

# The experience of clinical nurses with nursing students: a phenomenological analysis\*

LA EXPERIENCIA DE LAS ENFERMERAS CLÍNICAS CON ESTUDIANTES DE ENFERMERÍA: UN ANÁLISIS FENOMENOLÓGICO

A EXPERIÊNCIA DE ENFERMEIRAS ASSISTENCIAIS COM ESTUDANTES DE ENFERMAGEM: UMA ANÁLISE FENOMENOLÓGICA.

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed at understanding the reality of being a clinical nurse who works with nursing students while they develop their care experience in the clinical practice. The research was carried out by means of a phenomenological approach. Nine clinical nurses were interviewed and based on their discourses four categories of concretely experienced events were identified and interpreted according to Martin Heidegger's philosophical reference. Among the categories emerging from those discourses, this article highlights the following: *being a nurse with students in their educational process, and the possibility of being with private and public university students*. These aspects are presented here in order to encourage reflections on the important participation of clinical nurses in the education of future nursing professionals.

## KEY WORDS

Nursing.  
Education, nursing.  
Philosophy.

## RESUMEN

La trayectoria de este estudio se dirigió para la comprensión de la vivencia de ser enfermera clínica que actúa con estudiantes en los campos clínicos. Tuvo como objetivo comprender la experiencia vivida de las enfermeras clínicas al estar con los estudiantes de enfermería en cuanto ellos desarrollan su experiencia clínica en su servicio. Se optó por realizar una investigación cualitativa con enfoque fenomenológico. Se entrevistaron nueve enfermeras clínicas y de sus discursos se identificaron cuatro categorías concretas de lo vivido, que fueron interpretadas según el referente filosófico de Martín Heidegger. De las categorías que emergieron de los discursos se destacaron: *Siendo enfermera con estudiantes en el proceso de formación y La posibilidad de estar con estudiantes de universidades privadas y universidades tradicionales*, que se presentaron en el intento de estimular reflexiones acerca de la importante participación de este profesional en la formación de los futuros profesionales de enfermería.

## DESCRIPTORES

Enfermería.  
Educación en enfermería.  
Filosofía.

## RESUMO

A trajetória deste estudo voltou-se para a compreensão da vivência de ser enfermeira assistencial, que atua com os estudantes de enfermagem, quando estes desenvolvem suas experiências assistenciais nos campos de prática clínica. Com esta proposta, se optou por realizar a pesquisa segundo a abordagem fenomenológica. Foram entrevistadas nove enfermeiras assistenciais e, de seus discursos, identificaram-se quatro categorias concretas do vivido, que foram interpretadas segundo o referencial filosófico de Martín Heidegger. Dentre as categorias que emergiram dos discursos destacaram-se, para este artigo: *sendo enfermeira com estudante no processo de formação e a possibilidade de estar com estudantes de universidades privadas e universidades públicas*, que serão apresentados com o intuito de estimular reflexões sobre a participação das enfermeiras assistenciais na formação de futuros profissionais de enfermagem.

## DESCRITORES

Enfermagem.  
Educação em enfermagem.  
Filosofia.

\* Extract from the master's thesis "Estar con Estudiantes de Enfermería: la experiencia de las Enfermeras" School of Nursing, Universidad Andrés Bello, Santiago de Chile, 2007. <sup>1</sup>MSc. in Nursing. School of Nursing at Universidad Andrés Bello, Santiago de Chile. [marcia\\_fsantos@yahoo.com.br](mailto:marcia_fsantos@yahoo.com.br) <sup>2</sup>Full Professor at School of Nursing, University of São Paulo. São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. [merighi@usp.br](mailto:merighi@usp.br) <sup>3</sup>Full Professor at School of Nursing, Universidad Andres Bello, Santiago de Chile. [Imunoz@unab.cl](mailto:Imunoz@unab.cl)

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Chile has gone through several changes since the establishment of its first university in 1842, to become what it is today. Several events led to the transformation of the old system, which was centered in the state, to the open and varied system it is in present day, with both public and private universities<sup>(1)</sup>.

Higher education in nursing was also initially developed by the state health institution, with the creation of the first Nursing School in 1902 associated with the University of Chile. This area of education has developed up to the present, offering society the most varied options of access to this career, with nursing schools in several public and private universities.

