective and ineffective instructors will be presented in descending order.

*Personality* (distinctive qualities and traits of the instructor) was the most frequently mentioned characteristic of both effective and ineffective instructors. Examples given of effective instructors included: easy to get along with and being personable to the students. Examples of ineffective characteristics of instructors included: rigid, no flexibility, and having no personality (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Teaching method* (instructional techniques of the instructor) was ranked the second highest. Examples of effective instructors included: teaches at the students' knowledge level, gives an outline, and provides both positive and negative feedback. Ineffective instructors taught at a level higher than the student and provided no study guides or outlines (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Presentation* (manner of delivery of course materials) was ranked third.

Examples given of effective instructors included: explains material in a down-to-earth manner and is creative. Examples given of ineffective instructors included: only lectures, no interaction with the students, and is unorganized (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Demeanor/Attitude* (behavior or conduct of an instructor toward the students and demonstration of concern for students' needs) was ranked fourth. Examples given of effective instructors included: concern for students and relates to the student needs. Examples given of ineffective instructors included: instructor does not feel sorry for students, and the instructor is on a power trip (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Enthusiasm* (eagerness in the teaching experience) was ranked fifth. Examples given of effective instructors included: wants students to do well and likes teaching. Examples given of ineffective instructors included: wants to give lecture only and then get out of the classroom, and is not enthusiastic about teaching (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Conduct* (instruction, actions and behavior toward students in the classroom) was next in importance. Examples given of effective instructors included: willing to listen to students problems, treats students with respect, and is patient. Examples given of ineffective instructors included: makes students feel stupid when they do not understand the material, belittles students, admonishes students publicly, and are hurried (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Knowledge* (instructor's grasp of course material) was identified as a top 10 characteristic for effective instructors but not for ineffective instructors. Examples given of effective instructors included: knowledgeable, up-to-date, and having intellectual grasp of the material. Examples given for ineffective instructors included: does not know material well (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Helpfulness/Availability* (willingness to help students and availability outside of class) was mentioned by more than 25% of the students as a characteristic of effective instructors; however, it was mentioned least often regarding ineffective instructors characteristics. Examples given of effective instructors included: takes time to answer questions, holds variety of office hours, and is willing to meet outside of class. Examples given of ineffective instructors included: not willing to help students, never available, and annoyed with questions (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Communication* (exchange of course information on communicating expectations) was identified as extremely important when discussing ineffective instructors. Examples given of effective instructors included: explains material so students can understand, covers and reviews expectations clearly, and explains what is most important. Examples given of ineffective instructors included: assumes the student understands material so instructor does not explain, is unclear on expectations, and does not speak clearly (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

*Fairness* (equitable treatment of students) was the least mentioned characteristic when describing effective instructors but mentioned more frequently when discussing characteristics of ineffective instructors. Treating students fairly was one example for effective instructors. Examples given of ineffective instructors included: tries to fail student, makes class as difficult as possible, and is unfair (Berg & Lindseth, 2004).

Smith and Fitzpatrick (2006) have discussed "Tips and Techniques for Teachers." The authors report on an informal, non-research, survey they conducted; the goal of which was to develop a resource for instructors of valuable tips and techniques in a variety of instructional settings -- intensive courses, clinical courses, and distance courses. Although these settings differ from a typical classroom, valuable

information and similarities can be deemed from the survey. For each type of instructional situation, both students' and faculty perceptions of what instructors do and do not do to help students learn were identified. The following is a sampling of their findings for each type of learning situation (p. 186-201).

Students' perceptions of what teachers do to help them learn in *intensive courses*:

- Be available to answer questions outside of the classroom
- Demonstrate knowledge of the course material
- Focus on learning and not the assignments
- Have a positive attitude
- Have a sense of humor
- Offer a variety of teaching strategies
- Provide a comfortable and conducive learning environment
- Provide flexibility in learning activities
- Provide positive feedback and reinforcement
- Show genuine interest in the students and subject matter

Students' perceptions of what teachers do that does not help them learn in *intensive courses*.

- Display the fact that they are burned out
- Fail to be engaged in the course
- Fail to integrate guest speaker content into the course
- Fail to provide course materials in a timely manner
- Impart the feeling that this is just their job
- Lack preparation



- Are not able to move beyond their own work
- Provide unclear directions for assignments
- Use too many guest speakers

Students' perceptions of what teachers do to help them learn in a *clinical setting*:

- Answer questions in detail
- Are clear about expectations
- Are patient and let the student work through problems without telling the answers
- Ask the question "Why?"
- Build trust in the teacher / student relationship
- Expect the most from students
- Explain equipment in detail
- Focus on student success
- Give immediate feedback
- Have a knowledge base and expertise

Students' perceptions of what teachers do that does not help them learn in a

*clinical setting*:

- Add to the students' nervousness
- Is not approachable
- Assumes students already know the content
- Is unprepared
- Breaths down the students' backs by staring at them
- Corrects students by yelling at them in front of the patient and family
- Demeans students

- Expects students to answer a question quickly
- Does not have patience with students
- Tells students to “figure it out”

Students’ perceptions of what teachers do help them learn in *distance education*:

- Is clear about expectations
- Encourages open communication
- Encourages student responsibility with assignments
- Gives feedback on work that has been completed
- Touches base with students frequently
- Makes course announcements available to everyone
- Recognizes busy schedules of students
- Spaces out assignments over the term

Students’ perceptions of what teachers do that does not help them learn in *distance education courses*:

- Causes anxiety by not answering student questions
- Does not communicate regularly with the student
- Does not provide feedback
- Does not return assignments or answer questions in a timely manner
- Gives assignments that are difficult to understand
- Gives reading assignments that are overwhelming
- Is not available for immediate personal assistance
- Provides unclear answers to questions
- Puts too much responsibility on the student for learning

### *Perceptions in the Clinical Setting*

The study of nursing students' perceptions of effective and ineffective teaching personality characteristics and strategies in the clinical setting dates back many decades. The goal of these studies has been to improve student learning outcomes.

Brown (1981) examined baccalaureate degree student and faculty perceptions of effective clinical instructors. A descriptive research approach was utilized for the study. The sample included 42 senior nursing students and 42 faculty members. Brown used a researcher developed questionnaire called "The Clinical Teacher Characteristics Instrument." The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section identified 20 characteristics of clinical teachers. These characteristics were rated using a Likert-type scale with a stated rating code, ranging from "of most important" to "of no importance." The second section of the questionnaire required participants to select five characteristics from a list of 20 items that they considered most important for clinical instructors to possess. These characteristics were ranked in order of importance. Brown hypothesized that students and instructors would have similar perceptions of effective clinical instructors. However, the hypothesis was not supported by the research. A chi square test was done to determine if there was a significant difference between the two groups. Based on analysis of the data, the investigator rejected the hypothesis that nursing faculty and students are congruent in their description of the effective clinical teacher. Students regarded the instructors' relationships with students as more important than professional competence; whereas, the instructors perceived professional competence as more important than their relationship with students. The two groups also differed on the degree of importance of theory to practice, supervising and helping in new experiences without taking over, self-control, cooperativeness, and patience.

However, both groups ranked the following two items as the most important characteristics of an effective clinical instructor: (a) provides useful feedback, and (b) is objective and fair. Based on the data, Brown suggested that administrators in schools of nursing should encourage seminars and workshops regarding interpersonal relationships and teacher-student relationships as part of their professional development program for faculty.

Bergman and Gaitskill (1990) replicated and extended Brown's study to include a comparison of the findings between the grade levels of the students. Bergman and Gaitskill also wanted to determine if the perceptions of effective personality characteristics changed as students advanced toward graduation. A descriptive research approach was used.

Data were collected using Brown's (1981) questionnaire – The Clinical Teacher Characteristics Instrument. Using Brown's questionnaire, researchers surveyed 132 students from three levels of one baccalaureate degree program and 23 faculty members. Bergman and Gaitskill (1990) found that 11 items were selected by the majority of students as the most important characteristics. The two most important characteristics identified by the students were: (a) the instructor is well informed and able to communicate knowledge to students, and (b) the instructor is objective and fair in the evaluation of the student. The students found only two items as unimportant which included: (a) the instructor relates underlying theory to nursing practice, and (b) the instructor displays a sense of humor.

