

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Training model for online nurse educators

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ABSTRACT

Background and objective: Online instruction is very different from teaching in a face-to-face setting and educators may lack formal pedagogical training specific to online instruction; in addition, online instructors may feel isolated and have less access to direct support than their counterparts on campus. The objective of this study was to promote best practice in online education through faculty support and professional development; a structured online training process was created.

Methods: Design: Instructors that teach in the online venue need teaching and training to feel comfortable with the technology and online pedagogy strategies that support best practice in online education. A structured training process was created to support novice online educators. Setting: Nursing faculty and Masters of Science in Nursing education track students co-taught one online class together. Participants: Faculty and senior level Masters of Science in Nursing education track students were asked to reflect on their one-year teaching and training experience as educators. Methods: Qualitative analysis using Denzin's interpretive interactionism was used to elicit meaning from participant experiences.

Results: Four themes emerged from the data; online pedagogy, knowledge acquisition, mentor-mentee role, and online nurse educator. These themes align with the scholarship of teaching, discovery, application, and integration, respectively. The Training Model for Online Nurse Educators was developed to show this relationship.

Conclusions: Using Boyer's model of scholarship as a framework for online training can prepare instructors for the online nurse educator role. Online instructional delivery is a mainstay in education necessitating nurse educators who are prepared to apply best practice strategies in online education.

Key Words: Online training model, Online nurse educator, Online instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

Aging faculty, budget constraints, and increasing job competition from the health sector are contributing factors for the nurse faculty shortage.^[1] The absence of nurses prepared to step into a faculty role coupled with a limited pool of prepared masters and doctoral students, and lack of qualified applicants for teaching positions prevent resolution of the nursing faculty shortage.^[1,2] In addition, once qualified instructors are hired, assimilation into the college culture and retention remains an issue.^[3,4] Mentoring articles to address faculty retention issues are abundant in the literature, but

limited research exists for mentoring online faculty.^[5-8]

The increase in online education has changed how many universities deliver instruction. As a result, programs and degrees can be earned fully online. Online instruction that promotes best practice is necessary and can be accomplished through faculty support and professional development. Instructors that teach in the online venue need teaching and training to feel comfortable with the technology and online pedagogy strategies that support best practice in online education.^[9,10] To support this premise, a structured train-

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ing process was created to support novice online educators. The study looked at faculty and education track Masters of Science in Nursing (MSN) student's experiences as online educators when provided with structured support.

Background/Literature

A shortage of nurse educators impacts the number of student nurses that can be educated within school of nursing programs, and contributes to the shortage of nurses nationwide.^[11] A nursing faculty position is very different from a clinical practice and transition into the role is burdened by many challenges.^[6,12] Without preparing future faculty and informing them of the expectations of academia the result may be role strain and job dissatisfaction.^[4,12] Sharing knowledge and wisdom of experienced nurse educators with novice nurses assists them in assimilating to their new role.^[6,13] Grassley and Lambe^[6] support investment in future nurse educators; clinicians who are new to education as well as graduate and doctoral students who are poised to educate as future instructors support this premise. Professional development at the start of academic careers that include mentoring and structured training may enhance success.^[6,9]

Literature attests to the need for intentional mentoring to transition nurses from bedside to educator as a way to improve nurse educator retention and to support successful transition to the academic environment.^[6,8,9] Programs that provide comprehensive support including continuing education, certification, and educational coursework specific to curriculum, teaching and learning, and educational theories can improve instructional processes for the educator.^[4,14] Structured orientation that includes essential education skills as well as mentoring should be part of an orientation program for new educators.^[8] Training programs should be goal oriented and include standards that provide equal support for faculty and instructors regardless of a tenure role.^[5,9,14] Effective training models for nurse educators, specifically for online instruction, are sparse.^[9,14] Literature confirms a "substantial learning curve" required for those that are new as online educators (p. 128).^[14] While faculty may be clinical experts, they come to schools of nursing with limited or no teaching experience, especially in online education.^[14]

