In 1996, faculty at Western Regional School of Nursing (WRSON) in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, underwent the major transition from teaching in a diploma nursing program to teaching in a baccalaureate nursing program. At the time, they were experiencing increased workloads and threats of impending job losses. In addition to working full-time, many were engaged in part-time graduate studies to meet the minimal educational requirements necessary for teaching in the new collaborative baccalaureate program. Today, those who remain are considered the more seasoned faculty, compared to younger, more recently hired colleagues.

Together, novice and senior faculty are embracing the ongoing challenge of making the complete transition into the academic world of university governance where both teaching and scholarly work are required. During the 10-year period from 1996 to 2006, faculty underwent an accreditation process, built infrastructure and initiated partnerships with the university and the community, and developed their expertise and uniqueness in relevant areas.

Since the implementation of the new baccalaureate program, faculty have often felt as if they were just keeping their heads above water. Currently, some individuals have finished their graduate work, courses have been successfully established, and a 7-year accreditation and approval has been granted. Finally, in the past few years, the faculty have had a chance to reflect on where they started, what they have accomplished, and what kinds of faculty growth and development have already occurred.

Three years ago, a small group of the faculty took a more deliberate look at faculty development needs, began a literature review and needs assessment, and initiated a more structured process for faculty development. The investigations and analyses that were conducted during this time culminated in the development of a 10-year retrospective model for faculty development.

In this article, the authors retrace their journey during the past 10 years as faculty members engaged in the implementation of a new bachelor of nursing (collaborative) program. They outline the major personal challenges related to increasing credentials and portfolio development for teachers within a university environment. The authors extrapolate from the relevant literature on teaching and scholarship, and thereby analyze the methodologies that enhanced the faculty development process for them during this time. Specifically, they discuss the methods that facilitated meaningful reflection on their new roles and responsibilities; nurtured their professional growth and afforded opportunities for refueling and reenergizing along the way; and provided a vision for reframing their practice as nurse educators in light of previous experiences. With reference to Boyer’s model of scholarship, the authors also explore possible implications for further analysis of the faculty development process within the broader context of nursing scholarship.

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Reflecting, Refueling, and Reframing: A 10-Year Retrospective Model for Faculty Development and Its Implications for Nursing Scholarship

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abstract

In this article, the authors retrace their journey during the past 10 years as faculty members engaged in the implementation of a new bachelor of nursing (collaborative) program. They outline the major personal challenges related to increasing credentials and portfolio development for teachers within a university environment. The authors extrapolate from the relevant literature on teaching and scholarship, and thereby analyze the methodologies that enhanced the faculty development process for them during this time. Specifically, they discuss the methods that facilitated meaningful reflection on their new roles and responsibilities; nurtured their professional growth and afforded opportunities for refueling and reenergizing along the way; and provided a vision for reframing their practice as nurse educators in light of previous experiences. With reference to Boyer’s model of scholarship, the authors also explore possible implications for further analysis of the faculty development process within the broader context of nursing scholarship.

This model is based on the philosophy that the reflective process affords faculty the opportunity to refuel as they move forward through this transitional period, and provides them with insights, allowing them to focus more clearly on what lies ahead to reframe their development as nurse educators and as scholars within the new academic reality. This model could be adapted for use in other areas of continuing education where nurses are pursuing scholarly activities, making major workplace transitions, or adjusting to modifications in their roles and responsibilities as professionals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature, as well as current trends, supports the fact that there has never been a stronger case for nurse educators to revisit their own values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and scholarship to more effectively embrace the challenges of academia.

Kovach (2004) provides tips based on her own experiences for designing a fulfilling career in academia and encourages dialogue among educators. She states that educators are needed who are innovative activists willing to “push the boundaries of possibility” (p. 73). Kovach believes that being a professor is multifaceted and affected by multiple factors, suggesting that faculty must attempt to understand the many forces at play to structure their roles and activities to flourish in higher education.

Zambroski and Freeman (2004) discuss the multiple changes required for nursing faculty who are transitioning from a community college to a university. They emphasize the need for faculty to rethink their role and how to redevelop it in light of their new environment. These authors note that this transition involves adapting existing skills and developing new skills in the areas of teaching, service, and research in order to embrace the new workplace culture of scholarship that exists within the university.

