

Exploring the Issue of "Failure to Fail" in professional programs: A Multidisciplinary Study



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Conflict Disclosure Information



- Presenters: Sylvie Larocque and Nadia Omri
- **Title of Presentation:** Exploring the Issue of "Failure to Fail" in professional programs: A Multidisciplinary Study
- **We have no financial or personal relationships to disclose.**

The Importance of Preceptors in Professional Programs



- During the preceptorship experience, the student is paired with a preceptor and a faculty advisor for the duration of clinical experience
- It is during these clinical experiences that the student acquires the necessary knowledge and skills to work as a professional.

Rising demand on professional programs



- There is a growing universal demand for well-prepared professionals in all disciplines and the society has entrusted professional schools with the task of preparing such individuals (Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2008).
- The preceptors/field instructors and faculty advisors have an academic and professional responsibility to teach, supervise and evaluate students clinical practicum to ensure that each graduate of their program is competent.

Purpose



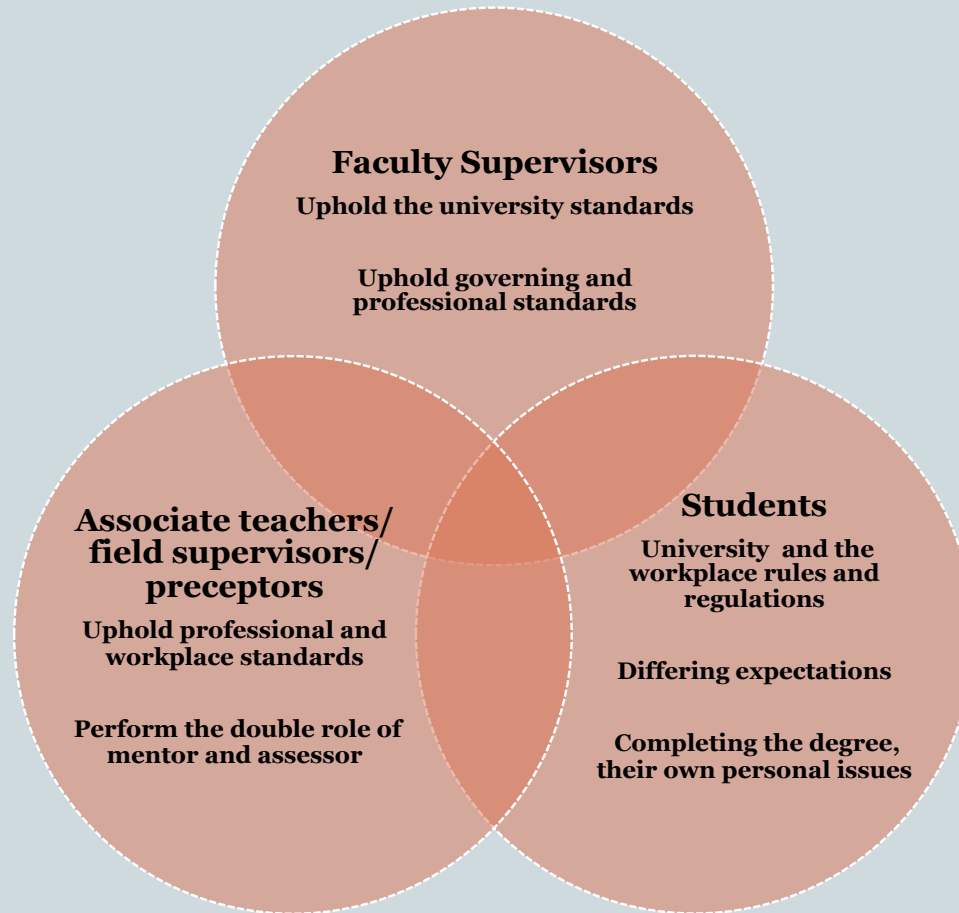
- There is evidence that some preceptors and faculty advisors experience difficulty in identifying and making decisions to fail students who display incompetent or unsatisfactory practice (Bogo et al., 2007; Brown , Dudek et al, 2005. Hawe, 2010; Luhanga Yonge and Myrick, 2008).
- We undertook an multidisciplinary study to explore the issue of “failure to fail” in professional programs including Nursing, Education and Social Work.

Complexity Theory (Morrison, 2002)



- Complexity theory is a theory of change, evolution and adaptation, often in the interest of survival with a combination of cooperative and competitive strategies (Lam Nogueira, 2006, Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2002).
- This theory originated from science, but the complexity theory has been applied to several studies in education, nursing and social work, given that all human beings operate and interact in complex systems.
- The practicums /preceptorships take place in a complex system.

