

## The Importance of Reflection and Collegial Support for Clinical Instructors When Evaluating Failing Students in a Clinical Nursing Course

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**Abstract :** Context: In nursing education, clinical instructors are crucial in assessing and evaluating students' performance in clinical courses. However, instructors often struggle when assigning failing grades to students at risk of failing. Research Aim: This qualitative study aims to understand clinical instructors' experiences evaluating students with unsatisfactory performance, including how reflection and collegial support impact this evaluation process. Methodology, Data Collection, and Analysis Procedures: This study employs Gadamer's Hermeneutic Inquiry as the research methodology. A purposive maximum variation sampling technique was used to recruit eight clinical instructors from a collaborative undergraduate nursing program in Southwestern Ontario. Semi-structured, open-ended, and audio-taped interviews were conducted with the participants. The hermeneutic analysis was applied to interpret the interview data to allow for a thorough exploration and interpretation of the instructors' experiences evaluating failing students. Findings: The main findings of this qualitative research indicate that evaluating failing students was emotionally draining for the clinical instructors who experienced multiple challenges, uncertainties, and negative feelings associated with assigning failing grades. However, the analysis revealed that ongoing reflection and collegial support played a crucial role in mitigating the challenges they experienced. Conclusion: This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of nursing education by shedding light on clinical instructors' challenges in evaluating failing students. It emphasizes the emotional toll associated with this process and the role that reflection and collegial support play in alleviating those challenges. The findings underscore the need for ongoing professional development and support for instructors in nursing education. By understanding and addressing clinical instructors' experiences, nursing education programs can better equip them to effectively evaluate struggling students and provide the necessary support for their professional growth.

**Keywords :** clinical instructor, student evaluation, nursing, reflection, support

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