

## Short Research Article

# Research Project: The Mentoring and Development of Emotional Competence in Nursing Students

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### **Abstract**

*Nursing care has a very intense emotional component. Nursing students, in addition to dealing with the frailties inherent in their life processes and personality development, are still subject to an emotionally and socially demanding academic experience. This negatively charged emotionality hinders the teaching-learning process and the academic course. The emotional management depends on perception and individual resources, and it may be necessary for this regulation support and guidance provided by a mentor. The mentoring programs developed in the Institutions of Higher Education contribute to the healthy integration of the student and, consequently, to their socialization and academic success. Mentors provide guidance to students and extrinsic emotional regulation, through support and discussion, and are a resource in managing emotions, contributing to the development of emotional competence in nursing students. This quantitative research project aims to contribute to the construction of a mentoring program that promotes the development of emotional competence, essential to academic success and transformative learning in Nursing Degree.*

### **Keywords**

*mentoring, nursing, students, emotions, emotional competence, academic success*

### **1. Introduction**

Students admitted to the nursing degree live an intense emotional experience, exhausting and often disturbing, which can weaken your health and inner balance. These students, in addition to having to deal with the weaknesses inherent in their life processes and personality development, are still subject to an

intense academic experience, which is very demanding from an emotional and social point of view (Williams & Williams, 2011; Banks, Owen, & Erickson, 2012). The intense negative emotionality load complicates the teaching-learning process and the academic course. The students' emotional experience in Clinical Teaching involves stressful situations that require work at the level of emotional support (Diogo, Rodrigues, Lemos e Sousa et al., 2017). From the perspective of Watson's theory of human caring, emotions are a key element for the nurse's connection with the Self (body, mind and soul) of the caregiver. This relationship appears as a rich experience for both stakeholders, in which all grow and learn with each other. Thus, nursing care is framed in a "human-to-human caring process" (Watson, 2002, p. 69) with a very intense emotional component. Analyzing nursing practice as a relational process impregnated with emotions and feelings (Diogo, 2015) becomes a pertinent and necessary horizon, since emotional experience is omnipresent in every act of caring (Diogo, 2006). The management of emotions and experiences depends on individual perceptions and resources and may be necessary for its regulation support, guidance and mediation over the processes of learning and human development (Huybrecht, Loeckx, Quaeysaegens et al., 2010; Rodrigues & Baía, 2012; Lima & Tavares, 2016).

The concepts of tutoring and supervision differ from the concept of mentoring, as the latter refers to a person who helps to understand the system and offers guidance. At the academy in particular, tutoring guides the student to succeed in the organization (Bryant, Brody, Perez et al., 2015). Thus, in the educational area, tutor is one that contributes to learning, within a certain philosophy of teaching. The mentor has an expanded role, marked less by the teaching itself and more by the personal and professional orientation of the student as a whole (Botti & Rego, 2008).

Mentoring contributes to the development of positive perceptions of learning by students (Chuan & Barnett, 2012). The mentoring programs developed in Higher Education Institutions contribute to the healthy integration of the student, consequently to their socialization and academic success. Orientation is part of the leader's role, which aims to promote growth by helping students develop their own academic or career path (Kim, Im, & Hwang, 2015). The mentor, in a work of reciprocity, supports and empowers the development of communication skills, critical judgment, evaluation and adjustment (Araújo & Vieira, 2013), which empowers talent, seeking the best opportunities and resource management, for the individual development and learning (Saraiva & Rodrigues, 2011; Williams, 2013). The mentor should, on the one hand, support and guide the student to more effectively reach his or her potential (Bain, Fedynich, & Knight, 2010; Bryant, Brody, Perez et al., 2015), on the other hand facilitate the development of educational and academic competencies (Williams & Williams, 2011). Mentoring facilitates when there is inadequate academic preparation, lack of social and academic resources, and anxiety in nursing students, this can reduce dropout and increase success rates for these students (Wong, Stake-Doucet, Lombardo et al., 2016). Mentors provide guidance to students and extrinsic emotional regulation, through support and discussion, these are a resource and support the management of emotions. Through the co-regulation of emotions, mentors facilitate integration and adaptation to the emotions experienced (Straus, Johnson, Marquez et al., 2013). When the student achieves positive results with the