The Practicum



Methods



- Qualitative approach (content analysis).
- Recruitment was done through posters, emails and network sampling (snowball effect).
- 30 preceptors, faculty advisors, professors involved in the evaluation of students were questioned.

Participants



Position	Education	Nursing	Social Work
University professor	5	5	2
Faculty advisor		3	2
Preceptor	5	5	3
Total	10	13	7

Semi-structured interviews



- **Imagine having to communicate to a student that he or she has not met the clinical course objectives in their final placement. What would it be like being the one dealing with such a student?**
 1. In your experience as a field instructor/preceptor or faculty member, have you ever failed or considered failing a student in their final field / preceptorship placement?
 2. How was this situation managed, and what was the outcome?
 3. Did you ask for assistance? If so, explain what kind of assistance you received or asked for?
 4. In your experience as a preceptor or faculty member, do you think that some students pass field placements even when their performance is questionable? If so, explain.
 5. What are some of the factors that prevented you from failing a student in the past?
 6. What do you think are the challenges and consequences of failing a student on a field/preceptorship placement?

Other sources of data



- Comparing the following documents:
 - Course syllabus
 - Manuals
 - Policies
 - Regulations
 - Standards
 - Guidelines

Data analysis



- A content analysis was conducted:
 - The researchers met several times in order to reach a consensus for each theme.
 - NVivo helped with the organization of the data.

Results



- Five major themes emerged from the data
 1. Failing a student is a difficult process;
 2. Both academic and emotional support are required for students and preceptors/faculty advisors;
 3. There are consequences for the programs, faculty and students when we fail to fail a student;
 4. At times, personal, professional and structural reasons exist for failing to fail a student,
 5. The reputation of the professional program can be diminished as a result of failing to fail a student.

1- Failing a student is a difficult process



- "...when you have to tell them that you're not ready to pass, they get really angry and tears, and the whole gamble of emotions. "(Preceptor)
- "... for some students, maturity, level of confidence, it may be a challenge for them as they move into a preceptor's experience where they're no longer in a secure situation in a group with a clinical educator"
" (Faculty member)

2-Both academic and emotional support are required for students and preceptors/faculty advisors

- "I felt preceptors required a lot of encouragement and support... to fail a student... As a faculty advisor, its very challenging because you have to support the student and you have to support the preceptor." (Faculty advisor)
- "There's a girl (registered nurse) who, with her last student she gave up... she didn't really feel she had backup from the university. " (preceptor)

3- Consequences for the programs, faculty and students when we fail to fail a student



- "It's frustrating you think I'm not taking another student... You know my opinion is not valued. I'm telling you this person is unsafe to be out there. And it's just not listened to." (Preceptor)

4- Personal, professional and structural reasons exist for failing to fail a student



- "I don't think any of us want to see somebody throw four years of their life out the window..." (Preceptor)
- "..., the challenges are I think on a personal level you feel like you have failed as an educator in your job" (Faculty)

5-Reputation of the professional program can be diminished as a result of failing to fail a student



- "It is difficult to fail to a student, but I think we have no choice because the ultimate consequence is the safety of patients, and also the reputation of the university ... » (Faculty advisor)

Recommendations



1. Improve assessment tools.
2. **Training for preceptors and faculty advisors in respect to the evaluation of a student at risk of failing.**
3. Better communication between the agency and the university.
4. The importance of documentation: interventions and support given to the student.
5. Provide support to the preceptors and the faculty advisors.
6. Administrative support of the university.

Training for preceptors and faculty advisors in respect to the evaluation of a student at risk of failing



- A workbook was developed (in English and in French) for Nursing preceptors and Faculty advisors
- These workbooks include :
 - Literature review
 - Research methodology
 - Results
 - Case studies/Scenarios

Case studies



- Case studies were developed based on the results of our research and the literature
- These will help better prepare the preceptors and the faculty advisors who are faced with the decision to fail or not a student who is having difficulty meeting the objectives of their final practicum.

Case studies



- The case studies examine the preceptors and the faculty advisors experiences with underperforming students.
- Each case study also invites the reader to reflect on the issues surrounding the experiences (Stockhausen, 1994).
- They are also meant to be used to generate debate and discussion (Quinn, 2000).

Nursing case study



- Topic
- People involved
- Situation
 - Dilemma
- Three step approach
 - Identify the problem
- Scenario
 - Point of views:
 - ✦ Preceptor
 - ✦ Faculty Advisor
 - ✦ Student
- Conclusion
 - To fail or not to fail the underperforming student
- Questions are asked throughout the scenario to prompt the reader

Example



- **Topic:** The faculty advisor needs to make a judgement on a student's clinical placement based on a reported lack of knowledge by the preceptor, but is concerned about the possible appeal process that might result from failing them.

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Questions

