



Review

Bringing us back to our creative senses: Fostering creativity in graduate-level nursing education: A literary review[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The purpose of this paper is to explore empirical findings of five studies related to graduate-level nurse educators' and nursing students' perceptions about the roles of creativity and creative problem-solving in traditional and innovative pedagogies, and examines conceptual differences in the value of creativity from teacher and student viewpoints.

Data sources: Five peer-reviewed scholarly articles; professional nursing organizations; conceptual frameworks of noted scholars specializing in creativity and creative problem-solving; business-related sources; primary and secondary sources of esteemed nurse scholars.

Review methods: Quantitative and qualitative studies were examined that used a variety of methodologies, including surveys, focus groups, 1:1 interviews, and convenience sampling of both nursing and non-nursing college students and faculty.

Results: Innovative teaching strategies supported student creativity and creative problem-solving development. Teacher personality traits and teaching styles receptive to students' needs led to greater student success in creative development. Adequate time allocation and perceived usefulness of creativity and creative problem-solving by graduate-level nurse educators must be reflected in classroom activities and course design.

Conclusions: Findings indicated conservative teaching norms, evident in graduate nursing education today, should be revised to promote creativity and creative problem-solving development in graduate-level nursing students for best practice outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Fostering creativity and creative problem-solving in graduate nursing education promotes the possibility of new methodologies for solving patient-care problems and overcoming barriers in healthcare in a safe and effective manner (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2011, 2013; National League for Nursing [NLN], 2012). Creative development is considered essential to advancing the graduate-level nursing student from a level of proficiency, which is expected at the undergraduate level, to expert competency at the graduate-level, in any healthcare setting (AACN, 2011, 2013; NLN, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to explore empirical findings of five studies related to graduate-level nurse educators and nursing students' perceptions about the roles of creativity and creative problem-solving using traditional and innovative pedagogies in nursing education. Based on the research findings from the literature reviewed, nurse educators must reevaluate their graduate nursing curricula and classroom activities to more fully integrate creative development and creative problem-solving through adequate time allocation and

innovative teaching strategies. The author's academic goal is to increase nursing faculty's awareness of this essential pedagogy for advanced nursing students' creative development. This paper concludes with a synthesis of common themes and patterns prevalent throughout the research findings, and suggestions for further research involving innovative teaching strategies in nursing education from both a local and global perspective.

Since the concepts of creativity and creative problem-solving are contextually-relevant by professional domain (area of expertise), it is important to understand these nursing essentials from the lens' of both professional nursing organizations and conceptual frameworks. The NLN (2003) defined creativity in graduate nursing education as the integration of a long-term, innovative, and creative perspective in teaching graduate nursing students. Advancing creativity and creative problem-solving in graduate nursing students is necessary to elevate clinical competency resulting in best patient care in the classroom and clinical practice (AACN, 2011, 2013; NLN, 2012). From a conceptual perspective, Csikszentmihalyi and Wolfe (2005) view creativity as "an idea or product that is original, valued, and implemented" (p. 81). Amabile (1987, 2012) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) examined creativity from the perspective of intrinsic motivating factors, such as pride, dedication, and self-perseverance, while Sternberg and Lubart (1995) examined

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creativity from the perspective of extrinsic motivating factors, such as money, prestige, and power. [Baer et al. \(2004\)](#) studied creativity through the lens of professional domain vs. non-domain specific importance, while other researchers looked at the connection between personality traits and creative potential ([Prabhu et al., 2008; Simonton, 1991; Torrance, 1970](#)). To better appreciate the significance of creativity and creative problem-solving in graduate-level nursing education, it is essential to also know the role of the graduate-level nurse educator.

According to the [AACN \(2011, 2013\)](#), within a master's degree program, the nurse educator prepares the graduate nurse to develop and apply leadership and decision making skills, assume a leadership role within an interdisciplinary team, promote patient safety and quality improvement, manage healthcare systems in a fiscally-responsible manner, apply business strategy to meet healthcare demands, design and develop innovative strategies to improve patient care, and integrate new healthcare models to meet the complex needs of patients along the healthcare continuum. The graduate-level nursing student is expected to develop a sophisticated skill-set, consisting of advanced assessment and evaluation expertise, in conjunction with leadership and creative change abilities.

Notable nurse scholars throughout nursing history have promoted the transference of creativity and creative problem-solving into nursing practice. Nightingale considered creativity and creative problem-solving as essential elements to the art of nursing ([Nightingale, 1859](#)). [Watson \(1979\)](#) advocated for creative artistry, present in holistic nursing, by which the nurse addresses the patient's "mind-body-spirit" through the art of creative problem-solving and the science of nursing practice. [Rogers \(1992\)](#) stated "the art of nursing is the creative use of the science of nursing for human betterment" (p. 28). In order to provide superior nursing care, the evolving nurse's creative problem-solving and critical thinking abilities need to work together for best practice outcomes ([AACN, 2011, 2013; NLN, 2012](#)). Without a balance in these essential qualities, the graduate-level nursing student will have an underdeveloped skill-set to address patient care holistically ([AACN, 2011, 2013; NLN, 2012](#)). Although this nursing philosophy is intuitively accepted as a social norm in nursing education and clinical practice, there is very limited empirical data to support this assertion. Due to a dearth of research focusing on creative thinking development in graduate-level nursing education, scholarly material available for review involved mostly undergraduate nursing students. The author used a literary review timeline of the past sixteen years as a general gauge for assessing the novelty and progression of creative development in nursing education. Additionally, for the purposes of this article, research about the value of creativity and creative problem-solving was explored in depth in the business sector and found to be useful as a supportive guide to its relevance in graduate-level nursing education.

