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KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education, Health and Human Services

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION DEFENSE

of

Marcy S. Caplin

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Curriculum and Instruction

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN NURSES
RETURNING FOR A BSN: A NATURALISTIC INQUIRY

September 22, 2016

2:00 p.m.

Room 308 White Hall

Marcy S. Caplin

M.S.N., Master of Science in Nursing
Yale University

B.A., Psychology
State University of New York at Binghamton, 1980

Marcy has been an instructor at the College of Nursing, Kent State University, for 15 years. She teaches in the RN/BSN program in which nurses with a diploma or associate degree in nursing return to school to complete a bachelor of science in nursing degree. She also teaches in the Nurse Educator concentration in the Master of Science in Nursing program. She was an early adopter of online education and has presented and mentored other college faculty in online teaching. Prior to coming to Kent State University, Marcy taught at St. Vincent's College of Nursing, Bridgeport, CT, for 7 years.

In addition to her teaching, Marcy has extensive experience as a registered nurse in cardiovascular nursing. She has worked as a staff nurse in cardiac and medical-surgical intensive care units. She also held the positions of cardiovascular clinical nurse specialist in open heart surgery and director of inpatient and outpatient cardiac rehabilitation programs.

Marcy has presented at local, state, and national conferences on various nursing education on topics such as online education, writing for publication, professional identity, adult learning, innovative courses, and qualitative research. She has also been published on topics such as professional literacy, patient education, mentoring, and various cardiovascular nursing topics.

Professional Identity Development in Nurses Returning for a BSN: A Naturalistic Inquiry

The purpose of this qualitative naturalistic inquiry study was to identify how nurses with associate degrees returning for a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) degree experience professional identity development. Mezirow's transformational learning theory was used as the conceptual framework to understand how professional identity was transformed in these nurses returning for a BSN degree.

Data were collected from nurses at the end of their BSN program through semi-structured interviews and their student portfolios. Data were analyzed using a process of emergent category design that continued throughout the data collection process.

The findings showed that nurses with associate degrees who returned for a BSN experienced an increase in confidence. This increase in confidence manifested itself in three ways. First, nurses became aware of issues related to empowerment, such as reducing hierarchies, becoming a valued member of the healthcare team, developing a professional voice, identifying and using power, and controlling their career paths. Second, nurses perceived an expansion of their current nursing role or took on new roles that they had not previously considered, such as researcher/user of evidence-based practice, disseminator of knowledge, change agent, leader, advocate, and educator. Third, nurses experienced a shift in worldview that included a changing image of nursing, seeing the bigger picture, experiencing new possibilities, and developing a thirst for learning.

The results of this study have important curricular implications for nurse educators to understand how nurses in a BSN program experience professional identity transformation and to design nursing programs that enhance transformational experiences that lead to professional identity development. Nurse leaders need to support professional identity development in the workplace and provide recognition to nurses who earn a BSN.