To assist faculty in recognition of scholarly work in academia, a broader definition of contributions in the areas of discovery, application, teaching, integration, was proposed.^[15,16] Boyer's Model^[15] was developed to show the "full scope of academia work" integrating the teaching, scholarship, and service required within academic settings (para 4);^[17] the model's four paradigms have been used to guide scholarship practices within the academic nurse setting.^[18] The AACN^[18] position statement supports a broader definition in

academic nursing scholarship inclusive of scholarly contributions that address discovery, practice (application), integration, and teaching as valued areas of scholarship. Boyer's scholarship components,^[15] as an integral part of academia and as the foundation for mentoring and training of faculty who will work in academia, can assist in bridging the novice online educator into the educational milieu. Without formal role preparation many nurse faculty experience conflict and lack knowledge that is needed to be successful in an academic setting. This is particularly important for faculty challenged with moving from a face-to-face classroom into an online environment. Few studies have addressed the issues surrounding online educators and the need for instructional faculty support in the online educator role.^[9]

2. METHODOLOGY

This study followed Denzin's^[19] interpretive format to extract meaning from a teaching experience shared by faculty and graduate students from a school of nursing in the west coast region of the United States. Interpretive interactionism follows an idiographic and emic perspective allowing a naturalistic interpretation of subject matter grounded in social interaction.^[19] Five faculty and five MSN students participated in the education and teaching experience; six completed the study. To support instruction for a new online RN-BSN program, and provide MSN students with online teaching experience, online faculty and MSN students were paired. MSN students in the education track and in their final year of graduate school were included in the online teaching opportunity; as future nurse educators it was felt the training process would be beneficial while supporting MSN education track program outcomes. The online teaching experience supported required clinical teaching hours for MSN program outcomes; MSN students provided 40 hours of online instruction. The online faculty were the faculty of record for the assigned course. Faculty teaching in the new online RN-BSN program were novice online instructors; while eager to tackle curriculum and pedagogy for an online venue, they were also unsure regarding online technology tools, online curriculum, online pedagogy, and their role as online faculty. While novices to online instruction, the faculty did have more experience in academic teaching and fulfilled a surrogate mentoring role; however both online faculty and the MSN students were both learning the online instructor role. Faculty and MSN co-taught one class together, completed online instructional classes for training and certification, had access to online instructional support for learning management system (LMS) technology, and participated in online faculty meetings for one academic year. Online instructional classes consisted of 7 online courses using the Moodle LMS

platform offered through a nationally recognized program that supports online instructional processes for best practice. Faculty and MSN students all received teaching certification as online instructors after completing this coursework; online instructional classes took faculty and MSN students three to six months to complete. Online instructional classes included: gauging your technology skills, evaluating your course design, exploring your institution’s policies, orienting your online learners, connecting learning theories to your teaching strategies, creating presence in your online course, and assessing your learners. Faculty and MSN worked together and both contributed to creating and teaching the online class, and utilized the LMS to build their course.^[20]

Participants were asked to reflect on their one-year teaching and training experience as educators. Participants were asked to journal their reflections mid-way and at the end of their nine-month experience. Journal questions included prompts such as: Tell me about your teaching and learning experience as it relates to online instruction/pedagogy? Did you have any discoveries in the educator role? No word limit was imposed on the participants for their journaling. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to clarify participant’s meaning such as: Can you clarify this comment? You mentioned this, can you elaborate? Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. University Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for this study; informed consent was received from the participants.

Interview and journal data were coded independently by each researcher and then aggregated by the researchers for each participant. Denzin’s^[19] six steps in the interpretive process were used: a) conceptualizing the phenomena of interest; b) deconstructing the phenomena; c) capturing the phenomena through participant’s personal experiences in the experience; d) bracketing the phenomena through immersion

in the data where key phrases and narrative statements were identified; participants verified meaning of content; e) construction of the phenomena as the parts became whole, meaning was placed into context; researchers confirmed coding and categories; and f) contextualization of the phenomena as meaning was synthesized into reformulated statements that embodied the phenomena of study where four themes emerged. Procedural rigor was followed through an audit trail, reflective journaling, prolonged engagement with data, and member checking.^[21]

3. RESULTS

Demographic data from three faculty and three MSN students were collected. The participants in this study included one experienced (5-10 years) and two new (1-3 years) faculty and three MSN students enrolled in their final year of the educational track MSN program. Two faculty had a master’s degree and one had a doctoral degree. The mean age for the faculty was 47 years of age and for the MSN students 48.6 years of age. Participants identified themselves as Asian (1), Hispanic (2), and Caucasian (3); all participants were female. Participant’s nursing experience included background in community health, medical-surgical, maternal-child, pediatrics, geriatrics, and surgery with everyone having a minimum of 10 years of clinical experience in their area of expertise. No faculty or MSN had prior experience teaching an online class.