mentoring program, the mentee feels empowered, confident and encouraged to use this strategy in similar situations during the remaining years of the course, and often for a lifetime (McGaghie, Issenberg, Petrusa et al., 2010). The mentor works with students on an individualized action plan to increase their self-esteem, in order to increase their resilience. When working with the student, the mentor can provide help and timely advice on the different features available. Students need to feel valued, and often do not optimize available academic resources, for lack of knowledge or fear of breach of confidentiality (Marks-Maran, Ooms, Tapping et al., 2013).

The scientific evidence and the daily life led to the guiding question of this project; how do the nursing students live and perceive the negative and exhausting factors and their emotional experience along the formative course? The purpose of this study is to contribute to the construction of a mentoring program that promotes the development of emotional competence, essential to academic success and a transformative learning in Nursing Degree.

## **2. Overall Objective**

Understand the emotional experiences of the students throughout the teaching-learning process.

## **3. Methodology**

Exploratory study of a quantiquitative approach. The sample consists of the degree course nursing students (from 1st to 4th year) and their teachers. Data are collected in a first phase by “Emotional Skills Competence Questionnaire” (ESCQ) portuguese version (Santos & Faria, 2005); the purpose of applying this questionnaire is to identify emotional perception and expression and ability to deal with emotion. Emotional perception corresponds to the ability to recognize emotions in oneself and others (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Emotional expression refers to the ability to externalize the affective contents in the “here and now” in interaction with the other (Denham, 2007) properly (Alzina & Escoda, 2007). And the ability to deal with emotion is to be able to manage and regulate emotions in an adaptive way, which refers to the concept of emotional regulation that consists of the conscious and/or unconscious strategic process by which the individual influences the type of emotion that he has, when and how he experiences them and expresses (Gross & Thompson, 2007). This questionnaire consists of 45 items, on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from never to ever, composed of three subscales: “emotional perception”, with 15 items corresponding to the questions: 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 33, 36, 39, 42 and 44; “Emotional expression”, with 14 items corresponding to the questions: 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38 and 41; and “ability to deal with emotion” with 16 items corresponding to the questions: 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43 and 45. In this scale there are no inverted items (Santos & Faria, 2005). In a second phase, students will be interviewed, until data saturation, with the objective of understanding emotionally intense and disturbing experiences in the student’s perspective; understand their training needs aimed at the development of emotional competence; identify emotional management strategies; identify emotional management resources;

analyze mentoring as a resource for the development of emotional competence. In the third phase there will be the realization of a focus group for teachers, also with the objective of understanding the emotionally intense situations of the students; understanding weaknesses in emotional development; analyze their training needs, which aim to develop emotional competence; and to analyze mentoring as a resource for the development of emotional competence.

#### 4. Expected Results

This project will be performed in different Portuguese nursing education institutions, and its temporal prediction will be two years. Participants are expected to benefit from this study by reflecting on the recognition of their emotional competence, analyzing emotional management strategies that promote their overall wellbeing and emotional balance, and the ability to identify resources that target their emotional development by empowering them to cope more effectively with adversities as students and throughout their lives. No damage is expected for the participants.

In summary, with this study, it is important to define formative strategies and transformational learning opportunities for the development of the nursing student's emotional competence. Thus, it is expected to be able to understand the emotional experiences lived by the students, and with this to raise awareness of the importance of mentoring in the Nursing Degree Course and structure the guidelines of a mentoring program, adapted to a constructive learning and cognitive development, stimulating the emotional competence of the nursing student.

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