Since their origins, the nursing schools have always considered the clinical experience as an important pillar in the education of future nursing professionals<sup>(2)</sup>. Clinical experiences, as a part of the educational process, provide students with opportunities to think about the professional practice and to develop a critical point of view regarding the dynamics of the relationships existing in the working environment; this favors theoretical-practical integration and enables several activities to be performed in this area, thus allowing for the elaboration of new knowledge and influencing the development of the student as a person<sup>(2-3)</sup>.

We agree with some authors when they state that the educational institution is not the only entity responsible for the quality of education of nurses, since it is also the responsibility of institutions that provide health services, thus allowing the prevention of a dichotomy between what is taught and what they actually find in practice<sup>(4)</sup>. Nevertheless, these opportunities presented to students in practice environments, fields for clinical placement or for professional education are always supervised<sup>(5-6)</sup>, either by a professor or by a clinical nurse, and each professional plays an important part in the education of the future nursing professional.

In this context, the development of this study arises from a series of inquietudes that have been generated from the first author's experience as a clinical nurse, added to the opportunity of acting now as an undergraduate nursing professor, with students who acquire their clinical experience in several different clinical fields at the Nursing School of the University Andrés Bello of Santiago in Chile.

Questions arise by sharing discussions with nursing students and professors and listening to them as they talk about their experiences with the clinical nurses, both the good and the bad. On one hand, there was the author's own perception about the subject: *They don't know what they are talking about; they are mistaken about the clinical nurses, because they do like to be with students*; and on

the other hand there was doubt: is this perception or thought exclusively mine? What do other clinical nurses think about it? What is their perception on this matter?

Centering on the concerns and reflections of the undergraduate student, and being aware of the role of the clinical nurse in this process, this study examines the clinical nurse who, during the performance of his daily work, involving a person who requires care, must supervise and be in charge of the education of a student, a future nursing professional. New concerns were then presented: What happens in their relationship with the student? How does the nurse receive the student? What does it mean for the clinical nurse to have students for whom they are responsible?

Interested in this matter, the literature was searched for studies that bore a relationship to this study, and it was observed that the existing studies are not focused on clinical nurses and the nursing undergraduate student education, but on the experiences in clinical fields and the relationship of professor and student. Therefore, this study is important, as it is possible to learn the foundations of teaching nursing students and care practice as we research the reality of the clinical nurse's experience in theoretical-practical education with nursing students through understanding the meaning of their activity.

The nursing schools have always considered the clinical experience as an important pillar in the education of future nursing professionals.

## OBJECTIVE

The development of this study aims at *understanding the experience of nurses and nursing students during their practice in the clinical fields*, in order to understand the phenomenon: *being a clinical nurse in the presence of nursing students in clinical fields*.

This study has an existentialistic focus, in order to understand the experience of these clinical nurses.

## METHOD

The journey taken and the nature of the mentioned concerns led us to question and to try to understand this phenomenon through a qualitative focus with a phenomenological course. Phenomenology aims to redefine the global process of knowledge and types of effective relationships between subject and object, who have the ability to define the phenomenological contents<sup>(7)</sup> and to describe the total structure of the experience, including the meaning these experiences have for the individuals who participate in them, focusing on comprehension rather than explanation<sup>(7)</sup>.

The phenomenology of Martín Heidegger is an option to understanding this phenomenon through an existential focus, as it searches for the meaning of the phenomenon in its existence, or the factual basis of the *dasein*; focused on questioning the being<sup>(8)</sup>.

In the thoughts of this philosopher we found the conductive thread of our analyses, since Martín Heidegger does not separate reason from emotion, or subject from object. Martín questions the way of being in the existence, clarifying that this being involves the totality that is possible for him to apprehend in his being, based on the mundaneness. Heidegger considers phenomenology as *going after things* searching the *how*, as experience shows from existence<sup>(9)</sup>.

The study enjoyed the participation of clinical nurses who contribute to the learning process of nursing undergraduate students in public and private nursing schools, towards the development of their clinical practice. A hospital institution was chosen as the study location because the nurses who work there constantly supervise and are often in charge of several undergraduate students, of differing education levels. These nurses, who were later interviewed, had been working in the institution for three years, on average; some had broad experience in supervising nursing students, whereas others were experiencing their second opportunity to make this contribution. All interviewed professionals were public university graduates.