Bergman and Gaitskill (1990) found that 10 items were identified by faculty members as the most important characteristics. The three most important characteristics identified by the faculty were (a) the instructor shows genuine interest in

patients and their care, (b) the instructor conveys confidence in and respect for students, and (c) the instructor is honest and direct with students. Few faculty members identified any item as unimportant. However, low importance was placed on the categories of sense of humor, self-control, and flexibility by faculty.

Students and faculty unanimously considered seven items as important: shows genuine interest in patients and their care, conveys confidence in and respect for students, is well informed and able to communicate knowledge to students, provides useful feedback on student progress, is realistic in expectations of students, is honest and direct with student, and encourages students to feel free to ask questions or to ask for help. The researchers also reviewed the results of the important/unimportant characterizations made by the three grade levels of students. Significant differences were not found.

Further analysis on an item-by-item basis indicated a relative significant level of disparity between student and faculty perceptions on seven items: displays a sense of humor, supervises and helps in new experiences without taking over, is honest and direct with students, encourages students to feel free to ask questions and to ask for help, shows enthusiasm for teaching, permits freedom of discussion and venting of feelings, and is available to work with students as situation arises in the clinical setting.

Although some findings were similar to Brown's (1981) findings, Bergman and Gaitskill (1990) found that faculty members ranked relationships with students as more important than professional competence, contradictory to Brown's findings. In summary, this study found faculty and students responses tended to suggest that certain characteristics are uniformly important.

Knox and Mogan (1985) conducted an exploratory study in a university setting in Western Canada. They first established five categories of effective clinical instructor personality characteristics in a previous study (Mogan & Knox, 1983), which included, teaching ability, nursing competence, evaluation, interpersonal relationship, and personality. The purpose of the 1985 study was to examine if there was a significant difference between the rated importance of the five categories of effective clinical instructor personality characteristics, as perceived by university faculty, undergraduate nursing students, and practicing baccalaureate degree graduates. The researchers also examined if there was a significant difference between importance ratings made by university nursing faculty, undergraduate nursing students in different years of the baccalaureate degree nursing program, and practicing baccalaureate degree graduates in the five categories of effective clinical instructor personality characteristics.

A 47-item researcher developed survey instrument, the Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory (NCTEI), was used to collect data from 393 nursing students, 49 faculty, and 45 graduates. Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale, according to the perceived importance of each of the clinical instructor characteristics. Space was also provided for remarks or additional comments. Analysis of variance of the responses from the three groups showed a significant difference in nursing competence. Ninety-two percent of BSN graduates (92%) perceived nursing competence as being important, while only 89% of nursing students perceived nursing competence as being important. However, no significant differences were found in the other four categories: teaching ability, evaluation, interpersonal relationship, and personality (Table 1).

Table 1

*Difference Between Importance Scores of Faculty, Students, and BSN Graduates for Each of Five Categories of Teacher Behaviors*

Category	Sum of Squares	df	Mean squares	F	p
Teaching ability	183.32	2	91.66	1.436	0.239
Evaluation	56.67	2	28.34	2.100	0.124
Interpersonal relationship	47.38	2	23.69	1.990	0.138
Personality	49.45	2	24.72	1.270	0.283
Nursing competence	153.24	2	76.62	3.310	0.040

Questionnaires were then analyzed comparing responses between six groups: faculty, practicing BSN graduates, and students from each of the four levels. Analysis of variance of the responses of the six groups showed a significant difference for all five categories of teacher behaviors -- teaching ability, nursing competence, evaluation, interpersonal relationship, and personality (Table 2).

Table 2

*Difference of Importance Scores Between Six Groups for Each of Five Categories of Teacher Behaviors*

Category	Sum of Squares	df	Mean squares	F	p
Teaching ability	2094.6	5	418.9	7.1	<0.01
Evaluation	335.2	5	67.1	2.9	0.01
Interpersonal relationship	227.8	5	45.6	3.5	<0.01
Personality	452.4	5	90.5	8.3	<0.01
Nursing competence	569.8	5	113.9	6.2	<0.01

Mogan and Knox (1987) furthered their previous research (1985) to determine the specific characteristics differentiating *best* and *worst* clinical instructors as perceived by students and faculty. Much like their previous work, the researchers questioned if there was a significant difference between the five previously identified significant categories (teaching ability, nursing competence, personality, evaluation, and interpersonal relationship) of instructor characteristics, as rated by students and faculty. The sample consisted of 173 student respondents and 28 instructors from seven universities in the western part of the United States and Canada. This study also used the researcher developed NCTEI instrument used in their previous study (1985). Results showed that students and faculty in this study did indeed ascribe different characteristics to *best* and *worst* clinical instructors (Table 3 and Table 4) (Mogan & Knox, 1987, pp. 334-335).



Table 3

*Highest Rated Characteristics of Best Clinical Teachers as Perceived by Students and Faculty*

Students			Faculty		
Item	x	sd	Item	x	sd
*Is a good role model (N)	6.63	0.68	*Enjoys teaching (T)	6.60	0.69
*Enjoys teaching (N)	6.52	0.72	*Is a good role model (N)	6.57	0.63
*Demonstrates clinical skills and judgment (N)			*Demonstrates clinical skill and judgment (N)	6.54	0.51
*Enjoys teaching (T)	6.48	0.92	*Enjoys nursing (N)	6.54	0.64
*Is well-prepared for teaching (T)	6.40	0.83	Stimulates student interest in the subject (T)	6.50	0.98
*Takes responsibility for own Actions (N)	6.38	0.76	Explains clearly (T)	6.21	0.69
*Is approachable (R)	6.38	0.93	Demonstrates a breadth of knowledge in nursing (N)	6.18	0.86
*Is self-confident (P)	6.36	0.80	*Takes responsibility for own action (N)	6.18	0.86
Demonstrates enthusiasm (P)	6.31	0.88	*Is well-prepared for teaching (T)	6.14	0.89
Promotes student independence (E)	6.29	0.85	*Is self-confident (P)	6.07	0.98
Corrects students' without belittling (E)	6.29	1.01	*Is approachable (R)	6.07	1.02

Note: The means and standard deviations reported were calculated from a 7-point set where 1 = not at all descriptive and 7 = very descriptive.

\*Characteristic included by students and faculty

(T) Teaching ability

(N) Nursing competence

(P) Personality

(E) Evaluation

(R) Interpersonal relationship

Table 4

*Ten Lowest Rated Characteristics of Worst Clinical Teachers as Perceived by Students and Faculty*

Students			Faculty		
Item	x	sd	Item	x	sd
*Is a good role model (N)	2.36	1.47	*Is a good role model (N)	2.39	1.45
*Uses self-criticism constructively (P)	2.63	1.51	*Recognizes own limitations (N)	2.46	1.11
*Is open-minded and non-judgmental (P)	2.67	1.67	*Uses self-criticism constructively (N)	2.48	1.28
Demonstrates empathy (R)	2.70	1.66	Enjoys nursing (N)	2.50	1.53
Corrects students without belittling them (E)	2.71	1.86	*Encourages climate of mutual respect (R)	2.50	1.35
*Encourages a climate of mutual respect (R)	2.72	1.62	Demonstrates communication skills (N)	2.61	1.26
*Provides support and encouragement to students (R)	2.81	1.63	Stimulates student interest in the subject (T)	2.61	1.10
Communicates clearly expectations of students (R)	2.68	1.66	Identifies student's strengths and limitations objectively (E)	2.64	1.34
I approachable (R)	2.87	1.76	*Is open-minded and non-judgmental (P)	2.74	1.61
*Recognizes own limitations (N)	1.64	1.64	*Provides support and encouragement to students (R)	2.86	1.46
			Helps students organize their thoughts (T)	2.86	1.30

Note: The means and standard deviation reported here were calculated from a 7-point response set with 1 = not at all descriptive and 7 = very descriptive.