Kenny, Pontin, and Moore (2004) emphasize the critical need to “explore the socialization process experienced by novice nurse academics when they make the transition from the health sector into the education sector” (p. 629). These authors advocate a model of socialization that develops professional and personal self-awareness, and values reflective thinking. They state that through this socialization process, nurse educators will need to acknowledge that scholarship requires individuals to recognize the importance of being open to and understanding a variety of perspectives and to value the educational journey for its own sake.

In a review of the literature on faculty orientation programs, Morin and Ashton (2004) recognize that changes occurring in nursing education can be challenging for both novice and senior faculty. These authors report that faculty development initiatives enhance teaching abilities and foster success in scholarship. They also recommend that when new faculty are introduced to their colleagues’ research, teaching, and service activities, they are better able to evaluate their own fit and feel comfortable in their new environment.

Finally, Matthew-Maich et al. (2007) emphasize that “effective faculty development programs are of paramount importance in this era of profound change in nursing education driven by baccalaureate-degree entry to practice and the concurrent implementation of college/university collaborative partnerships” (p. 75). These authors report on a study that attests to the benefits of engaging faculty in an evolutionary process that builds capacity over time through activities such as the exploration of roles, expectations, hopes, and values within a supportive and safe environment.

It is well established in the literature that faculty development is not a single activity, but rather a continuous process that involves reflection, examination of assumptions, and active participation in the process (Didham, 1998; Glendon & Ulrich, 2004; Johnson-Crowley, 2004; Sweitzer, 2003). It is from this perspective that the authors trace their journey of faculty development during the past 10 years and propose it as a retrospective model for faculty development and nursing scholarship in the future.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT: A 10-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

Faculty Development Workshop

From the findings of the literature, and with the support of faculty, the authors planned their first structured faculty development workshop for June 2005. In April, they conducted a needs assessment to elicit faculty support and obtain faculty input for the development of a workshop focus. Two main questions clearly emerged as they analyzed the results of the needs assessment: “How can we explore our own growth as novice nurse academics making the transition into the university environment?” and “How can we develop a clearer understanding of ourselves as teachers and as scholars?” To answer these questions posed by faculty, the authors planned the workshop to include a minor introductory focus on teaching philosophy and a more substantial and primary focus on scholarship within the university environment. There was also a consensus among faculty that they favored an interactive workshop that would be different from the traditional lecture method. In keeping with faculty preference and the current literature that supports
reflection and dialogue, the authors designed activities that required faculty to analyze, critique, and view teaching and scholarship from a variety of perspectives.

The workshop began with an introduction to the development of a teaching philosophy, which, according to Switzer (2003), is essential for evolving professional development and for academic review. The authors outlined Switzer’s four broad categories of reflection that he suggests are inherent in any professor’s teaching philosophy. These include knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning; goals of learning, as they pertain to what students should learn and why; how students learn and what they bring to the learning environment; and how faculty learn and what they bring to the learning environment. Faculty were then divided into small groups in which they had structured exercises that guided their reflection on Switzer’s four broad categories. They were asked to reflect on a series of open-ended questions accompanied by quotes from the literature. They were encouraged to dialogue with one another and record their reactions and responses to these questions. Each small group then reported back to the larger group.

Next, the authors presented an overview of scholarship, which included a brief review of Boyer’s model and how it relates to the strategic plan (Table). Then, the differences among effective teaching, scholarly teaching, and the scholarship of teaching (Richlin, 2001) were clarified. Finally, the four main components of a scholarship plan were described: clear questions; unique aspects; methods appropriate to the questions and available resources; and possible venues for dissemination (Sweitzer, 2003). Faculty were again divided into small groups in which structured exercises guided their reflection on scholarship. They were asked to brainstorm and identify their areas of interest to include activities, projects, and studies that they had been involved with in the past, were currently developing, or might be interested in exploring in the future. In this exercise, faculty were also encouraged to categorize their areas of interest using Boyer’s four forms of scholarship: discovery, application, integration, and teaching (Boyer, 1990). Finally, faculty were given guidelines to assist in developing a beginning individualized scholarship plan. At the end, each small group reported back to the larger group.

After exploring their own teaching philosophies and scholarship activities, the authors conducted a panel discussion with three tenured professors from non-nursing disciplines—science, sociology, and fine arts—to share their current teaching philosophies and scholarship activities. This session exemplified that although the fields of study and the scholarship agendas were different among these panelists, the actual components of their teaching philosophies and the components of scholarship in their work remained fairly constant across the disciplines, including nursing.