The collection of statements took place in April and May of 2006. Respecting the nurses' decision, the interviews were taken in the hospital, since they believed it was the most appropriate place to develop the subject. Each nurse specified the most convenient time and place to meet, so that they could talk without being interrupted. During the interview, the interviewers explained the general purpose of the study, laying the foundations of the phenomenological interview in order not to influence answers.

According to the ethical principles that concern the development of studies with human beings, the authors consulted the Committee of Ethical-Scientific Evaluation of the Metropolitan South Health Service (Comité de Evaluación Ético Científico del Servicio de Salud Metropolitano Sur), to which the elected hospital belongs, as well as the Research Commission of the Nursing School of the University Andrés Bello (UNAB - Comisión de investigación de la Facultad de Enfermería de la Universidad Andrés Bello), obtaining the necessary authorization to carry out the study. In all cases, an informed consent was also signed in order to guarantee the rights of the clinical nurses involved in the study.

The nurses' statements were led by the following guiding question: *what does the experience of being with undergraduate nursing students during the development of their clinical practice at your place of work mean to you?*

Nine clinical nurses participated in this study. Statements were completely transcribed and identified as Statement 1 (S1), Statement 2 (S2) and so on.

The procedures recommended by Josgrilberg were used to understand this phenomenon. This author proposes to delimit the subject and to proceed to the phenomenological analysis and description, from the principle of the elected referential (in this case Martín Heidegger) in order

to be able to later classify the object, or meaning units, in a process of reduction<sup>(10)</sup>.

The journey to the comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon started at the moment the statements were transcribed. After reading them several times in order to capture the entire meaning, and based on the fundamental structures of the *being* proposed by Martín Heidegger, the authors tried to delimit the meaning units of each statement; in other words, to delimit the expressions spontaneously perceived in the descriptions of the subjects, centered on the searched phenomenon.

The next step was the categorization and grouping of these meaning units, aimed at capturing the presence of common aspects in the descriptions, including convergences and divergences; through this grouping, the thematic categories were established and named ontological unifications<sup>(11)(a)</sup>.

Four ontological unifications were identified, which included: being a nurse with students in their educational process; the possibility of being with students from public and private universities; the *dasein* in the relationship with students; and the feeling of being a model to students.

This study will highlight the following ontological unifications: *being a nurse with students in their educational process, and the possibility of being with students from public and private universities.*

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Being a nurse with students in their educational process*

The contact of the student with the nursing reality in professional practice allows him to learn and identify the activities that permeate the care practice and the way to be and act as a nurse<sup>(4)</sup>.

As a being-in-the-world, the nurse is also a being-with, since by being co-present he ends up interacting with others in the world. Therefore, the nurse is not only busy with the student, but is also concerned about him. This sympathy or concern may be presented in an authentic or inauthentic way<sup>(9)</sup>. In an *inauthentic* manner, the nurse takes on the student's problems, doing, thinking and discovering things for him, not allowing him to discover them by himself or allowing him to build his own knowledge:

[...] intervening in a positive way and making the necessary adjustments so that tomorrow he may be a good professional S2.

[...] you with them, taking their hand and telling them where to go S4.

And you have to say, watch this, and that,...] S5.

(a) It is the comprehension men have about themselves in relation to their historical and ontic situation.

In the *authentic* way, the nurse helps the student to be free and take on his own roles and responsibilities. This means they do not do things for the students, but are present in this process of discovery and understanding, allowing the student to discover his possibilities and to grow in them, building his learning possibilities *with* the nurse. In a study developed by the State University of California, nurses talk about protecting students, by not placing them in situations where they may fail, or in situations that may damage their confidence<sup>(12)</sup>.

The relation of a human being with another being in the world, therefore, is not about domination, but about coexistence; it is not about intervention, but involves interaction in order to assume their own existence and transcend in their being<sup>(9)</sup>.

[...] I am not the kind of nurse who is always after them. I let them work freely. I am not the kind of person that when asked about something: why is it that way?, why do you believe that? [...] study about it and tomorrow we talk S3.

I believe they have to study because this is the time to learn. So this is what I emphasize a lot to the students S7.