Interpretation of the findings identified the need for instructional faculty support in the online educator role where the following themes emerged: online pedagogy, knowledge acquisition, mentor-mentee role, and online nurse educator, aligning with Boyer’s Scholarship of teaching, discovery, application, and integration, respectively. The Training Model for Online Nurse Educators shows the relationship between identified themes and Boyer’s Model (1990) (see Figure 1).

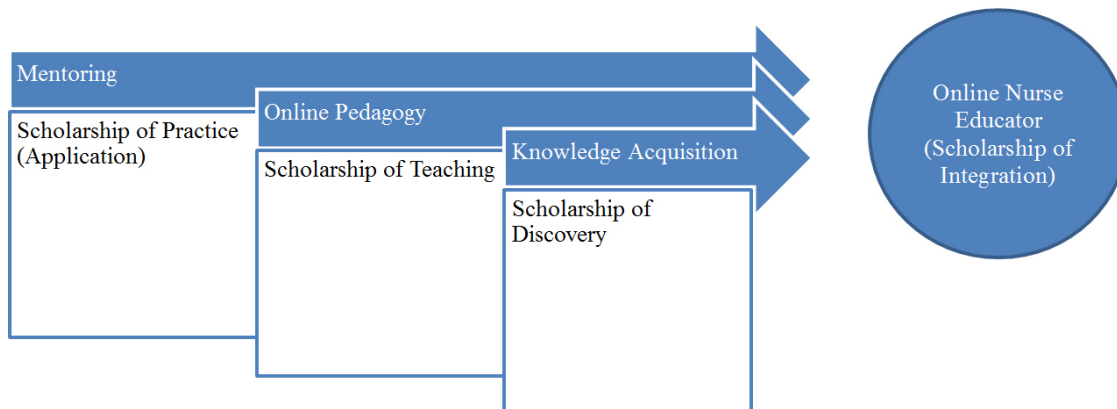


Figure 1. Training model for online nurse educators

3.1 Online pedagogy (Scholarship of Teaching)

Faculty and MSN students acknowledged that teaching online was more difficult than teaching in the classroom. Without knowledge of online mechanics and technologies, they could not give attention to pedagogical strategies; "I am much more mindful about how information is shared, how clear things are laid out for students, how much is involved for the students, and the alignment of the course objectives and assignments." Participants indicated that they had to be cognizant of instructional methods used and the intended outcome of their teaching as online instructors. The participants overwhelmingly reported that the experience assisted them in becoming a better educator allowing them to reflect on their teaching abilities. They were made "more mindful" while aligning courses with objectives and assignments; "It exposed me to the necessary components of a capable instructor, creating a thorough class and the means to measure."

3.2 Knowledge acquisition (Scholarship of Discovery)

Both MSN students and faculty were in agreement that using best practice to formulate their courses provided better cohesion in their instruction and made them more accountable as an instructor "... I was much more mindful about how the course is seen from the student's perspective." The training classes allowed instructors to see the flaws in their own class and to make amendments in their course; "I got to see what online learning looks like; it was good experiential learning and reinforcement for me." Having online training prior to teaching was paramount with participants who indicated that instructional classes "... took the sting out of 'not knowing' and that the "... [online] training was worth the extra effort."

3.3 Mentor-mentee role (Scholarship of Practice/Application)

Participants quickly fell into a mentor-mentee relationship without formal planning for this distinction. Participants described the relationship of mentor-mentee as being between two people, the seasoned mentor and the novice mentee who "supports" them in their new role as an educator. The MSN students described themselves as the mentee and the faculty identified themselves as the mentor despite all being novice online instructors. All mentees reported that the guidance of the mentors and resources offered a "full package" for success. One mentee stated, "The mentoring portion was priceless. It allowed me the opportunity to try on new skills and receive feedback in the process;" another stated "I discovered what it takes to become an excellent instructor." The mentees reported that the mentor relationship supplied them with a bridge into the real world of academia. The mentors reported that it is important to develop a trust component between the mentor and mentee and expressed value in pass-

ing on their wisdom as a nurse educator to future faculty. They explained that their biggest challenge was being flexible and taking the position of "sitting back and listening." Many expressed a desire to learn how to be better mentors. In the end, participants reported that the mentor-mentee experience resulted in enhanced confidence, increased awareness of resources, and a true understanding that teaching is a fluid experience with each instructor providing their own creative stamp to their class.