\*Characteristic included by students and faculty

(T) Teaching ability

(N) Nursing competence

(P) Personality

(E) Evaluation

(R) Interpersonal Relationship

In 1990, Nehring replicated Mogan and Knox's 1987 study and found that the findings were very similar, which increased the reliability for the NCTEI tool. The NCTEI tool has been used since then by other researchers to identify effective and ineffective clinical instructors (Gignac-Caille & Oermann, 2001; Sieh & Bell, 1994).

Gignac-Caille and Oermann (2001) and Sieh and Bell (1994) both examined student and faculty perceptions of effective clinical instructors in associate degree programs. Both studies used a descriptive design with a self-reporting questionnaire. Both studies used the NCTEI instrument developed by Knox and Mogan (1985) to conduct their research study. Tables 5 and 6 summarize the results from both studies (Gignac-Caille & Oermann, pp. 350-351).

Table 5

*Most Important Characteristics Identified by Students*

Rank	Characteristic	Mean	sd	Subscale
1	Demonstrates clinical skill and judgment	4.90	0.35	N
2	Explains clearly	4.89	0.33	T
3	Is well prepared for teaching	4.89	0.33	T
4	Does not criticize students in front of others	4.84	0.50	E
5	Is approachable	4.82	0.45	I
6	Emphasizes what is important	4.81	0.45	T
7	Corrects students' mistakes without belittling them	4.77	0.59	E
8	Communicates clearly expectations of students	4.77	0.53	E
9	Demonstrates communication skills	4.77	0.51	N
10	Provides constructive feedback on students' performance	4.76	0.55	E

Subscale: T = Teaching ability, I = Interpersonal relationship, P = Personality traits, N = Nursing competency, E = Evaluation skills

Table 6

*Most Important Characteristics Identified by Faculty*

Rank	Characteristic	Mean	sd	Subscale
1	Explains clearly	4.97	0.18	T
2	Is well prepared for teaching	4.92	0.28	T
3	Is approachable	4.92	0.29	I
4	Corrects students' mistakes without belittling them	4.88	0.42	E
5	Communicates clearly expectations of students	4.86	0.44	E
6	Enjoys teaching	4.85	0.36	T
7	Encourages a climate of mutual respect	4.85	0.36	I
8	Demonstrates clinical skill and judgment	4.83	0.51	N
9	Provides support and encouragement to students	4.81	0.43	I
10	Listens attentively	4.81	0.39	I

Subscale: T = Teaching ability, I = Interpersonal relationship, P = Personality traits, N = Nursing competency, E = Evaluation skills

Elcigil and Sari (2008) conducted a study to determine nursing students' opinions about, and expectations of, effective nursing clinical mentors. Even though this study did not investigate nursing instructors, only clinical mentors, it stills provides valuable and recent evidence on the opinions of students in regards to effective personality characteristics. Data for this descriptive study were collected through focus group interviews with 24 students. The data gathered showed that most students agreed with the previous work of Gignac-Caille and Oermann (2001) regarding the five mentor roles

established: clinical competence and subject knowledge, interpersonal relationships with students, teaching skills, evaluation strategies, and personal characteristics.

In summary, limited current research exists regarding student perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn in the classroom. Extensive research has been conducted on the effective and ineffective personality characteristics of clinical instructors and can be useful in providing a basis for research of the instructor in the classroom setting.

### Chapter Summary

The conceptual model by Dunkin and Biddle (1974) was utilized for this study and was described in this chapter. The Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching was described in detail and the four variables of classroom teaching: presage, context, process, and product, were explained. A greater focus was put on the presage variables and their application to this study explained.

The review of literature demonstrates that there is a lack of current literature regarding student perceptions related to how instructors help students learn in the classroom. Extensive research has been conducted on effective and ineffective personality characteristics and strategies of clinical instructors. However, limited research has been conducted on students' perceptions in the classroom. In the next chapter, the methodology will be described in detail.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate degree nursing program perceive how instructors help students learn in the classroom. This chapter focuses on the methodology of the study, which includes the design, population, sample and setting, and data collection and analysis procedures.

#### Design

The study utilized a descriptive, qualitative design. Data were collected via audio-taped, unstructured interviews. An unstructured interview method was chosen to allow participants greater latitude in their responses. According to Speziale and Carpenter (2007) unstructured interviewing is the preferred technique in qualitative studies.

#### Population, Sample and Setting

The target population was nursing students who were currently enrolled in a baccalaureate degree nursing program. The accessible population was nursing students from a baccalaureate degree nursing program at a Midwestern university in the United States.

The sample was a convenience sample of approximately 20 students (or until data saturation had been achieved). Participation in the study was voluntary.

Student inclusion criteria was: male or female students, at least 18 years of age, enrolled part time or full time, and completed at least three semesters in the nursing program (senior level nursing student). Part time students are those taking less than 12 credits and full-time students are taking 12 credits or more. At the university where data were collected, students are eligible for admission into the nursing program after three semesters of general education and other prerequisites. The nursing program (professional major) is a total of five semesters. Senior level nursing students were selected as they would have been exposed to a variety of nursing instructors who use multiple teaching strategies.

#### Data Collection Procedure

The dean and the undergraduate program director were contacted by a written letter to request permission for student participation in the study. Approval from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human participants was obtained prior to data collection.

Student participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. This researcher requested permission from the two senior level facilitators and the course instructors to attend classroom sessions in which first and second semester senior nursing students were enrolled. The researcher explained the purpose and design of the study to the students, and volunteers were solicited. Students who were willing to participate were requested to sign up for a convenient time to be interviewed. The sign-up sheet included students' name and phone number, as well as available times and locations for interviews. The students were also given the researcher's business card with name, e-mail, and phone number in the event he/she needed to cancel or reschedule the

interview. If the student was willing to participate, but was unable to because of time limitations, the student was asked to leave his/her contact information so that the researcher could contact the student to schedule a time at the student's convenience.

At the scheduled interview time, the researcher obtained informed consent (Appendix A) from the participant and assigned each participant a number. The assigned number provided anonymity to the individual without linking to any identifying data. According to Polit and Beck (2008), informed consent includes notifying the participant of the study goals, the type of data that will be collected, the data collection procedures, estimated time commitment, number of contacts, and sponsorship or funding for the study. Documentation of informed consent was completed by having the participants sign a consent form. A copy of the consent form was provided to the participant and the original retained by the researcher.

At the time of the interview, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). Information collected from the students included: sex, age, current level in the nursing program (Senior I or Senior II), self-reported GPA, full- or part-time student, and previous work in the healthcare field.

The primary data collection method included audio-recorded unstructured interviews. The student interviews were conducted in a quiet office reserved at the college by the researcher. The interview length ranged anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes. The interview with the students began by asking the question, "Tell me what you think instructors do to help you learn" and was followed by subsequent probing questions (Appendix C). As stated in Polit and Beck (2008) subsequent questions will be focused and will be guided by the responses of the broad question.



### Data Analysis Procedures

All audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist was only given the participant's assigned number for identifying the transcript. The researcher then read and reread the transcribed text. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times by the researcher to determine salient themes. The themes were then analyzed for emergence of possible relationships and categories. Colaizzi's method, as described by Speziale and Carpenter (2007), was used. Speziale and Carpenter (p. 83) describe eight steps to this approach, seven of which were used. These included:

1. Describe the phenomenon of interest.
2. Collect participants' descriptions of the phenomenon.
3. Read all participants' descriptions of the phenomenon.
4. Return to the original transcripts and extract significant statements.
5. Try to spell out the meaning of each significant statement.
6. Organize the aggregate formalized meanings into clusters of themes.
7. Write an exhaustive description.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the study design, population, sample and setting, data collection method, and data analysis were described. A qualitative design was used to describe what students perceive instructors do to help students learn in the classroom. A convenience sample was drawn from a Midwestern United States baccalaureate degree nursing program. Informed consent was obtained from each volunteer participant prior to data collection. Interviews were conducted, transcribed verbatim, and coded using

the method described by Colaizzi. Presentation of the findings through detailed description will be presented in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate degree nursing program perceive how instructors help students learn in the classroom. A total of 21 individual interviews were conducted with senior level nursing students. Each participant responded to the research question: What do you think instructors do to help you learn in the classroom? In this chapter, the demographic data and the results and discussion of the research study are presented.

