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Making a Difference in Graduate Education: Implementing Online Caring Groups

Carol B. Wilson, PhD, RN is a full professor at the University of West Georgia and has a long term history in the development and implementation of a caring curriculum and a research program related to the experiences of participating in experiential teaching and learning practices related to caring, with numerous publications in the field. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of IAHC.
International Association for Human Caring

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Dr. Carol B. Wilson
University of West Georgia

Introduction
University of West Georgia
School of Nursing:
• Embraced the call of the curriculum revolution for teaching and learning caring
• Implemented a philosophy guiding a caring curriculum in the generic undergraduate program.
Caring Groups Begin.....

Caring Groups - experiential teaching-learning strategy for caring (1992)

Research indicates students experience and learn caring

- RN/BSN program did not have formal Caring Groups
- Classes implemented within a caring framework

Undergraduate Caring Groups

- Continue face to face, faculty facilitated in the generic program
- Occur as a component of clinical courses
- Remain an important teaching learning strategy for caring at UWG
  - (Wilson & Grams, in press, IJHC)
- Issue remained – Caring Groups for RN/BSN Students

Implementation of Online Caring Groups in BSN Program

- RN BSN program moved to > 50% online
  - Commitment by faculty to create caring learning environment
- Online Caring Groups Initiated with RN/BSN cohort in fall 12
  - S. Welch and C. Needham presentation of preliminary research at IAHC 13
Graduate Education and Caring Groups
Implementation of Online Caring Groups for Graduate education

MSN Program
- MSN program -2001, course on caring
  - Research supported caring course as strategy for teaching/learning caring (Wilson & Grams, 2007)
- Hybrid program initially <50% online
- Converted to 100% online program in 2012
- Commitment to creating Online Caring Groups for cohorts beginning fall 12

EdD in Nursing Program
Development of the EdD in Nursing 2010-12
Designed as 100% online
Strong commitment to create caring online learning environment.
Commitment to creating online Caring Groups for the 1st cohort admitted fall 12
Integration of Online Caring Groups

Fall 2012 – Implementation of Caring Groups for all cohorts and all programs in the SON.

Review of Literature

Caring Groups as a strategy for teaching and learning caring at UWG

- Wilson & Grams, (in press) (accepted for IJHC, summer or fall 2013)
- Hughes, Kosowski, Grams, & Wilson, 1998
- Grams, Kosowski, & Wilson, 1997
- Wilson, Grams, & Kosowski, 1997
- Kosowski, Grams, & Wilson, 1996
Additional Caring Group Research


Creating Online Caring Environments

Nursing education move to 100% online programs at the graduate level. Research to understand how to create online caring learning environments, including online caring groups.

Watson (2002)

- Addressed issue of human to human interaction via cyberspace.
- Communication in the world of cyberspace has the potential to create “a disembodied human-to-human connection” (Watson, p. 42) – incongruent with caring philosophy.

Knowledge is needed on strategies for sustaining caring in online nursing classrooms in order to support caring as a core value in nursing.

Caring learning environments have the potential to promote student success in graduate education.

"with the exception of Gabbert (2008), knowledge development related specifically to caring online is scant" (p. 171).

Themes important in conveying caring in online learning:
- empathetic perspective
- timeliness of communications
- tone of appreciation
- being the best I can be
- finding a chord of harmony
- feeling the passion of caring online" (p. 316).

Eight themes - online caring environment:
- frequent feedback
- timeliness
- reciprocity of caring online
- personal connection and empathy
- Clarity
- multiple contact opportunities
- second-fiddle worries
- teacher's commitment to learning.
Gabbert (2008)
Perceptions of caring student-teacher interactions online higher:
- older vs younger students
- more professional experience
- post-vs pre-licensure

Gabbert (2008)
- Modeling subscale = highest score: caring behaviors modeled by teachers
- Indicates effectiveness of instructor (role modeling) more important than technology.