It was from the results of these reflective exercises and the evaluation of the workshop by faculty that the authors began to identify how much they had already accomplished and were able to begin a more systematic approach to organized and meaningful faculty development. To a large extent, the outcomes of these exercises on teaching philosophy and scholarship led the faculty to where they are today. The faculty are gradually identifying, expanding, and redefining their teaching and scholarship initiatives within the context of Boyer’s model. In doing so, they are building capacity for rigorous and meaningful scholarship that will not only strengthen their individual portfolios, but also contribute to the school of nursing’s larger scholarship agenda within the university environment. As a result of the June 2005 workshop, a similar workshop is now conducted annually to build on previous outcomes and to sustain faculty’s ongoing professional development as teachers and as scholars within the evolving reality of nursing academia.

Support for Individual Development

There has been a climate of support for individual development at WRSON since the early 1990s when the five schools of nursing in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador were given the mandate to develop a single curriculum for a bachelor of nursing (collaborative) program. A consortium agreement that was signed at the time required, as a minimal level of preparation to teach in the new degree program, a master’s degree in nursing or a relevant discipline. Shortly after that time, faculty who were interested in remaining in education and beginning their graduate work were provided with the necessary supports (i.e., interest-free loans for tuition, decreased workloads, and paid leave to work with thesis advisors). Mechanisms are now in place to begin the support for attainment of doctoral degrees, which are recognized as an integral component of succession planning in the school’s strategic plan.

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<th>BOYER’S MODEL AND WESTERN REGIONAL SCHOOL OF NURSING’S STRATEGIC PLAN</th>
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There is a real sense of necessity to develop expertise among faculty in various areas and a willingness to seek out opportunities and to encourage and support faculty in pursuing these interests. For example, several faculty have attended the 3-month Annual Summer Research Internship Program in Ottawa, Ontario. This is a federally sponsored initiative with a mandate to build a strong network of nurse scholars who can facilitate the adoption of research findings into practice, policy, and curricula. One faculty member has attended the 4-day Faculty Development Summer Institute in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. This institute addresses the issue of active learning and teaching in universities and colleges, and brings together educators from various disciplines and professions from around the world.

Many faculty members have developed their expertise in curriculum design and development through various workshops and programs, such as access program initiatives for Inuit students who reside in remote areas of the province, as well as a fast-track program for students with advanced standing or previous degrees. One faculty member became actively involved as an accreditor for the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing in reviewing other baccalaureate programs. Several faculty members developed their expertise in test development through the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination item writing, review, and analysis process. As part of a federally funded initiative for an interprofessional education research project currently being conducted through the Centre for Collaborative Health Profession Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, faculty are taking lead roles in curriculum development and delivery of interprofessional education. Many faculty members have pursued the nurse practitioner route for their master’s preparation and have been supported to pursue their ongoing practice and expertise in this area, as well as to become the leaders in the ongoing curriculum development, delivery, and evaluation of advanced nursing programs for others.

According to Zungolo (2004), academic environments need to be created where faculty feel supported and encouraged to experiment with innovative approaches to teaching and scholarship and are provided “the impetus to make bold and audacious changes from the traditions of the past” (p. 23). In this regard, many faculty members are breaking new ground in their work. They are exploring non-traditional teaching methodologies for their students, such as writing to learn activities, concept mapping, virtual classrooms and laboratory simulations, and cultural sensitivity interventions. They are conducting research with their community and service partners in areas such as college student wellness programs and new patient care delivery models.

As a means of supporting the exchange of information among faculty regarding their teaching and scholarship pursuits, lunch and learn sessions were initiated shortly after commencement of the new baccalaureate program. These monthly sessions are somewhat informal, held in-house, and open to faculty and students. Topics for each session are scheduled and advertised a few weeks in advance. Agenda items include reports from conferences attended by faculty and students; reports from faculty on recent scholarly activities, such as proposal developments, studies in progress, presentations at conferences, or publications; and updates on items of interest or current developments from provincial and national associations or from local partners within the university, the health organization, and the community at large.

Mentorship

In the past few years, there has been a major turnover in faculty composition at WRSON. For example, within a 1-year period, five full-time faculty members were lost due to retirement and job reclassification. Within the next 5 years, further loss of experienced faculty due to impending retirements is anticipated. This turnover aligns with the national trends in the professoriate: faculty are retiring at a much higher rate than the inflow of adequately prepared faculty at the master’s and doctoral levels (Bartels, 2007; Bartfay & Howse, 2007; Bellack, 2007; Canadian Nurses Association & Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, 2007; Morin & Ashton, 2004). As a result, the already evolving mentorship process needed to be formalized to help new faculty with professional growth and development within the school of nursing. Hence, a small group of faculty developed guidelines for a mentorship program, which were approved and are now in place.