#### Sample Description

A convenience sample of 140 potential participants were contacted by the researcher attending two classes containing senior level one and senior level two nursing students at a Midwestern university. A brief presentation was given to the students, and then willing participants were asked to sign up for an open interview time slot. The sample for this study was 21 volunteer, senior level nursing students who met the criteria for sample selection and agreed to participate.

#### Demographic Data

Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 46 years, with a mean age of 25 years and a mode of 22 years. Three of the participants were male and 18 were female. All 21 participants were enrolled full time in the nursing program. Twelve of the participants, (57%) were in the first semester of their senior year and the remaining 9 participants

(43%) were in the second semester of their senior year. Self-reported grade point averages (GPA) ranged from 3.0 to 3.9, with a mean GPA of 3.47. Seventy-six percent reported having previous experience in the healthcare setting as certified nursing assistants (CNA). One participant was a physical therapy aide, as well as CNA, and another participant was an emergency medical technician (EMT), as well as a CNA. A summary of demographic characteristics are reported in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7

*Demographic Data Summary*

Demographics		Percent
Gender	Male	14.0
	Female	86.0
Enrollment Status	Full-time	100.0
Semester in Program	Senior I	57.0
	Senior II	43.0
Previous Healthcare Experience	Yes	76.0
	No	24.0

Table 8

*Additional Demographic Data Summary*

Demographics	Range	Mean
Age	21 to 46	25.00
Self-Reported GPA	3.0 to 3.9	3.47

## Results and Discussion

The results of this study are based on senior level nursing students perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn in the classroom. The research question was: What do you think instructors do to help you learn in the classroom? In order to better understand what instructors do to help the participants learn, the participants were asked to give specific examples of what has helped and what has not helped them learn.

Dunkin and Biddle (1974) reported that much of the successes and failures of teaching are a result of the personality characteristics of the instructor in the classroom, which are a result of the presage variables. Data analysis revealed that perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn were diverse. The four major themes identified coincide with the presage variables, teacher properties, of Dunkin and Biddle's Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Figure 1): (a) teaching skills, (b) intelligence, (c) motivations, and (d) instructor personality traits.

The themes and examples are presented in Table 9. Each identified theme is supported by direct quotes to clarify and strengthen the association of the theme to the presage variables of Dunkin and Biddle's Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching.

Table 9

### *Major Themes and Examples*

Themes	Examples
Teaching Skills	Visual aids, case studies, open discussion
Intelligence	Knowledgeable, currently practicing as an RN
Motivations	Money, promote profession
Personality Traits	Friendly, approachable, caring

## *Major Themes*

### *Theme One: Teaching Skills*

The teaching skills theme was the most frequently discussed theme in this study by participants. Every participant discussed specific teaching skills that instructors have used to help them learn. These teaching skills were diverse. Table 10 gives a summary of the most frequently discussed teaching skills that were beneficial to the participants learning, followed by direct quotes from the participants to support those findings. Every participant also discussed specific teaching skills that instructors have done that were not beneficial to their learning. The most commonly discussed non-beneficial teaching skills will be discussed, followed by direct quotes from the participants to support those findings.

Table 10

#### *Most Frequently Discussed Beneficial Teaching Skills/Techniques*

Skill/Technique	Percentage
Case studies	81
Personal nursing stories / examples	76
Use of various technology	57
Visual aids / props	57
Discussion / allows time for questions	52
Power points	48
Organization and preparation	43
Interactive class	43

The most frequently discussed beneficial teaching skill was the use of case studies in the classroom, as 81% of participants discussed the benefits of case studies during the interview. Frequently the participants described how the case studies were stimulating because it was more like the “real world.” The participants repeatedly stated that they were able to connect information more easily when the information was presented in a case study. As one participant stated:

Case studies are good. Like when we were learning all those adult health illnesses, that was helpful with case studies, putting it altogether and talking with people and writing it down and then, I don't know, it all goes together in a way and then you understand the disease process through a case study. The case studies I think were good so you kind of relate it to something in the real world with a real patient.

Another participant also related the case studies to real patients:

Doing case studies really helped me a lot. I know in [class] especially because that's what it is about. It's about thinking about that person in the bed with a certain disease, so that has helped me.

Often the participants discussed that the case studies were not received very well by the class, but the participants still found them to be beneficial. Following are two examples of that point from the interviews:

The case studies in [class] were good. I don't know what they did beforehand but everyone complained when they went to the case studies. I thought it was great. You got a lot out of it and we went through it you know in depth. I liked that. I felt that was good and then you're forced to participate.

Another participant observed:

I like the case studies and a lot of people didn't like them but it really helped my learning to do them before and then if I missed the point or if I really didn't emphasize it when I did the case study on my own, I knew what to do in that situation. I'm not big to read before class and then listen to lecture and then read after so I think just straight up lecturing is hard to really learn the material, especially if it's so in depth like kidneys or something like that, you're kind of lost. So I think really doing the case studies and putting it into a patient focus analysis cause that's what we're going to be doing so that peaks our interest.

Seventy-six percent of participants found it beneficial to their learning when the instructor shared personal nursing stories with the class. The participants often stated that using personal nursing stories stimulated their interest in the topic and helped them to remember the material when later found on the exams. One participant explains:

I think her putting her stories into it helped. I always paid attention to those. I think throughout [class] you felt that it was like actually telling us a story, like I'm not going to pay attention, I'm not going to remember this or we're not going to get through our material but really you did get through all your material in the end and it helps you remember it then.

As supported by the following quote, participants shared that when an instructor was able to interject personal nursing stories it made her/him more believable and trusted by the class.

I find instructors that are actively involved in nursing help me learn. You know they work a shift here and there so they're able to say, oh I had that case this weekend, when we're talking about it and this is what I did or this is what went



wrong and I think that's what helps the most, that they're not so far removed from the situation.

Following is another example from a participant regarding how they felt an instructor was more believable if they shared personal nursing stories:

I like when they have stories that they tell us that relate to what we're talking about right now, something that they have experienced or somebody else that they know experienced. I think that really helps so I guess the instructors having the experience in whatever they're teaching really seems to bring it more down to like the reality, like this is actually real, this actually happens, you actually see this.

However, frequently the participants also stressed the instructor needed to keep the stories short and to the point as described by one participant below:

Telling stories helps to a certain extent. They're fun. I don't mind them as long as they're 10 minutes or less. Well, they do get longer sometimes but you know you get off the material and then you get to the exam and you don't know as much as you should or haven't covered much in class like you should have with the time that you have.

Many of the participants discussed that the use of various technology aided them in their learning process (57%). Various technologies mentioned by the participants that were beneficial included: videos, podcast, You-tube videos, and the "clicker." Following are examples of those participants' quotes:

The one thing that is running through my mind right now, I can just think back to like [class]. [Class] is my favorite class, but like in [class] we would use like the

Internet sometimes for like videos but more like instructional videos on how processes in the body work and stuff like that.

Another participant added:

Oh the podcasts, yah those worked really nice. I used those the last few semesters for like just reviewing for exams, especially the finals.

And another stated, when asked, what an instructor has done to help them learn:

Straight lecture is probably not so good. It's like some days it's like okay I can sit through this but there are other days where they sometimes do like videos pointing out certain patients and in [class] she does a lot of videos of like schizophrenia and all these different things to try to say this is what a patient may present with or this is what the effects of medication might do to a mental health patient, so I think those really help because it sets it into reality and you can see it whereas sometimes when it is just lectured about you can't really grasp it.