A survey conducted in 2010 by International Business Machines (IBM) of more than 1500 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) from sixty countries worldwide found that creativity and creative problem-solving were considered the most important aspects of successful competition in a rapidly changing business environment ([IBM, 2010](#)). More than 60% of the CEOs interviewed believe transformation due to societal demands requires creative problem-solving as the change agent for success ([IBM, 2010](#)). In a study published by [Adobe Systems \(2012\)](#), the survey firm of Edelman Berland asked 1000 college-educated, full-time employed Americans, ages 25 and older, about the relevance of creative problem-solving in their current jobs and throughout their college education. Edelman Berland found that 85% percent of business professionals agreed creative problem-solving is essential in their profession, and 96% of respondents believed creativity is crucial to societal growth. Additionally, 88% of respondents agreed creativity and creative problem-solving should be built into college curriculums (as cited in [Adobe Systems, 2012](#)). The results of this study are indicative of the need to empower educators and raise the importance of teaching creativity as a critical competency across all disciplines. By infusing creativity throughout all college curriculums, this pedagogical

approach will drive the global economy and the career success of the next generation ([Perera, 2012](#)).

[Pink \(2006\)](#) believed a paradigm shift in business was underway based on societal expectations, in which a preference for critical thinking, comprised of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing and synthesizing is being replaced by a new standard of creative problem-solving, consisting of innovation, intuition and imagination. These findings parallel general beliefs in nursing education that support creative problem-solving development in graduate nursing students to better meet complex healthcare demands in an ever-changing society. Several facets of creativity and creative problem-solving are further explored in the following five studies, which illustrate common themes evident in higher education research.

2. Literature Review

[Gerrish et al. \(2000\)](#) explored creativity and pedagogical concerns in Master's level nursing programs in the United Kingdom (UK). The participants in this qualitative study were 18 nurse educators teaching at the Master's level in eight universities throughout the UK. The study was administered in two parts. The first part consisted of an initial pilot stage, including focus group interviews with interdisciplinary groups of nurses, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists, followed by individual interviews with nurse educator participants. The research findings identified six areas of concern regarding traditional vs. innovative pedagogies. Problem areas focused on maximizing the level and intensity of assimilating nursing knowledge into clinical practice, and closing the gap between transferring knowledge from classroom-to-clinical setting, using traditional vs. innovative teaching techniques. Research indicated nurse educator participants did not encourage creative thinking; instead, they maintained traditional teaching methods. Participants assessed the graduate nurse as a professional nurse leader instead of a well-educated change agent in nursing practice. Other areas of study focused on fostering critical thinking development in the classroom and examining the impact that professional nursing experience has on the graduate-level nursing student.

Study results indicated incongruence between the stated philosophy of fostering creativity and critical thinking in students and an inability of teachers to evaluate these intellectual growth indicators through traditional grading metrics ([Gerrish et al., 2000](#)).

[Ku et al. \(2002\)](#) looked at intrinsic qualities of creativity in nursing students by investigating characteristics of creative problem-solving in students enrolled in a RN-BSN program in Taiwan. Using Williams' cognitive-affective interaction model of innovative enrichment, researchers focused on the qualities of fluency, flexibility and originality in creative development among enrolled nursing students (as cited in [Ku et al., 2002](#)). This qualitative study was administered at four different times over three consecutive semesters to a purposive sample of 52 two-year degree nursing students and 69 three-year diploma nursing students who had completed a Nursing Concepts course, each with at least one year of working experience as a professional nurse. Data were collected using the Chinese-translated version of Creativity in the Application of the Nursing Process (CNPT) survey tool designed by Emerson (as cited in [Ku et al., 2002](#)). Common trends were coded from categorical responses to five randomly selected surveys, which were reviewed for relevance by ten nurse educators considered experts in creative development in nursing students. Findings indicated both two-year Associate degree nursing students and three-year diploma nursing students demonstrated accelerated improvement in fluency and flexibility in creativity after the second semester in the RN-BSN program, with three-year diploma nursing students faring slightly better in originality after the first semester.

[Brown et al. \(2009\)](#) researched types of teaching strategies used in nursing education worldwide. Using a mixed methods approach, 946 nurse educator members of Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI) were surveyed. Data were collected using a three-part instrument designed

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