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EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

THE IMPACT OF PREVIOUS LIFE EXPERIENCE ON COGNITIVE STRUCTURE
CHANGES AND KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION OF NURSING THEORY AND
CLINICAL SKILLS IN NONTRADITIONAL NURSING STUDENTS (167 pp.)

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This mixed methods research study used a natural inquiry approach to investigate the effects of previous life experience on learning in nontraditional nursing students.

A moderate, positive correlation suggested that academic ability was related to theory course grades without regard to the amount of previous life experience.

The theme of Dimensions of Role Transition contained interpersonal and intrapersonal changes in relationships with peers, faculty, patients and within themselves. Strong caring feelings, high personal expectations, reality shock and personal conflict were components of the nontraditional students' transition to nursing. The instrumental role of the faculty was a recurring theme in the student's ability to adapt or reconcile their life experiences with learning in the classroom and clinical experience.

The theme of Cognitive Restructuring identified knowledge conflict, cognitive resistance, and affective qualities as aspects of the integration of new knowledge into existing cognitive structures.

Nontraditional nursing students bring a lifetime of previous life experience which can be a rich avenue for faculty to support knowledge acquisition and conceptual change. These students have unique responses to learning which should to be identified and understood by faculty in order to foster their educational development.