This meeting with the other happens in their daily work. The nurse's presence meets the other in what he undertakes, uses, hopes, and avoids, which is not immediately near in this surrounding world, or in their occupation<sup>(9)</sup>.

This meeting is represented by the environment where the nurse works, where he lives his life exercising his role as a health professional in the service of a person, family or community, and where he expresses and fulfills himself, showing how much life there is in his work<sup>(14)</sup>. This world is where the student has the possibility to develop his knowledge.

[...] I believe it is an enriching experience for them, as they come to a world, to this reality of becoming qualified S1.

[...] here they have the possibility to see the way they are trained, if they are ready to finish their studies S2.

[...] it is an educational environment, we are used to having students here, to be with them and to teach and guide them S8.

It is the only way to provide the knowledge one has [...], the knowledge he acquired in the practice S9.

The nurse brings his history with him, by being human and being a temporary movement<sup>(10)</sup>. Men never are, they are always *being*, in a constant to-be. He has a story that precedes, reaches and projects him to a future that is only real in his imagination<sup>(9)</sup>. Provided with this story, the nurse is able to remember his past, and in his present, as a being, he compares the student, remembers his experiences and understands this student should be more interested and stimulated with experiences beyond theory.

[...] I hope to intervene in a positive way, with my personal and professional experience so that the student develops to the best of his abilities S2.

The student who comes here is more independent, he has innumerable possibilities S2.

(...) it is possible to see that the students come with the idea of learning other things, [...] learning other techniques, they come with other ideas S9.

In this context, the following statements will show that the nurse refers to his experience of meeting students who are not interested in their educational process as a negative experience:

[...] I've had several good and rare experiences, but some were not very good S1.

I've had students who were really good, and others who were not S4.

[...] because they do not study anymore... S7.

[...] we went there and we felt like studying, at least I felt like studying... S7.

Concerned about transmitting his own knowledge, especially the knowledge that goes beyond the execution of a technique, the nurse involves his story, his way of being, his life, and his professional experience, which when summed up produces his own knowledge. For Heidegger, this is coexisting; in other words, being with the other provides conditions so that one can see the perspective of the other, comprehending and seeing as the other sees, feels, and thinks through his gestures and the way of reacting to his verbal and non-verbal language.

In a study developed regarding the routine of nursing students in clinical practices, the students mentioned criticisms and questions regarding the performance of the employees, indicating the prevalence of a mechanical performance and tasks in which the distance of the nurses regarding the indifference towards the suffering of their patients was the most frequent fear presented regarding their future professional practice<sup>(13)</sup>.

[...] when you are a student [...] you focus too much on the theory. And you know the ideal, you know how it should work, but in practice, we can show them the reality, making changes in what they have learned, keeping the basic care of a patient in nursing S4.

[...] we can transmit knowledge, things they will not learn in the books, in the literature. It is possible to teach them aptitudes as a nurse, something more experiential in nursing's core S6.

[...] they have to qualify in several areas, they have to develop the intellectual part [...] the ethical part [...] the psychological part [...] and the fourth part, that is about the spiritual S7.

A great part of the nursing work stands on handling the personnel, the patients and their families, [...] things more related to dealing with people S9.

Nevertheless, the nurse recognizes that he shares experiences as a being-in-the-world; however, the student,

with his presence, also shares his experience and knowledge with the nurse. The need to be current in their knowledge in order to be with the student leads the nurse towards the future, in the manner of a be-always-being.

[...] even though [...] they are studying, graduating, there are things they lose, even if they do not want to, once they are inserted in a working system; and they bring them as new things S3.

[...] I have also learned with them, because it is a process of feedback and in the end, there are many things that you may be doing on a daily basis and you forget some things, and they are able to give these things back to you S4.

You can teach the students and they can also teach you [...]. S6.

### ***The possibility of being with undergraduate students from public and private universities***

A professional graduated from a public university has a different status compared to those from private universities. This situation is the result of the history and tradition that public universities have, with years of experience in the education of nursing professionals<sup>(1)</sup>. Another fact to consider is that most of the nurses who work in hospital institutions, clinics or primary care units, graduated from public universities, since they were the first to offer nursing professionals to the work market.