Participants very commonly mentioned that uses of visual aids or props were beneficial to their learning. Over half of the participants mentioned at some point during the interview that using visual aids or props helped them learn, as evidenced below in the following quote:

Another thing that helped me learn was like drawing models out and things like that. I'm more of a visual learner and so I think by drawing different things out like in [class] I know she draws out the heart and the flow of blood and all that sort of stuff, so I think that really puts it into perspective for me as well.

In addition another participant mentioned in regards to visual aids the following quotation:

When she could, she gave us a graphic on the board about the heart and where things went and the lungs and how that worked and different things like that so she would draw on the board and that helped me a lot.

When asked what type of teaching strategies in the classroom helped them learn, another participant talked about the following use of visual aids:

Activities, skits, visual aids. Like sometimes even just having something on the overhead or if we're talking about wounds, showing me a picture of the wound helps me to understand a little better than saying well this kind of wound is like a papule.

In the following example, one participant stressed the need and benefit of visual aids:

I know it's hard, but like going through it on the board. We were talking about cancer one day, and she was going through like all the cells, like the differentiation of cells and things, and she wrote it on the board so we all wrote the picture and like that just helps me, like visual things and repetitive. I need to go over it way more than once, so I mean things like that, but I mean I'm not the type to hear something and know it so maybe I'm more visual.

The next most commonly mentioned teaching skill, and discussed by just over half of all the participants, was when the instructor allowed time for discussion and questions and answers. This teaching skill was also discussed in the informal survey that Smith and Fitzpatrick (2006) conducted. The following quote from one participant supports this finding:

The instructors that helped me learn the most are probably the kind that did their presentations and then allowed time for students to ask questions at the end.

Just under half of all the participants expressed that power points were beneficial to their learning. Most of the students stated that they liked the use of power points; however, they also liked when they still had to take notes. They did not like when the power points were too complete. If the power points were too complete the participants stated that they would be bored and daydream, as supported by the following quote:

Power Points I think are helpful, but I think there are some power points for some classes that just have way too much information on there and if they could just give us the most important things instead of all the little details here and there. You know I think that really overwhelms us, me personally, and it makes everything more confusing and you don't know what's important. If they just broke it down on the power points to the most basic, important concepts.

Another example of how the participants found Power Points to be both beneficial and not beneficial:

Power Points are nice with like pictures and stuff. I hate when the teachers read their power points word for word. Like it's up there, I see key points you know, but then I like them to go off of that Power Point. Sometimes I know you can't avoid it because it might be tough and you want to provide the key points. You know you can see people like nodding or doing other things because they read off the Power Points and they know that so they don't pay attention as much.

Participants discussed the need for the instructor to be organized and prepared in order to facilitate their learning needs. Forty-three percent of the participants reported that their needs for learning could not be met if the instructor was unorganized or unprepared. When asked for a specific example of what an instructor has done to help you learn one participant stated:

I think some of the teachers I've had have really good lectures, like not getting lost in your own lectures, like preparing before class really helps cause you can definitely tell when an instructor has prepared before class, has thoroughly thought through the lecture with what to tell us and provide us a lot of examples.

Many participants emphasized the importance of instructors coming to class prepared and organized, as illustrated in the following example:

I really think what definitely helped me was when a teacher was organized and when the lectures follow an organized pattern. Like if they give us Power Points in class or give us notes that it kind of follows along with the chapter that we are reading through so that it correlates in order.

When asked what teaching strategies helped them learn, one participant answered with the following response:

Organization, an organized syllabus with dates when things are due, following some kind of logical pattern and you can just tell when a teacher is excited and prepared about what they are talking about and I think that just keeps you engaged.

In the following example, a participant explains what happens when an instructor is not organized:

I know she means well and I know she's a very nice lady, but she needs to do something with her organization skills and lecture because I've sat through class this whole semester, read my book, did the outlines, went on my computer, did whatever I felt like. I even did work for other classes. The same teacher is also bad at getting grades back in a timely manner. Just unorganized. I still have four blanks in my grade book. I don't like to worry about that.

An additional teaching skill that 43% of participants found beneficial was when the instructor had an interactive class. The participants explained that when they were engaged in the class by activities or discussion, they felt they retained more of the information, as demonstrated by the following:

I like interactive classes. Ones that incorporate activities, skits, visual aids, guest speakers, discussion, even just having something on the overhead or showing me a picture helps me to understand a little better than just saying it. Then when I get to an exam, I can picture whatever that was we were talking about.

When the participants were asked what instructors did in the classroom to help them learn, beneficial teaching skills were the most commonly discussed topic. However, in this study, the participants were also asked what an instructor has done in the classroom that did not help them learn. Every participant discussed examples of specific teaching skills instructors have done that did not help them learn. The most commonly discussed answers are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

*Most Frequently Discussed Non-Beneficial Teaching Skills/Techniques*

Skill/Technique	Percentage
Provides too much information/Lacks focus or direction	67
Reads off of Power Point	52
Unorganized	43
Does not answer questions	38
Discouraging remarks	29

The most common non-beneficial teaching skill used in the classroom discussed by the participants was that instructors often tried to provide too much information or the lecture lacked focus or direction. This commonly led the students to feel overwhelmed or even intimidated in their learning.

It is not helpful to me when you're going over so much information and you don't know where to focus it and they don't really help you focus it, so you don't really learn anything. It's kind of mass memorization of everything you could possibly get and that doesn't help. It's like where are the connections, what am I supposed to be focusing on. For example peds. There is so much information and it's everywhere, all over the place and I don't know. It's not really helpful to not nail it down.

Fifty-two percent of all participants mentioned that "just reading" off the Power Points was not beneficial to their learning. It was very frequently discussed, with a great deal of disappointment in the participants' inflection. The participants complained that reading off of Power Points was boring, a waste of time, and insulting their intelligence.

When the instructors use Power Points, and they just basically summarize the chapter with the power points, does not help me learn because I've already read the chapter so I already know what the chapter is about. When I come to class I'm looking for additional information to help me learn what's in the chapter, not to just summarize what I've already learned.

In a different perspective of how Power Points were not beneficial one participant stated:

It is not helpful when they use Power Points from the book instead of making their own power points and then just reading off that Power Point, and it's so

broad that it's hard to get an idea of exactly what we need to learn and how to learn it.

Another participant added the following statement:

I have had instructors that just stand in front and just talk over their Power Point and I don't learn anything from that. I might as well sit home and read myself or find videos or something that can supplement my reading. I personally don't learn that way, so that's very hard for me because it's like I feel like I'm just wasting my time sitting here.

Another participant with a similar perspective stated:

Power Points are nice with pictures and stuff. I hate when the teachers read their lectures word for word, like it's up there, I see key points, but then I like them to go off of that. Sometimes I know you can't avoid it because it might be tough and you want to provide the key points. You know you can see people nodding or doing other things because they read off the Power Points and they know that so they don't pay attention as much.

This particular participant explained how reading from the Power Point was detrimental to her learning.

Some of the instructors they read from the Power Point. We are at the point where we can read ourselves, we don't need anybody to read it to us, just explaining that is important, explaining it and getting to the important part. Do some of the important things in the classroom, not just sitting there and reading the Power Point, that doesn't help at all.



And finally another participant summed it up with the following statement:

The ones (instructors) that don't help me learn are the ones that just show up with Power Points and just read verbatim off the Power Points and add nothing.

An additional thing that instructors do, that 43% of the participants found hindered their learning, was being unorganized or changing things "mid-stream."

Participants found this to be confusing and distracted them from learning the important things from the class, as illustrated in the following example.

All of a sudden one teacher said that she was 'switching it up.' A lot of people started failing because it was weird what she would lecture on. I need structure and she's not very structured. She jumps around from side to side and then goes front to back and then what we talk about in class doesn't even make it to the exam. Even if sometimes assignments or lectures seemed to have pertinent information, she doesn't follow through on what she says she's going to do.

She's not consistent and that drives me nuts.

Another participant added:

I just keep thinking of [class] because it's like everything was always changing. I just find it hard because it was not organized. One minute we're watching a video and then the next she's just talking about a chapter that we don't have stuff printed from and that doesn't help when we don't have the right materials or are not learning from the syllabus.

