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## Reflective Test Review: The First Step in Student Retention

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### ABSTRACT

Test review is an often overlooked strategy for student retention. The purpose of this manuscript is to provide the reader with a step-by-step process of the reflective test review method. Test review is an opportunity for students to review and reflect on their thought processes during the examination and to improve understanding and future decision making. Students have indicated that this method was instrumental in successfully completing the course and, ultimately, graduating.

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A test review is an often overlooked strategy for student retention. In a review of text focused on nurse educators (Billings & Halstead, 2016; Bradshaw & Lowenstein, 2014), no information regarding test reviews was provided. There is limited information found in the nursing literature regarding the most beneficial way to conduct a test review.

Masters (2007) proposed a test review whereby a copy of the examination with rationales for the answers was posted on the classroom wall. Students were given their answer sheets and instructed to compare their answers with the answers and rationales found on the wall. Faculty members were available to answer questions and clarify information. The author reported that students shared their individual reasons why they chose a particular answer with each other creating an environment of support instead of antagonism. Lerardi (2014) suggested a student-centered approach to test reviews designed to lessen the frustration and hostility experienced during test review. The author stated that the goal was to change the focus of the test review to a time for metacognitive processing. This proposed method of test review was optional and student led. A student (usually a class officer) was chosen to moderate the discussion regarding the test questions and answers. Faculty members were available for clarification as needed. This method was found to be beneficial to both students and faculty.

Poorman and Mastorovich (2008) discussed using both a pretest and a posttest review to help students enhance their metacognitive skills. They found that the best time for test review was immediately following the test as students were still able to recall their thought processes for answer choices. They proposed a class-wide test review where students were encouraged to “think out loud,” in other words,

explain/defend their answer to the class. This process also helped faculty to ascertain the students' understanding of the concepts and ability to discern the focus of each question.

The purpose of this manuscript is to provide the reader with a step-by-step process of the reflective test review method. A test review in the most basic sense is reviewing/discussing the test with the student after the examination. However, using the reflective framework, a *test review* for this manuscript is defined as activities, following an examination, that encourage or enhance reflection on the student's preparation, thought process, and decision-making during the test.

Student retention is essential to the student, the university, and the profession of nursing. There is a decline in the number of students enrolling in universities, producing tuition shortfalls and making student retention even more important. Most of the publications related to student retention focus on concepts, such as mentoring (Crooks, 2013), increasing student ability to take the National Council Licensure Examination (Homard, 2013; March & Ambrose, 2010), increasing flexibility in the curriculum (Shelton, 2012), and increasing strategies for minority retention (Cantwell, Napierkowski, Gundersen, & Naqvi, 2015; Charbonneau-Dablen, 2015; Dapremont, 2014). These approaches to student retention are often remedial and implemented only after the student is struggling. If students are unsuccessful in their early courses and fail out of the program, they would not be present to benefit from any of these strategies. The majority of the information available regarding student retention speaks in terms of graduation rates and end-of-program strategies and interventions; however, it is crucial to start the retention process early in the nursing program rather than in the final semesters.

Testing is difficult for some students as they move from knowledge and comprehension examinations to higher level application examinations. Given an opportunity to reflect on their mistakes,

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students are often able to gain insight into their faulty reasoning or change the way they interpret/approach questions on future examinations. Faculty have varying philosophies and methods for conducting test reviews. Some faculty conduct a test review immediately following an examination with the questions and answers displayed on a projection screen, which cycles through the examination and students stay as long as needed to complete one cycle of the test. Other faculty members spread the examination out on tables with the correct answers marked and allow the students to walk around the room and review the examination. Still, others collect scantron sheets but allow the students to keep their test booklets and verbally call out the correct answers. Faculty members also differ in the individual test reviews. Some faculty members allow the student an individual test review but do not provide the student their individual test booklet. Rather, they hand the student the keyed test to review. Students have reported that some faculty work on other things while the student is in the office reviewing the test but will answer questions that the student may have.