Whenever a nurse is with students who are developing their clinical practice, he is given the opportunity to be with different students from different universities, and he will deal with the student according to his way of being-in-the-world:

[...] I am a nurse from a public university, I am not a nurse from a private university as they are nowadays S1.

[...] I have participated in the education of students from both public and private universities S4.

A nurse's way of being confronts the student's way of being, and in this manner, the nurse understands (attributes meaning) to the difference in the student's attitude as relating to the university to which he belongs, and according to the subvention he has to present.

[...] this has changed the students a little, in other words, as the student now comes from a private university where they subsidize [...] 100% of their career, they have a different attitude S1.

[...] the universities nowadays actually accept students to safeguard themselves, not to lose students due to an economical interest S1.

I see, for instance, that different people come here now [...] probably different from what we were S7.

For Heidegger, being-in-the-world is the multiple ways in which a man lives and can live, the several ways in which he relates to and acts with the individuals he meets and

those who are presented to him. The relation that is established with the world allows him to comprehend the being in his existence.

In regards to the student, the nurse has different possibilities and possible ways of being, which allows them to choose among several paths. The nurse can choose to understand the student in order not to allow the student's way of being to relate with his own, thus seeing it as the previous situation, in other words, inside his own world and experience, or he may choose to comprehend the student in his world, in the relation he establishes with the world, thus understanding him as a being in his existence:

[...] I can learn what the reality of a nursing student is... you see different kinds of people, learn how to share your knowledge in a different way. There are different levels of assertiveness and they accept information from a clinical nurse in different ways S4.

I have not had any sort of problem during all this time, when I was given students from different universities S8.

Given the opportunity to choose, each nurse will face this possibility according to his way-of-being-in-the-world, providing the student with his own possibility.

It is fundamental to accept the student with his limitations and conflicts, monitoring him in the development of his personal and professional maturity, for an education that is not only technical in regards to his future profession, but also considering his education as a citizen, a human being, whose duty always has implications in the social and existential dimensions<sup>(13)</sup>.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

From the point of view of the nurse who is with students as they develop their clinical practice and supporting them in the philosophical referential of Martín Heidegger, the authors could understand the phenomenon of being a nurse in the presence of students.

The clinical nurse carries his history, his experience and his interpretations of the world, represented by his routine; in other words, where he lives and works as a nursing professional.

By meeting the student in this world, according to his own interpretation, the nurse can share with him, providing an authentic care and allowing him to be in this world, sharing his own knowledge generated from the coexistence with others. Therefore, the nurse recognizes him, values him, and gives him opportunities, comprehending the student in his own world and, based on that, in a constant circle, bringing him to his own world. The educational process is developed in this constant being-in-the-world.

Nevertheless, there is also the possibility that the nurse may limit the student with inauthentic care, preventing him

from being, and only allowing the repetition of assigned tasks and actions without sharing his reflections about them.

The clinical experience is an important and continuous process in the education of students, in which the clinical nurse plays a fundamental role.

Comprehending and considering the clinical nurse as a being of possibilities and a participant in the educational process of nursing students allows nursing schools to develop new points of view regarding the clinical experience and its importance.

It is the responsibility of the universities to search for places for clinical practice, and according to their way of viewing and understanding nursing, to find the best possibilities for the advancement of the education of their students. Therefore, they shall search for environments that provide a greater possibility of experiences, represented as interactions among patients, professionals and material resources.

The constant interaction of university professors with clinical nurses allows them to know and comprehend each selected world and, based on this experience, to elect those

that provide ideal possibilities for the education of their students.

Another important fact to consider is the inclusion of references in the school programs in order to allow them to understand the other from a comprehensive perspective. Comprehending the clinical nurse in his world may reduce interpretations and prejudice, which are generally negative. Student and professor should talk and discuss the possibilities in each selected world, aiming at searching for the necessary experiences for the education of the new professional.

At the end of this study, and after sharing with students and nurses, the authors highlight that they have revealed a part of the phenomenon, but every time it is analyzed it may be presented and revealed in a different way.

Finally, it is important to continue searching for an understanding of the phenomena that are presented in the education of nursing students. The authors state that phenomenology contributes to the comprehension that involves the experience of the other and allows the nurse to be and offer an authentic care according to his needs and expectations.

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