



Challenges of Novice Nurse Educator's Transition From Practice to Classroom



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ABSTRACT

As nurses transition as educators, many struggle with developing skills and acclimating to the academic setting. This qualitative case study addressed challenges encountered by novice educators. Benner's Novice to Expert Framework guided the study. Data collection included interviews, review of a self-study report, and participant demographic characteristics. Findings provided a basis for novice educator transition into academia.

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Introduction

With the increased need for health care services in recent years, the number of students seeking entry into nursing programs has grown. As a result, in 2014, there was an insufficient number of nursing faculty available to teach, which led to the denial of 68,938 qualified applicants' admission into nursing programs (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2015). More specifically, nurse educators employed at a particular associate degree nursing program were faced with extreme workloads. Over half of the full-time faculty members were exceeding the student contact hours, which is 18 to 21 hours/week. These extreme workloads placed limitations on the faculty's ability to address student needs and/or assisting other faculty members with tasks. This nursing program has faced a decline in scores on the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (RN). The shortage of faculty and the urgent call for nurse educators to fill vacant positions may be a result of the decline in the National Council Licensure Examination scores. Spencer (2013) stated that, although many candidates are qualified to teach because of their vast clinical experiences, it is impracticable to expect these individuals to be an expert in the academic role. According to the AACN (2014), the median age of nurse educators is 53.5 years, which will result in a wave of retirement. With the

experienced faculty members retiring, the novice educators are unfamiliar with the expectations and responsibilities of the educator role.

To address the need for the nursing faculty shortage, many nursing schools are looking to experienced clinicians to transition to part-time or full-time nurse educators. These nurses often assume the nurse educator role with minimal guidance (Sorrell & Cangelosi, 2015). Consequently, they struggle with developing necessary skills and becoming acclimated to the academic setting (Grassley & Lambe, 2015; Poindexter, 2013; Schoening, 2013). Although this problem is not new, the gap in identifying specific challenges and resolutions that novice nurse educators encounter has not been resolved. Thus, it is imperative that we gain an understanding of the resources that novice nurse educators need in order to meet the high demands of the educator role (Jacobson & Sherrod, 2012). The overall context of the academic environment is hard to grasp for novice nurse educators. If the novice educators do not feel secure in their position, they may leave the role, thereby further increasing the insufficient numbers of nursing faculty. Therefore, the researchers conducted this qualitative case study to understand the challenges novice nurse educators endure and potential resolutions needed to ensure faculty success.

Literature Review

Regardless of a nurse's clinical expertise, transitioning into an academia role categorizes them as a novice educator. Kumi-Yeboah and James (2012) state that novices are individuals with less than 3 years of experience. Novice nurse educators encounter challenges such as learning and implementing different pedagogical styles,

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managing heavy workloads, balancing academic responsibilities, and essentially surviving in academia. However, there are varying factors that contribute to the challenges that a novice educator experiences. In a survey of 226 nurse educators, [Bittner and O'Connor \(2010\)](#) found that 65% of novice educators experience heavy workloads.

[Dattilo, Brewer, and Streit \(2009\)](#) emphasized the importance of nurse educators having educational courses related to curriculum, assessment, and evaluation processes. Obtaining formal education can assist educators in understanding the fundamental aspects needed when working with students. In addition, clinicians transitioning to the nurse educator role also face teaching content that is unfamiliar to their clinical expertise or specialization. Asking a novice nurse educator to teach outside of his or her comfort zone can produce stress or discomfort. In a qualitative study on the transition process of novice nursing instructors, [McDonald \(2010\)](#) found that knowledge deficit was a common theme.

