

Transition from novice adjunct to experienced associate degree nurse educator: A comparative qualitative approach¹



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Role transition;
Novice adjunct;
Full-time faculty

Abstract

Nursing adjuncts are hired to accommodate student enrollment needs. Considered experts in nursing service, the transition to educator is difficult. Perceptions of transition, comparison of novice adjuncts' self-identified responsibilities with full-time members' expectations for role performance, and educational topics for role development are explored. Emerging narratives identify four themes: (a) knowing requirements: must read/must follow; (b) evolving teaching role identity; (c) teaching role management; and (d) faculty relationship development.

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Trends identified in the State of Pennsylvania Report on Nursing Education in 2009 (Pennsylvania Department of Health, 2010) indicate that adjuncts are far outpacing the number of full-time hires in associate degree nursing (ADN) programs with many hired on a semester-to-semester basis. The report lists the adjunct turnover rate as 26% and is forecasting an expected retirement rate of 8.5% for full-time faculty within the next 3 years. Employment of nurses from hospitals and community agencies is utilized to accommodate this impending exodus of senior nursing faculty. According to the National League for Nursing (NLN, 2010), the average age of the nurse educator is 55 or over, with many soon retiring. This leaves a significant gap in faculty demand to accommodate the number of students wishing to enter nursing education. It cannot be assumed that

novice educators hired from nursing service areas are prepared for the role because there is a need for transition to this new role (Cangelosi, Crocker, & Sorrell, 2009).

Some novice nursing faculty issues that have been previously noted by the NLN Think Tank (Valiga & Kear, 2008) include understanding the program's curriculum, staying current with clinical practice guidelines, preparation for the teaching role, the need to work with role models, and mentorship. Being immersed in a new environment is also a factor affecting change. Resocialization to the new work setting is vital for positive transformation by learning the skills, values, and responsibilities (Marquis & Huston, 2012). Although transition to any new position can take time, support from the organization is needed to facilitate the process. This article describes perceptions of transition and the data comparison between novices' self-identified needs/challenges and full-time nursing faculty members' expectations necessary for the successful teaching role. Transitions theory (Meleis, 2010) is used as the conceptual framework for this qualitative project.

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1. Background

Role transition is an alteration in security/stability involving the need for knowledge acquisition, behavior change, and possible alteration of social status or interaction (Meleis, 2010). Becoming confident, gaining new knowledge for expected behaviors/responsibilities will influence the transition process toward mastery and subsequent identity change (Meleis, 2010).

Transitions are influenced by personal meaning of change, expectations, knowledge level and skill, environmental factors, planning, and emotional/physical well-being. Although previous experience may or may not be applicable to the transition, incongruent and unrealistic expectations can affect the process. Lack of communication and inadequate support are associated with feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and conflict. Knowing the role expectations, acquiring new knowledge and skill, ongoing role assessment, and clear communication can assist in alleviating anxiety associated with transitional change (Meleis, 2010).

2. Literature review

Transition from nursing service to education has resulted in stress and anxiety related to limited support, incongruence with expectations, and lack of knowledge for the role (Dumphily, 2011; Forbes, Hickey, & White, 2010; Schriener, 2007). Inexperienced adjuncts use personal learning experiences as their foundation for teaching (Morin & Ashton, 2004). Anxiety related to unrealistic expectations from seasoned employees, administrators, and the novices can encumber the transition process (Dumphily, 2011). In addition to change in role, organizational competencies may vary by institutional type. In a national study representing 48 states, nursing program administrators identify research and grant writing expectations higher for university settings compared with community and liberal arts colleges emphasizing nursing practice competency as top priority (Poindexter, 2013).

The teaching/learning process regarding skills, values, and knowledge for new roles is vital for adequate socialization to the organization. For ADN programs, mentorship of all faculty, part-time (adjunct) and full-time, is required according the standard 2.8 set by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN, 2013). Discussing experiences, willingness to mentor, mutual trust, and ongoing communication can ease role transition from service to education (Caputi, 2010; Dumphily, 2011; Hubbard, Halcomb, Foley, & Roberts, 2010; Marquis & Huston, 2012; Peters & Boylston, 2006; Pierangeli, 2006). Research reveals the need for adjunct clinical instructors to be oriented to basic process of organizational pay, benefits, access to supplies, and others; student policies and procedures regarding unsafe practice and remediation; curriculum content orientation and objectives correlating experiences; simulation technology; and criteria for student evaluation (Davidson & Rourke,

2012). Methods for promoting confidence and assisting positive enrichment include peer groups (Dumphily, 2011; West et al., 2009), on-line discussion and connection (Dumphily, 2011; Peters & Boylston, 2006; West et al., 2009), development of a reference manual (Pierangeli, 2006), and clinical teaching in hospital where employed (Parslow, 2008). Other formal mentoring designs for clinical nursing have incorporated Blackboard (West et al., 2009), an on-line semester mentoring course encompassing components of curriculum, simulation, and evaluation methods (Bell-Scriber & Morton, 2009), and formal faculty practicum workshops to the clinical unit and orientation programs (Hutchinson, Tate, Torbeck, & Smith, 2011).

Identification of adjunct learning needs is vital for the establishment of mentoring programs. Absence of information related to unspoken rules can lead to stress and conflict (Sawatzky & Enns, 2009). Dumphily's (2011) identifies several themes causing a difficult transition of novice ADN educators: lack of educational preparation for the role; inconsistent support and need for socialization into the role; transitional stress, ambivalence, and uncertainty about career change; feelings of isolation and decreased job satisfaction; and difficulty balancing faculty and student relationships and boundaries. Performing new skills not normally required in their service job, writing/analyzing theory questions, and minimal guidance on various teaching strategies can create frustration and role strain (Weidman, 2013).

Providing nursing education in a 2-year program has its challenges because the organizational environment and student population of an ADN program is different when compared with the 4-year institutions. Many students are nontraditional (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013): the average age of 29, working full time, with children, and other responsibilities. Student learning styles and life experiences do influence and affect teaching methods. Therefore, educational strategies must be modified to fit the student profiles because the role is multifaceted. Novice adjuncts without the educational preparation have difficulty with these adjustments. With the continued high enrollment in ADN education and the essential need for many qualified/prepared adjunct faculty, comparing novice adjunct perceptions transition to academia and identifying required role expectations from experienced faculty are initial steps for determining alignment of responsibilities, transitional needs, and topics for role development.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This descriptive qualitative study comprised individual interviews with novice nursing adjunct and experienced full-time nursing faculty. Comparisons between the adjuncts and full-time faculty regarding role expectations/needs and topics to promote successful adjunct role development were

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