3.4 Online nurse educator (Scholarship of Integration)

The participant's spoke of group cohesion as everyone shared ideas and learned together. The supportive environment was described as a "cocoon" effect that allowed for a broader perspective of teaching and online instruction. A change in teaching and education practices was identified as participants explained their epiphany specific to online instruction; "I was able to put all the pieces together regarding [the importance of] learning outcomes. Being forced to think of my course as a finished product in advance is much more student centered." One participant explained the processes as "demystifying".

Many MSN students reported that they felt like an impostor and didn't see themselves as true educators. They didn't realize that the transition would be difficult and that they were missing vital tools to assist with being successful in online education. One MSN described the experience as "being in the weeds" of instruction. Participants in the study had not previously taught a fully online course and were glad they had exposure to online professional development to assist them in incorporating online best practices, "I now know what a good instructor looks like and how to emulate their attributes and how to find resources for success."

3.5 Limitations

A limitation of the study included a small convenience sample located in one nursing program, within one university, and in one geographical region on the west coast. Another limitation of the study includes the difference in teaching experience between faculty and MSN students. While all were novice to online instruction, faculty did have years of experience as nursing instructors and the MSN students had no academic teaching experience.

4. DISCUSSION

This study looked at faculty and MSN students and their experiences while teaching in an online RN-BSN program while receiving structured instructional support for online education. Four themes were identified: online pedagogy, knowledge acquisition, mentor-mentee role, and online nurse

educator. These themes align with Boyer's Scholarship^[15] for teaching, discovery, application, and integration, respectively. The Online Training Model for Online Nurse Educators (see Figure 1) shows this relationship and provides an overarching framework for transition of the nurse into the role of an online nurse educator. Participants in the study expressed the need for mentor support (practice/application) as they sought to fulfill the educator role (integration); faculty and MSN students emphasized the need for online training (discovery) in order to be effective as an online instructor (teaching). Similar to the literature, the study demonstrates the need for mentored support to transition into the educator role.^[11,22-24] In addition, outcomes of the study identify the need for training that provides quality online instruction.^[14,23]

Current training models for online instruction are limited. Boyer's Model^[15] provides a framework for structured training and professional development for online nurse educators and is a component of faculty evaluation that is integrated into nursing academia (AACN 2018). Grassley and Lambe^[6] advocate for a structured or formal training process; training and mentoring is needed to transition nurses into the role of the educator while providing guidance in navigating the academic milieu. A process that includes a structured training process, integration into the academic culture, and inclusion of mentoring as an integral part of the department's ethos is suggested as a possible solution for novice and new educators, and has value as a template for online educators.^[6,8,14,22,24,25] In this study, intentional training for online technology, teaching, and pedagogy, as well as mentoring supported participants in their online educator

role. In fact, participants described having a "cocoon" effect where they were supported and provided with components necessary to be successful as online educators.

Online instruction is very different from teaching in a face-to-face setting. Online instruction requires pedagogical consideration for instructional content and constructive alignment within an online learning platform that also supports interactive learning strategies with consideration for online technological tools.^[26,27] Educators may lack formal pedagogical training specific to online instruction. In addition, online instructors may feel isolated and have less access to direct support than their counterparts on campus.^[11,14] Providing online instructors with a full array of support from training to the actual teaching experience gave both faculty and MSN students a cohesive experience. The training model for online nurse educators (see Figure 1) includes all elements of Boyer's scholarship to be successful in academia while providing a much-needed model for online instruction.^[18]

5. CONCLUSION

It is vital that we develop strategies that assist with training and mentoring faculty in online education. Instructors that teach in the online venue need information and training to feel comfortable with the technology and online pedagogical strategies that support best practice in online education. Using Boyer's Model of Scholarship^[15] as a guide for online education training can prepare instructors for the online nurse educator role.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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