Frequently, the participants mentioned that it hindered their learning when instructors would not answer questions. Participants discussed the frustrations they felt when instructors did not allow time for questions and answers at the end of class or when instructors would not allow them to discuss or ask questions regarding exams.

Many of the participants felt it was beneficial to go over the exam questions and learn from the mistakes that were made. This caused frustration when the instructors did not allow them the opportunity, as illustrated in the following quote.

Things that really don't help me learn is when maybe you'll be asking questions about your projects or anything and they just kind of don't accept questions.

They're not going to answer questions on certain things because they don't want to give you like clues, or they want you to figure it out yourself, like trivial things like formats and stuff like that.

One participant added:

Some of the professors will not be open to discussion and seem like this is what it is, deal with it. You know like not really talking about it doesn't help. One of our classes averaged 77 on exams and she won't even talk about them.

A further teaching skill or technique, which 29% of the participants mentioned as being detrimental to their learning, was when the instructor used discouraging remarks. Often the participants discussed feeling stupid and not capable of completing the nursing program because of remarks made by some instructors.

I'd say it doesn't help me learn when an instructor says something discouraging like telling us we're not a real smart class. I think that really didn't help a lot of us feel confident so I think that really definitely hurt because then you are scared.

Another participant added:

It is harmful when they (the instructors) look down on us or make us feel incompetent as students because we are learning.

On that same topic, the following participant made this remark when asked what instructors do that did not help you learn:

Discouragement. Putting students down. Telling them that they're the worst class ever. Telling them that they have dyslexia even though they don't have it. I've heard so many things from instructors that were negative.

In summary, the participants appeared more eager to discuss what teaching skills instructors used to help them learn versus what teaching skills instructors used that did not help them learn. However, when asked, participants did reveal many non-beneficial teaching skills similar to the results and findings of the informal survey conducted by Smith and Fitzpatrick (2006): not answering questions in a timely manner, causing anxiety by not answering student questions, demeaning students, providing unclear directions for assignments, and lack of preparation.

#### *Theme Two: Intelligence*

Twenty-nine percent of participants expressed that the instructor's intelligence or knowledge about the subject influenced their learning. Participants expressed that if the instructors were experienced and knowledgeable about the topic being presented, it helped them learn, because the material was presented more passionately.

A specific characteristic in an instructor that helped me learn was their knowledge. I just feel like they know everything. Obviously, they've been there for awhile and teaching for awhile and been a nurse for awhile, but I just feel like they're so knowledgeable about what they have learned and they know about all the new things that are coming up and they research that.

Another participant explained how being experienced and knowledgeable about the topic helped with her learning.

Because the instructor is interested and experienced in the subject, she makes the time go by fast. She makes it interesting to us. She's relaxed, she makes jokes.

Although intelligence was the least discussed in this study, it was talked about by 6 of the 21 participants and felt to be essential to their learning.

### *Theme Three: Motivations*

Thirty-eight percent of participants expressed that the instructor's motivation for teaching influenced their learning. Many of the participants mentioned that the instructor needed to have clear reasons for "being there." Some of the participants felt that when the instructor had the wrong motivations for teaching, such as money, benefits, or schedule, it was damaging to their learning.

Of course when they're available and they're willing to help it helps a lot, but having availability is not the only part. Being available is you can come in but being willing to help you is something different than just being available. I can sit here but if I don't want to be here am I going to be helpful to anybody? I'm looking at my watch, I have to go, I have to do this, I have to do that, but you know just willing to help students and be honest to a student, that's the important part.

Following is another example from a participant about how having clear motivations from their instructors would help or hinder their learning:

I think if you're going to be an instructor you're going to want to be there to teach and you can definitely tell when the professor is either burned out or you know they have too much stuff going on.

Another example of having the “right” motivations for teaching follows:

They have to have the desire to want to see us learn. Like there are two types of people in any career, people who are going on like an actual career and people who are just doing it as a pay check and you can really tell the difference.

*Theme Four: Personality Traits*

The personality traits theme was extensively discussed by the participants. Every participant discussed specific personality traits of instructors that were beneficial to their learning. The personality traits that were discussed varied, but the traits mostly followed a general consensus of kind, warm, and caring. These results were similar to the study conducted by Berg and Lindseth (2004). Figure 2 identifies words used to describe instructors’ personality traits that participants found to be beneficial in their learning process, followed by direct quotes from participants to support these findings.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendly / Approachable</li> <li>• Personable</li> <li>• Relaxed/Calm</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Honest</li> <li>• Humorous</li> <li>• Excited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledgeable</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Predictable</li> <li>• Respectful</li> <li>• Caring</li> <li>• Organized / Prepared</li> </ul>
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*Figure 2. Beneficial Personality Traits to Help Students Learn.*

The participants were asked what specific characteristics in instructors helped them learn. The variety of answers was long, but followed a general consensus of the instructor being kind, warm, and caring. The participants were extremely vocal when asked this particular question, and every participant had strong feelings and perceptions of what type of personality characteristics in instructors were helpful to their learning. The following remarks by the participants support these findings. The quotations were

attempted to be arranged by specific personality characteristic words used by the participants; however, many of the participants discussed numerous characteristics in one quotation, which made it difficult to categorize that way. Each quotation below is preceded by a personality characteristic word or words to summarize the quotation.

*Warm*

I like the warm instructor. Especially when they share personal stories, even like personal family stories, not that they get real detailed, but sometimes they talk about their kids and stuff that really make you identify with them as a person and that always make them more approachable in my head so that helped.

*Friendly, approachable, warm*

Friendly and open person and someone you can feel comfortable enough to approach. I mean there are other professors who they don't really have that personality or warmth so you're kind of intimidated to approach them. If they smile or acknowledge you when they see you in the halls, like openness and friendliness helps me. I think if they seem approachable, warm and friendly, it really helps facilitate learning from my point of view. They are able to correct you in a way that doesn't make you feel like demeaning.

*Open, honest, willingness*

I like when they (the instructors) are not intimidating, more like when they are open and honest with you and willing to help you and don't feel like, oh they're higher up than you. They're kind of like okay I'm here to help you and always there for you. That's nice.

*Fun, nice*

It helps me learn when I have instructors that like to have fun when they're teaching. If you're just going to sit there and talk to me about everything and not make it fun, it's not going to stick in my head. Also, just be nice and laid back.

*Fun*

As crazy as it may sound they have to have some kind of a sense of humor. Lighten it up a little bit.

*Humor, dedication*

They have to have the desire to want to see us learn. There's not many of the latter type here, but there are a couple who I think aren't as dedicated to the learning process as other instructors are. I think the thing that really sets it apart is the instructors who care about the students, who go that extra mile who want to see us learn. The thing that helps me learn a lot is someone who is a little bit looser, who is a little bit willing to go with the flow and who has a little bit of a sense of humor cause there's only so many power point slide shows you can watch in a row without needing to laugh a little bit and that little bit of a break-up in between really helps me to refocus myself and then I can take in more information.

*Humor, willingness*

Probably a good a sense of humor I think. I guess their willingness more or less, if they take the time to go through everything I think is a big thing because it comes so natural to them because they're used to doing it, and I think when they understand that it takes students a little more to get used to it because it's all new to them.

*Willingness*

I think if you're going to be an instructor you're going to want to be there to teach and you can definitely tell when the professor is either burned out or you know they have too much stuff going on.

*Personable*

I think that the nursing staff at the school here really try to get to know their classes which I find interesting and I think it's helpful because when you feel comfortable with the person that's trying to teach you, I think you learn more and I think they really strive to do that, to try to get to know most of the people in the class which is really nice.

*Down-to-earth*

Being down-to-earth definitely opens the students up and not being scared to really ask questions cause I know some professors are really high-end and they've gone through their schooling and they deserve the doctor title or the master's title and when they're not down-to-earth with us it's so hard to approach and really find the answer that we're looking for. I think it's a good trait, to be down-to-earth.

*Care*

Care. Like really care about you that helps me learn.

