Perceptions of Faculty Preparedness for Developing, Evaluating and Revising BSN Curriculum

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Introduction: Nurse educators are barraged with competencies, standards, outcomes, and initiatives to consider when developing, evaluating, or revising curriculum. Expert clinicians enter educator roles with minimal understanding of the expected skill set (Fitzpatrick, 2014).

Research Questions

What are the perceptions of nursing faculty regarding their preparedness and confidence for developing, evaluating, and revising curriculum?

Background:

- Accreditors mandate that faculty must contribute to, develop, and evaluate curriculum; however, faculty may be unprepared. Education on curriculum received by nurse faculty varies. Master’s education focuses on the development of teaching skills, while the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) focuses on practice. Many faculty entering academia are clinical experts, but novices at education. Many clinically expert nurses have only a vague idea of what the faculty educator role involves, and are inadequately equipped (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Penn, Wilson, & Rossette, 2008). The ability to design and evaluate curriculum is a needed competency for nurse educators (Halsed, 2007).
- Faculty transitioning to the educator role feel overwhelmed, drowning (Anderson, 2009) New faculty feel anxious and inadequate (McDonald, 2010; Amhas, Brennan, & Zien, 2009; McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2012) and experienced faculty feel stressed in curriculum revision (Reece, Money, & Scollin, 2008). Transition to the faculty role is difficult, frightening, overwhelming, awful, scary, and stressful (Weidman, 2013). This finding was confirmed.
- Less than half of associate professors and assistant professors felt their graduate preparation prepared them well for their role (Hart, Eagan, Pryor, & Tran, 2012). This finding was confirmed.
- 76% of nursing program respondents attributed the need to turn away applicants due to the faculty shortage (NACNEP, 2010).
- The ability to replenish faculty is inadequate despite faculty being recruited from clinical departments, with large numbers of vacancies (Halsed, 2012; Slimmer, 2012), notably those without sufficient education have greater faculty development needs and often lack teaching experience and education (Shants, Kalanek, Mourton, & Lang, 2011).
- There is a $40,000-$80,000 gap between what is paid a master-prepared faculty and what they earn in a clinical setting (BRAF, 2007) and larger gaps are reported (NACNEP, 2010). Advanced practitioners moving from clinical practice to education receive less compensation while needing more education. If a nurse practitioner is making $125,000 per year in a hospital, and is told they would have to go back to school, then receive half the salary to become faculty, people say, “why would I do that” (Ingerso, 2013, para. 12). A survey of 603 schools found 58% reported full-time vacancies, with 72% having insufficient funds to hire new faculty (AACN, 2012).

Majority of novice educators lack knowledge of R/T curriculum alignment with course outcomes

73.3% did not believe they had the big picture or understand how their course fit with the curriculum when they developed their 1st course.

Majority of faculty have low confidence

In spite of years of experience, an average of over 29 years nursing, and an average of 13 as an educator, 87% of faculty could not express confidence.

Theme 1

Faculty development and education: needed to aid knowledge

100% agreement. Expert clinicians could be novice educators.

Theme 5

Theme 2

Improved support & positive communication

93% experienced challenges in communication and support.

Theme 6

Overloaded and inadequate time

100% alighted to being extremely busy with inadequate time either currently or previously as facility. Excessive workload: faculty is in short supply, and inadequate time added to stress when curriculum must be assessed in addition to additional responsibilities.

Theme 3

Theme 4

Mentorship is needed

100% agree: mentors are helpful. It was the most frequent strategy recommended.

Theme 7

Suggested Strategies

Theme 8

Student development and education: needed to aid knowledge

The theory Challenged and Overwhelmed, a descriptive middle range theory, clarifies understanding of what educators face in academia and the resulting sense of an unmanageable number of challenges that can become overwhelming. Faculty who were expert nurses, struggle to achieve expectations they did not know existed when they were hired. Most progress from feeling confident and expert in a clinical role, to experiencing low confidence and feeling like they are facing too many challenges and feel overwhelmed, particularly with curriculum development, evaluation, and revision, despite high levels of knowledge in content areas. Five themes emerged as challenges: lack of confidence, overload and inadequate time, lack of knowledge and development, poor support and communication, and need for mentorship. Each of these five areas separately can cause distress, but the combination of all five factors leads to an educator becoming likely to be overwhelmed by the multitude of challenges. The themes are connected because low confidence and inadequate knowledge increases the likelihood of feeling overwhelmed. Poor communication and changing expectations leaves the educator guessing if they are on the right track. The inadequate time does not allow for recovery from fatigue, or adequate time to prepare quality work. Educators work long hours to keep up; when they may have family, other jobs, courses and additional responsibilities or financial burdens. Lack of mentorship leaves the educator struggling to find solutions on their own.

The model depicts how five strategy areas - education, mentoring, practice, time, and collaboration and feedback act to fortify the five themes affecting the educator, transforming the five deficit areas noted in the theory Challenged and Overwhelmed, into positive influences: collaborative support and communication, knowledge related to curriculum, paired mentoring, designated time, and increasing confidence.

Conclusion

The study identifies the five areas of challenge, and explores strategies for faculty to overcome these challenges and be successful in the role.

References


Research Methodology

Qualitative Constructivist Grounded Theory

Explored and compared perceptions and processes of 15 nursing faculty from 4 colleges.