Gabbert 2008 (4)
- Gabbert’s findings indicate challenges in planning online learning environments
  - learning styles of older nurses with more experience versus younger nurses with less experience
Implementation of Caring Groups in Online Graduate Education

UWG SON Philosophy
*
The School of Nursing at UWG frames its philosophy within the theoretical structure of caring as the essence of nursing. The faculty members are committed to creating a culture of quality caring that fosters caring collaborative relationships between teachers and learners; patients, families and nurses, as well as other members of the healthcare team** (UWG/SON Philosophy, www.westga.edu/~nurs).

Purpose of Caring Groups
*Foster caring collaborative relationships between faculty and students*

*Provide the opportunity for students to experience and learn caring for self and others*
Overall Goal of Caring Groups

- The intent is that students will learn the importance of caring for self and colleagues to success in their graduate program as well as to nursing practice.

Learning Collegial Caring

- Participation in Caring Groups is encouraged in order to create a context for students to give and receive support to and from each other.

Structure of Online Caring Groups

Getting Started

Continuing to Encourage Caring
Structure of Caring Groups

- One course for each cohort selected to "house" Caring Group beginning fall 2012
- Students were assigned same "groups" in all courses – ie group project work + Caring Group, at their request
- Caring Group "space" created in D2L learning platform via Discussion area
- Students encouraged to use Google hangout to meet face-to-face electronically

Getting Started

- Assignment - Post an introduction in Caring Group Discussion
  - photograph
  - information they wished caring group members to know
  - The faculty member introduction

Getting Started

- This activity was designed to create what Sitzman (2010) describes as a “chord of harmony” (p. 317).
Continuing to Encourage Caring

1. Online Asynchronous Discussions:
   - Students encouraged to use Caring Groups - for providing support and encouragement to each other
   - Activity in the groups grew as students learned to embrace the opportunity to seek support from a small group of colleagues.

Continuing to Encourage Caring

2. Synchronous Online Virtual Caring Group Meetings:
   - Google Hangout for online face to face
   - Opportunity to "see and hear" each other

Continuing to Encourage Caring

3. Perceptions of Being a Doctoral Student
   - Write a brief, less than one page, narrative of your experience in the doctoral program thus far. Include your thoughts, feelings and perceptions of what it means to be a doctoral student within your context, ie job, life, etc
Continuing to Encourage Caring

3. Perceptions of Being a Doctoral Student
   - Read responses of caring group members and respond
   - Designed to promote collegiality - going through a similar experience together.

   - Not going through it alone is a common theme among those experiencing the same phenomena, i.e., nursing education
   - (Martin & Wilson, 2011; Wilson & Grams, in press.)

Continuing to Encourage Caring

4. Assessment of Personal Status
   - Students were asked to post the following statement in their Caring Group:
     - At the moment, I am ____ on the stress level meter (1 = no stress, 10 = max stress) and I need _____ to make it to the end of the semester.
Continuing to Encourage Caring

4. Assessment of Personal Status
   - Students read responses of Caring Group members.
   - Encouraged to provide support to each other through responses and sharing resources.

What We Don’t Know

- Online caring groups: new strategy for teaching caring for self and others online.
- No data related to online caring groups; new territory at UWG

What We Do Know

- Data available regarding student’s perceptions of caring in online education
  - Specific strategies have been identified that demonstrate caring in online classrooms
  - Caring groups provide the opportunity for teaching and learning caring
Challenges in Implementing Online Caring Groups
- Identifying the best way to organize the groups
- Creation of online exercises designed to promote group cohesiveness.
- Encouraging students to use their Caring Group for support and resources

Lessons Learned
- Creating Caring Groups and Assignment Groups the same –
  - May not be the best idea

Changes Made Based on Lesson Learned
- Creation of an External Caring Group site by Dr. Cynthia Brown for the MSN cohorts
- Will be adopted by the EdD Cohort
- Caring Group participation external to course; removed from “assignment” piece.
Designing Online Caring Courses
Within a Framework of Caring

- Focus on Instructor-Student Interaction
- Recognize differences in age and experience of students

Where Are We Now?
- Refinement of Online Caring Groups: Dr. Brown/external site
- Further research to uncover the meaning of online caring groups
It's QUESTION TIME!!

Thank You