BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ADULT AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING TO ADDRESS RN-BSN STUDENT ATTRITION

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In response to the Affordable Care Act of 2010 and the changing health care needs of the 21st century, the Institute of Medicine recommended that 80% of the registered nursing (RN) workforce should have their baccalaureate degree or higher by the year 2020. The College of Nursing at Washington State University (WSU) offers an accredited, online BSN-completion program for RNs (RN-BSN). Analysis indicated that approximately 14% of students who first enrolled in the program between Fall 2014 and Summer 2017 have since withdrawn or temporarily discontinued the program. Due to several organizational challenges, there have been no coordinated efforts to examine student attrition. Without an intentional process to collect necessary data and to reflect on the experiences of these specific students, any retention supports or structures for continuous improvement would be informed by scant data and limited perspectives of the faculty, staff, and program administrators. The purpose of this action research study, therefore, was to engage these stakeholders in reflective practice on the issue of student attrition from the WSU RN-BSN program.

Using a framework of Look-Think-Act, seven faculty, staff, and program administrators and I met over a 15-month period to reflect on our perspectives of student attrition and our experiences throughout the research process. The RN-BSN research team identified factors contributing to student attrition through analyzing archived student data and piloting a collaboratively-authored survey instrument. We received only 10 completed responses to the pilot survey; thus, we could not make generalizable conclusions from the data collected. However, the data provided insights that were crucial to the RN-BSN research team's learning. Key to the RN-BSN research team's process, we needed to establish a collaboration and inquiry structure that would attend to our problem of practice, student attrition. What emerged was a new model that provides an understanding of the capacity-building process leading to overall improvement outcomes in a higher education context. This model also provides a constructive perspective when outcomes are not produced and highlights flaws that need to be addressed for continuous improvement.