In addition, novice nurse educators are often unfamiliar with the day-to-day tasks of an educator ([Grassley & Lambe, 2015](#)). Teaching requires more skill than just lecturing about disease processes and helping students care for patients. Educators need an understanding of how to create syllabi, tests, and class assignments; socialize students to the clinical environment; and implement teaching strategies that accommodate different learning styles. Furthermore, faculty are expected to participate in curriculum design, evaluate student progress, and determine appropriate learning outcomes. In 2005, The National League for Nursing developed eight core competencies for nurse educators that continue to be relevant and important today. The core competencies include facilitate learning, facilitate learner development and socialization, use assessment and evaluation strategies, participate in curriculum design and evaluation of program outcomes, function as a change agent and leader, pursue continuous quality improvement in the nurse educator role, engage in scholarship, and function within the educational environment (The National League for Nursing, 2005). Nurses who pursue careers in nursing academia without formal education may lack development of these core competencies ([McDonald, 2010](#)). In a study of 374 nursing administrators, [Poindexter \(2013\)](#) found that administrators expect entry-level nurse educators to develop teaching competencies prior to hire. Although this is not realistic, nursing programs are calling for clinicians to assume the role without formal preparation. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand challenges that novice nurse educators experience during their transition from clinical practice to academia.

Method

Given the fact that this research study focused upon one associate-degree nursing program (bounded system), the researcher implemented [Merriam's \(2009\)](#) qualitative case study design principles. The theoretical framework that guided the research was [Benner's \(1982\)](#) Novice to Expert Framework. The local setting's institutional review board granted research approval prior to any data collection. We provided informed consent forms, which contained researcher's contact information, confidentiality procedures, and protection of the participant's rights, to the participants. Each participant signed the consents before data collection. In addition, to comply with the guidelines of the institutional review board, the researcher followed these protocols: avoided coercion, honored the participant's privacy, protected the identity of each participant, treated each participant respectfully, and analyzed the data with honesty and integrity. [Merriam \(2009\)](#) explained that in order for qualitative research to be credible, investigators "need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions," which is called *the researcher's position or reflexivity* (p. 219). The part-time employment of the researcher could have but did not pose a threat to the study.

The researcher did not work alongside, know, or have any working relationships with the participants prior to the study.

Data collection included demographic characteristics, review of a Board of Nursing (BON) Self-Study Report, and semistructured interviews. Inclusion criteria for participants included 3 years or less of teaching experience and currently teaching in an academic and/or clinical setting. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic and self-study data. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim; subsequently, member checking was used to ensure accuracy of data. Two reviewers extracting direct quotes from the transcripts and developing potential themes implemented thematic analysis. The data were colorcoded to identify themes related to each research question. The researcher then compared findings, and final themes were determined. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants.

Results

Demographic Data

To help capture a full understanding of the novice educators and experiences, a data demographic form was created ([Appendix A](#)). Demographic data included personal characteristics such as age and gender and years of educational background, nursing experience, and prior teaching experiences. Participants' average length of time as an RN was 16 years. Participants' ages averaged 42.7 years. Years of teaching nursing students averaged 1.6 years. Seven faculty members (three males and four females) elected to partake in the research. Highest academic degree for five participants was a master's degree in nursing and for the other two was a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN).

According to this state's BON (2011), full and part faculty who teach in a nursing program must obtain the appropriate training within 3 years of hire to teach adult learners. This required educational preparation includes curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. The educational preparation may be achieved by one of the following: (a) completion of 45 contact hours of continuing education; (b) completion of a certificate program in nursing education; (c) 9 semester hours of education coursework; (d) national certification in nursing education; or (e) documentation of successful completion of structured, individualized development activities of at least 45 contact hours approved by the BON (2011). None of the participants had prior experience teaching nursing students upon transitioning as educators.

In addition, the researcher assessed the participant's perception related to teaching. Two of the participants rated themselves as advanced beginners, one participant rated himself/herself between an advanced beginner and competent, three of the participants rated themselves as competent, and one participant rated himself/herself as proficient. None of the participants rated themselves as novice educators.

Self-Study Report

The 2012 BON Self-Study Review was reviewed prior to the interviews, which provided some background of the faculty and the nursing program for the study. Reviewing faculty background information provided triangulation for this qualitative case study. In 2012, there were 16 full-time and 14 part-time faculty members for 220 students. Of the 30, 24 had a master's degree in nursing, whereas the remaining 6 held a BSN as their highest degree. The report did not specify the number of years of faculty employment or prior teaching experiences. Reviewing the Self-Study prior to interviewing the participants assisted in seeing a clear picture of how this nursing program functions as an organization. From this data source, descriptive information about the nursing program, such as the faculty roles, courses

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