*Personable, dedicated*

Being dedicated to what they're teaching cause you can always see that in the professors that are really gun-ho about their specific topic. Being personable, because if you can't come up to them and talk to them, then that'll hinder you. Being dedicated to the teaching field.



*Calm, relaxed, honest*

Relaxed, the more calm and the more honest help me a lot. In [class], I learned a lot in that classroom because it's so relaxed, so wonderful, so calm and you don't have to look at the clock. I learned a lot. She makes it interesting to us. She's relaxed, she makes jokes. She tells you the truth. She's honest and she treats everybody the same in the classroom and it's just a good learning environment.

*Relaxed*

Relaxed is obviously more helpful. Then you're more willing to ask questions and not be afraid that they know everything and I don't want to ask a question and I don't want to feel stupid.

The above characteristics are similar to the findings found by Berg and Lindseth (2004) when they determined that participants perceived instructors to be more helpful to their learning when the instructors were easy to get along with and personal to the students. Many of the same phrasing and descriptions were used by participants from the current study, Berg and Lindseth's (2004) study, and Smith and Fitzpatrick's (2006) informal survey. The perceptions of what personality characteristics were beneficial to a students learning were vast but held to a common theme of kindness, warmth, and caring.

In summary, four major themes emerged from the data obtained through the one-on-one interviews with senior level nursing students when asked what they perceived instructors did to help them learn in the classroom. The themes identified were (a) teaching skills, (b) intelligence, (c) motivations, and (d) instructor personality traits, which

coincide with the presage variables, teacher properties, of Dunkin and Biddle's (1974) Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Figure 1).

#### Discussion of Results With Related Studies

The teaching and learning process is a complex process that involves many variables, seen and unseen (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). In the current study, when the participants provided their perception of what an instructor does to help them learn, Dunkin and Biddle's Model (1974) assisted in the understanding of the teaching/learning process by determining which variables participants valued to be important to their specific learning needs. The results indicated that all of the participants described themes within the presage variables, teacher properties, of Dunkin and Biddle's model.

Limited studies exist on student perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom (Berg & Lindseth, 2004). While the majority of available studies offer perceptions of students in the clinical setting (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Brown, 1981; Elcigil & Sari, 2008; Gignac-Caille & Oermann, 2001; Knox & Mogan, 1985; Mogan & Knox, 1983; Mogan & Knox, 1987; Nehring, 1990; Sieh & Bell, 1994), the current study specifically focused on the students' perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom. The findings were similar to those of Berg and Lindseth's (2004) study, and participants from both studies used similar word phrasing to describe effective teaching personality characteristics and teaching strategies.

In recent years, there have been only a few investigators who have explored nursing students' perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom. This study explored this phenomenon qualitatively. By using a qualitative approach, rich detailed information was provided regarding the nursing students' perceptions of what

instructors are doing to help them learn in the classroom. It is anticipated that the results of this study can contribute to further research in nursing education and will help determine how educators can improve teaching in the classroom.

### Chapter Summary

In an attempt to explore and describe the perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn in the classroom, interviews were conducted with senior level nursing students ( $n = 21$ ). The findings from this study revealed four major themes describing the perceptions of the participants as they went through their college education. Findings were discussed and related to previous literature associated with nursing students' perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate degree nursing program perceive how instructors help them learn in the classroom. This chapter includes a brief summary of the perceptions of how instructors help students learn in the classroom described by 21 senior level nursing students. Conclusions based on the results of this study are discussed. Implications for nurse educators and nursing education administration are included. Recommendations for further research and nursing education are also provided.

#### Summary of Findings

Limited studies exist regarding the nursing students perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom (Berg & Lindseth, 2004). The current study explored and described senior level nursing students' perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom.

A qualitative descriptive approach was used to describe what senior level nursing students perceive instructors do to help them learn in the classroom. The target population for this study was senior level nursing students attending a Midwestern university. A convenience sample of approximately 140 potential participants was presented the opportunity to participate in the study. Twenty-one senior level nursing students met the criteria for sample selection and agreed to participate in the study.

A demographic questionnaire was used to gather background information. An unstructured open-ended questionnaire was used to answer the research question: What do you think instructors do to help you learn in the classroom? The researcher completed audio-taped, face-to-face interviews.

Colaizzi's method was used to analyze data and to gain a feel for the whole experience (Polit & Beck, 2008; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Significant statements were extracted and restated in more general terms, followed by the formulation of meanings. Meanings were then organized into clusters of themes and then referred back to the original transcript for validation.

The Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Figure 1) developed by Dunkin and Biddle (1974) was used to guide this study, since it identified many variables that influence classroom teaching and outcomes. This model was chosen because of its usefulness in explaining how personal characteristics and life experiences affect the learner/instructor process. The Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching distinguishes four main categories of variables: presage, context, process, and product.

The Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974) provided a framework for this research project because it demonstrated the constant and continuing interaction between instructor and student and how these interactions can influence the perceptions that the two have of each other. The model demonstrated the many factors that influence the perceptions students have of what instructors do to help them learn.

Four major themes emerged from the data obtained through the one-on-one interviews of senior level nursing students when asked what they perceived instructors did to help them learn in the classroom. The themes identified were (a) teaching skills,

(b) intelligence, (c) motivations, and (d) instructor personality traits, which coincides with the presage variables, teacher properties, of Dunkin and Biddle's (1974) Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching

#### *Theme One: Teaching Skills*

The teaching skills theme was the most frequently discussed theme in this study by participants. Every participant discussed specific teaching skills that instructors have done to help them learn. These teaching skills were diverse. Every participant also discussed specific teaching skills that instructors have done that were not beneficial to their learning.

#### *Theme Two: Intelligence*

Twenty-nine percent of participants expressed that the instructor's intelligence or knowledge about the subject influenced their learning. Participants expressed that if the instructor was experienced and knowledgeable about the topic being presented that it helped them learn because the material was presented more passionately.

#### *Theme Three: Motivations*

Thirty-eight percent of participants expressed that the instructor's motivation for teaching influenced their learning. Many of the participants mentioned that the instructor needed to have clear reasons for "being there." Some of the participants felt that when the instructor had the wrong motivations for teaching, such as money, benefits, or schedule, then it was damaging to their learning.

#### *Theme Four: Personality Traits*

The personality traits theme was extensively discussed by the participants. Every participant discussed specific personality traits of instructors that were beneficial to their learning. This study found that the participants used many of the same phrasing

and descriptions that were used by participants from Berg and Lindseth's (2004) study and Smith and Fitzpatrick's (2006) informal survey. The perceptions of what personality characteristics were beneficial to a students' learning were vast but held to a common theme of kindness, warmth, and caring.

### Conclusions

This study identified senior level nursing students' perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom. Four major themes emerged from the data obtained through the one-on-one interviews of senior level nursing students when asked what they perceived instructors did to help them learn in the classroom. The themes identified were (a) teaching skills, (b) intelligence, (c) motivations, and (d) instructor personality traits, which coincides with the presage variables, teacher properties, of Dunkin and Biddle's (1974) Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching

Instructors need to be aware of these findings by which they are evaluated by the students. The results of this study suggest that instructors may need to possess a variety of personality characteristics and teaching strategies to meet student expectations. However, no recommendations can be made for instructors to make significant changes in their teaching. Further research needs to be conducted with a broader sample.

### Implications

#### *Nursing Instructors*

An awareness of how senior level nursing students perceive how instructors help them learn in the classroom setting is of value to the nursing instructor. The results of

this study revealed that students' perception of what is beneficial to their learning is vast, but many similarities exist between students. These results can be helpful to nursing instructors in the planning and implementation of curricula. Recommendations for nursing instructors include:

1. Instructors must attempt to bridge the gap between what educators and students perceive as beneficial personality characteristics and teaching skills that help students learn in the classroom.
2. Instructors may better appreciate what students' perceive to be helpful in teaching.
3. Instructors might identify, evaluate, and improve upon the effectiveness of their own teaching skills. Eighty-one percent of participants found case studies beneficial to their learning, which is a specific teaching skill that could easily be implemented into almost any nursing curriculum or class. Another teaching skill that could be used to improve upon the effectiveness of an instructor's teaching skills is the use of personal nursing stories. Seventy-six percent of participants reported the use of personal nursing stories incorporated into the classroom lecture content benefited their learning. Over half of the participants reported that an instructor using visual aids or props helped them learn, which is also a teaching skill that could be implemented into many classrooms.