### Framework

According to the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (2003), *reflection* is defined as “mediation; reconsideration” (p. 1211). The art of reflective practice among professionals was first described by Donald Schon in his seminal work, *The Reflective Practitioner*. He postulated that, in the reflective process, we restate the situation that produces a different outcome. “...the practitioner’s effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappraisal” (Schon, 1983, p. 132). Nurse scholars have also suggested that reflection is essential to promoting critical thinking and decision-making within nursing education. “Reflection-on-action is a retrospective process, the thinking that occurs after an incident with the aim of making sense and using process outcomes to influence future actions” (Sherwood & Horton-Deutsch, 2012, p. 9). Nursing students need time to reflect on their examination performance just as they do to their clinical performance. A test review is an opportunity for the student to review and reflect on his or her thought processes during the examination and on his or her preparation prior to the examination.

### Process

The reflective test review process began on the first day of class during orientation. Students were instructed that they would receive paper-and-pencil examinations and that they would be able to mark on their test booklet. Students were encouraged to mark key words, underline important phrases, and bullet information (cues) they used to select their answer. Marking the examination in this way not only helped students during the examination but also laid the foundation for a better reflective experience during test reviews because it helped students remember and reevaluate their thought processes during the examination. Students were reminded of their ability to mark on their test booklets prior to each examination.

At the conclusion of the examination, faculty called out the correct answer to each question. Students were able to follow along using their individual test booklet. Faculty members found that, after tests students were emotional and completely convinced, they were correct in their answer choice, which could lead to adversarial situations between students and faculty. In order to counter this possibility, we conducted the test review in absolute silence. Faculty members did not provide students with rationales for the answers. Students were asked to review their notes and textbooks to ascertain why the correct answer was the best choice, which provided students another opportunity for reflection. Students who failed the examination

were required to schedule a test review. For students who passed the examination, the test review was optional.

### Review Session

Students scheduled a 40–45-min meeting with faculty to go over their examination one-on-one or with another student present, depending on the student’s preference. It often helped students hear another student’s perspective on the missed question rather than faculty’s explanation of why the selected answer was incorrect.

We covered four general areas in the test review: analysis of incorrect answers, test-taking strategies, learning style, and study habits. The first question students were asked was “What do you think is the reason you were not as successful as you would have liked?” Faculty often received a straightforward answer, such as, “It was spring break”; “I am not going to lie, I didn’t study like I needed to”; “I had to work too many hours this month”; “The kids and my husband were all sick.” Other times, faculty members had students who said, “I don’t know, I promise you I studied all week”; and they showed faculty copious study notes and were at a loss as to why they were not successful on the examination.

### Analysis of Incorrect Answers

#### Content Specific

Students were asked to reflect on each item missed in terms of what their thought process was during the examination. We looked at the words highlighted and the cues the students wrote during the examination. Faculty and the student discussed the information used during the examination to select the answer. Incorrect answers were examined for course content classifications, such as parameters, medications, laboratory results, clinical manifestations, complications, appropriate nursing interventions, dietary implications, and risk factors. This assisted faculty and the student to identify if there was a particular lecture that the student seemed to have trouble with. For example, in reviewing a pharmacology examination with a student, faculty noticed that each question the student missed was regarding medication side effects. Another example was a student who incorrectly answered each question related to laboratory results.

In addition to the missed questions, students were encouraged to review any questions that they were unsure of so they could make certain they reached the correct conclusion based on appropriate knowledge and decision-making. If the student’s rationale was faulty and they chose the right answer for the wrong reason, this also gave faculty members an opportunity to correct any misinformation. At the end of the actual review of test questions, students listed the number of each type of question missed. It was amazing to see how examining and quantifying the types of questions the student missed gave the student valuable insight and assisted the student to focus on the correct information as they studied.

#### Test-Taking Strategies

Together, the student and faculty member explored the questions missed to determine if there was a specific type of question the student was missing, such as fill in the blank, multiple choice, or select all that apply. A foundational tenet of reflective test review and metacognition is the belief that, if students understand their thought process at the time of choosing an incorrect answer, it will lead to changed thought process and improved test taking on the next examination (Poorman & Mastorovich, 2016; Sherwood & Horton-Deutsch, 2012). Similar to the reflective test review method, Poorman and Mastorovich (2016) used metacognitive wrappers,

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