

## Abstract

**Aim:** To gain an understanding of the social processes associated with the decision of diploma and associate degree nurses to advance academically.

**Background:** Advanced nursing education needs to be pursued along the continuum of the nursing career path. This education process is indispensable to the role of nurses as educator, manager, nurse leader, and researcher who will effect policy changes, assume leadership roles as revolutionary thinkers, and to implement paradigmatic shifts.

**Method:** Data were collected from two groups of participants using a face-to-face semi-structured interview. Group one was diploma and associate degree nurses. Group two was baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degree nurses who have progressed academically.

**Results:** Emerging from the thick, rich data were core categories of: rewarding, motivating, and supporting as critical factors that influence professional advancement.

**Conclusions:** This qualitative study elucidated that professional advancement was the social process that grounds. Emergent theory was, *The Theory of Professional Advancement*.