The objectives of the mentorship program are to:

1. Facilitate the establishment of relationships among experienced and novice faculty.
2. Assist novice faculty in the transition to a nursing education role.
3. Provide advice, consultation, and expertise to faculty as needed.
4. Provide a nurturing learning environment for professional and personal development.

Boyer’s model may aid in scholarship development, but it is equally important to support and mentor each other in role development, particularly during this transitional period in nursing education. Mentoring, when introduced in an academic environment, fosters the development of affective behaviors, encourages critical
Informal Networking Activities and Dialogue

Many informal networking activities that have occurred in the past 3 years have played a significant role in facilitating the faculty’s growth and development as nurse educators. The benefits of dialogue and interactive learning are well documented in the literature (Didham, 1998; Mikol, 2005; Myrick & Tamlyn, 2007; Ridley, 2007). Through dialogue in informal settings, individuals share emotions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas with one another in a non-judgmental and accepting atmosphere. Healthy debate among colleagues allows individuals not only to examine differing viewpoints and incite enthusiasm for particular ideas, but also to receive commitments from others and watch ideas develop and come to fruition.

Informal dialogue is a time for individuals to foster their development as critical thinkers by questioning and forcing others to examine underlying assumptions, beliefs, thoughts, and actions. It allows one to develop a heightened sense of introspection and an increased capacity for change. One learns to recognize that what is important about one’s mind is not what is in it, but how it operates. Also, one often gains the insight, passion, and courage required for meeting individual and group needs. These networking activities assist individuals to reach higher levels of thinking, whereby they are able to see things and say things about themselves that provide insight and fuel for personal development.

At the authors’ site, there are many venues for informal networking. Historically, most faculty gather for coffee prior to starting their day’s work. This has been a time for relationship building and dialogue whereby faculty members have gotten to know not only one another, but, perhaps more importantly, themselves. Over the years, faculty have engaged in numerous after-hour extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for informal networking and dialogue as well. Such activities include yoga classes, walking and running clubs, and rowing teams. They make a conscious effort, through their loosely organized social committee, to connect with one another and discuss their successes informally. They have organized several off-site, overnight retreats. These occasional getaways afford time away from the rigors of the workplace to connect on a more personal and informal level in an atmosphere of friendship and trust, which is often where the deepest insights and the most meaningful developments occur.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING SCHOLARSHIP

Boyer’s dimensions of scholarship provide a reasonable structure for helping nurse educators reframe their roles and responsibilities in light of the ever changing expectations within health care and higher education. However, there are many questions that remain unanswered. Who exactly are today’s nurse educators? How can they be prepared to take on the challenging roles they are increasingly required to assume? How can they be supported in their roles to ensure they become confident, inspired, and retained in their work? How do they develop as scholars willing to push the boundaries of possibility within a highly competitive climate and an extremely technological and overstrained system? How do they become empowered to face the challenges of the future in nursing education with optimism and enthusiasm? Although these questions are beyond the scope of this article, the results of the retrospective analysis of the past 10 years suggest that making a firm commitment to a more reflective model of faculty development may be the first step in answering them. Faculty must become more critically reflective in their own professional growth to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will better equip them to deal with the growing mass and fluidity of information, ideas, and options currently presented to them as teachers and as scholars.

Nurse educators must continue to reflect, refuel, and reframe within their respective academic environments. They must share their experiences and insights with one another through dissemination of their findings in the literature. Collectively, they can embrace the challenge of nursing scholarship for the future. However, inherent in meeting that challenge is the need to bring meaningful faculty development to the forefront and to recognize it as the internal compass that guides, enriches, sustains, and empowers nurse educators, thereby allowing them to become effective role models for the next generation of nurse scholars.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the authors have retraced the faculty development journey of a group of nurse educators making the transition from teaching in a diploma nursing program to teaching in a baccalaureate nursing program.
A retrospective model for development that is based on reflection, examination of assumptions, and active participation in the process has been proposed. The details for future adaptations of this model by other groups of nurses are beyond the scope of this article. However, the authors believe that this kind of model has major implications for strengthening the process of professional development and for steering it in a more meaningful direction as nurses in all areas of education and practice are required to adjust to the transitions occurring within the current health care system.

REFERENCES