#### *Nursing Education Administration*

Administrators of nursing programs need to maintain an understanding of the stresses and challenges student nurses face throughout the educational process. Academic administrators must work together with classroom instructors to keep each other informed about the needs of the student nurse throughout their educational



experience. Information from this study can assist nursing leaders in academia to design nursing programs that are conducive to student learning. Recommendations for nursing education administration include:

1. Graduate programs should be reviewed to determine if the proper teaching skills and personality characteristics are taught and emphasized.
2. In-services and faculty development might be implemented to improve teacher awareness and effectiveness.

### Recommendations

This study has provided a snapshot of senior level nursing students' perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom. A compelling finding was that age, gender, and level currently enrolled in did not appear to influence the perceptions of the participants. Because limited studies exist regarding the students' perceptions of what instructors do to help them learn in the classroom, recommendations for future research include the following:

1. A replication of this study with students who are enrolled in an associate degree nursing program or accelerated nursing program.
2. A replication of this study with junior level nursing students to determine if there are significant differences or similarities between the two levels.
3. A comparative study of students from a different field of study to determine if the perceptions are unique to nursing students.
4. A prospective study, beginning with a group of sophomore students, in which students complete a questionnaire each year until they complete their course of study, to determine whether the responses change over time.

5. A replication of this study with a broader based sample in other schools and regions to validate these findings.
6. A comparative study asking the same research question of instructors in an attempt to discover differences and similarities between the two groups.

### Chapter Summary

Based on the results of this current study and previously cited research, the perceptions of what helps students learn in the classroom is diverse. The nursing students in the current study discussed four major themes that helped them learn in the classroom: teaching skills, intelligence, motivations, and personality traits. The four major themes identified in the current study coincide with the presage variables, teacher properties, of Dunkin and Biddle's Model for the Study of Classroom Teaching (1974). By understanding the perceptions of senior level nursing students, educators and academic administrators can better understand, prepare, and facilitate the student nurse's learning. Recommendations were presented for future research and nursing education.

APPENDIX A  
Consent Document

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh  
Short Form Consent Document

I, the undersigned, have had presented to me a description of the research study, Students' Perceptions of What Instructors do to Help Students Learn, which explained the study's scope, aims, and purpose; the expected duration of my participation; the procedures which will be used; the reasonably expected benefits to myself or others; the reasonably foreseeable discomfort and risk of harm which could result from my participation in this project; and other information required under procedures for informed consent.

I have been provided with a copy of the research summary.

I agree to participate in this study and I agree to be audio taped during the interview process.

_____	_____
Date	Signature of Research Participant
_____	_____
Date	(Print) Name of Research Participant

I, the undersigned, have witnessed the presentation of the description of the research study to the above named research participant.

	_____
	Signature of Witness
	_____
	Denise Parrish (Print) Name of Witness

APPENDIX B  
Demographic Questionnaire

## Student Demographics Questionnaire

1. Student Participant # \_\_\_\_\_ (provided by researcher)
2. Male or female (circle)
3. Age \_\_\_\_\_
4. Senior I or Senior II (circle one)
5. Full or part-time student (circle one)
6. Previously worked in healthcare field: yes or no (circle)
7. If yes, what was your previous healthcare work  
experience \_\_\_\_\_
8. GPA \_\_\_\_\_

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Appendix C  
Interview Guide

## Interview Guide

1. Tell me what you think instructors do to help you learn.
2. Can you give me a specific example of what an instructor did to help you learn?
3. Can you give me an example of what an instructor did that did not help you learn?
4. Were there things that an instructor included on their syllabus that helped you learn?
5. Were there things that an instructor included on their syllabus that did not help you learn?
6. How did the availability of the instructor affect your learning?
7. Can you give me specific characteristics in instructors that help you learn?
8. What type of teaching strategies, in the classroom, helped you learn?
9. What type of teaching strategies, in the classroom, did not help you learn?
10. What type of projects, assigned by the instructor, did help you learn?
11. What type of projects, assigned by the instructor, did not help you learn?
12. What type of established classroom atmosphere did you find most helpful to you in learning?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add that would help me better understand what instructors do in the classroom to help students learn?



Appendix D

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh IRB Approval Letter



April 27, 2009

Ms. Denise Parrish  
5833 Koelpin Rd.  
Oshkosh, WI 54902


Dear Ms. Parrish:

On behalf of the UW Oshkosh Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Participants (IRB), I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved for the following research: Students' and Faculties' Perceptions of What Instructors do to Help Students Learn in the Classroom.

Your research has been categorized as NON-EXEMPT, which means it is subject to compliance with federal regulations and University policy regarding the use of human participants as described in the IRB application material. Your protocol is approved for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. A new application must be submitted to continue this research beyond the period of approval. In addition, you must retain all records relating to this research for at least three years after the project's completion.

Please note that it is the principal investigator's responsibility to promptly report to the IRB Committee any changes in the research project, whether these changes occur prior to undertaking, or during the research. In addition, if harm or discomfort to anyone becomes apparent during the research, the principal investigator must contact the IRB Committee Chairperson. Harm or discomfort includes, but is not limited to, adverse reactions to psychology experiments, biologics, radioisotopes, labeled drugs, or to medical or other devices used. Please contact me if you have any questions (PH# 920/424-7172 or e-mail:rauscher@uwosh.edu).

Sincerely,



Dr. Frances Rauscher  
IRB Chair

cc: Suzanne Marnocha  
1503

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Appendix E  
Letter to Potential Participants

There is currently a nursing shortage in the United States which is predicted to persist because of the increasing demand for healthcare from the baby boomer generation, and the aging nursing workforce (American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 2005). In order to address the shortage, colleges of nursing around the country are attempting to increase enrollment numbers (Kuehn, 2007). Their ability to increase enrollment is limited due to the scarcity of qualified nursing instructors. The shortage of nursing instructors adds to the nursing shortage (AACN, 2005). The AACN identifies many reasons for the instructor shortage including instructor age/retirement, salary differentials, alternative career choices, workload, job dissatisfaction, role expectation issues, the changing characteristics and expectations of students. The AACN (2005) also identifies many strategies to expand the capacity of the current nursing instructors one of which is to “conduct research to better understand the phenomena of teaching and learning and to document the effects of various educational strategies” (p. 20). Currently, there are few available research studies, examining students’ perceptions of what instructors do to help students learn in the classroom. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how students in a baccalaureate nursing program perceive how instructors help students learn in the classroom. The goal is to provide nursing instructors with positive strategies, based on student perceptions, for teaching in the setting.

Dunkin and Biddle’s (1974) Model of the Study of Classroom Teaching will be used as the conceptual framework for this study. The model describes the many variables that contribute to the instructor and learner experience, and also explains how these variables can affect the perceptions and outcomes for the learner and the instructor.

A descriptive qualitative design will be used. A convenience sample of 20 students will be interviewed from a college of nursing in the Midwestern United States. Informed consent will be obtained from the volunteer sample. A demographic questionnaire will be completed along with an unstructured interview. Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data will be analyzed using Colaizzi’s method.

The AACN (2005) supported conducting research like this to help better understand the phenomena of teaching and learning. By documenting the effects of various educational strategies, instructors may better plan and implement curricula. This could help alleviate some of the current demands and frustrations placed on nursing instructors and hopefully deter instructors from leaving academia. Also, by identifying effective and ineffective teaching strategies and/or instructor personality characteristics this study has the potential to improve the student’s educational experience and satisfaction. The results from this study could also be used to orient new instructors and also teach students seeking their masters in nursing education. And finally, the information deemed from this study could be used to create evaluation tools for promotion, retention, and merit and tenure decisions based on the instructors use of the effective teaching strategies or by their use of the positive identified personality characteristics.

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