Designing Educational Content Based on Best Available Current Evidence

abstract

This article, the fourth part of the educational design series, addresses how nursing professional development practitioners can meet educational design criterion 4 in the American Nurses Credentialing Center primary accreditation process and standards 4 and 5 in the Association for Nursing Professional Development Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice. J Contin Educ Nurs. 2018;49(4):148-150.

The American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) primary accreditation criteria stress the significance of utilizing current evidence when developing the content for educational activities, designed to facilitate learner achievement of the desired outcome (ANCC, 2015). The nurse planner (NP) and planning committee members must ensure that educational content reflects current standards of practice and best available evidence for the activity. According to Dickerson and Graebe (2018, p. 4), “utilization of the criteria and standards is recommended when planning any educational interventions as they provide a sequential process for content development,” including developing educational content utilizing the most current and applicable evidence. This article provides information for the NP and nursing professional development (NPD) practitioner on how to identify and incorporate the most current and best available evidence into educational activity development.

UNDERSTANDING THE CRITERION

As described in the first three articles of this Administrative Angles series, the first step in the educational design process (EDP 1) is identification of the practice gap, that is the “distance between where things are now and where they could or should be” (Dickerson & Graebe, 2018, p. 4). The second step (EDP 2) is identification of the appropriate educational need (knowledge, skill, and practice) that validates the established practice gap (Moyer & Graebe, 2018). The third step (EDP 3) is to “identify and resolve all conflict of interests for all individuals in a position to control educational content” (ANCC, 2015, p. 39). The fourth step (EDP 4) requires that activities be designed to “demonstrate how content of the educational activity is developed based on the best available current evidence to foster achievement of desired outcomes” (ANCC, 2015, p. 39). This includes, but is not limited to, “evidenced based practice, literature [and] peer reviewed journals, clinical guidelines, best practices, and content expert opinion” (ANCC, 2015, p. 25). Educational content may be selected by the NP and NPD practitioner or other members of the planning committee, ensuring that content is free of bias and influence is a critical component of EDP 4. The NP, content expert(s), or a content reviewer evaluate content and references to ensure that content is current and relevant to the identified gap and that the desired learner outcome is fair and balanced.

The Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice (Harper & Maloney, 2016) addresses content evidence under standards 4 and 5. Standard 4, planning, requires that the NPD practitioner “prepares content reflective of the expected outcomes and current evidence” (p. 34) and standard 5, implementation, stipulates that the NPD practitioner “uses current, evidence-based content, specific to the issue or trend to achieve the defined outcomes” (p. 36).
Content for the educational activity must be relevant and accurate, and reflect evidence-based practices, typically within the past 5 years. One exception is the use of seminal work that is typically cited repeatedly in research, articles, and books, based on its significance. An example of this is Dr. Patricia Benner's novice to expert model (Benner, 1984) that is frequently referenced as the foundation for competency development in nursing practice. When using seminal work, the NP or NPD practitioner must validate that this work is still relevant and accepted.

Many resources are available to the NP or NPD practitioner when developing the educational activity, such as the use of clinical experts, peer-reviewed journals, professional practice guidelines, and research (Schmidt & Brown, 2015). In addition, regulatory agency guidelines can be included, as applicable, when developing content. Examples and descriptions of educational resources for content development are listed in the Table.

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<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Content expert(s)</td>
<td>Individual(s) with experience, knowledge, and skills in the subject matter</td>
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<td>Peer-reviewed journals</td>
<td>Publications with content that has been peer reviewed by subject matter experts to ensure quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional practice guidelines</td>
<td>Statements that guide clinical nursing practice; professional and specialty organizations providing standards of practice based on current evidence, regulations, and statutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Content that has gone through a systematic review process utilizing information from clinical experts and outcomes data; provides evidence to support behaviors or practices (National Institute of Nursing Research, n.d.); use of a hierarchy of evidence framework allows the nurse practitioner or nursing professional development practitioner to evaluate strength of content, with research being higher on the hierarchy than the two preceding options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulatory agency guidelines</td>
<td>Network of governing bodies at the federal, state, and local levels that provide oversight to requirements protecting patient rights, welfare, and quality of health care; examples of agencies include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</td>
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<td>Seminal work</td>
<td>Significant models or theories of work that are substantiated by a scholarly community on a given topic (e.g., Benner's 1984 novice to expert model, Northcentral University Library [2018])</td>
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*The content expert, as with everyone who can control content of the activity, should be free from any conflict of interest. A conflict of interest occurs when an individual has the ability to control content and has a relationship with a commercial entity whose products and services are related to the topic of the activity. This impacts the ability of the individual to present fair and balanced content.*

The NP or NPD practitioner is responsible to ensure that content reflects the diversity of learners (e.g., cultural, generational), and utilizes adult learning concepts and instructional design principles. It may be helpful to engage representatives from the target audience to assist in development and review of the content for the educational activity. In addition, the NP or NPD practitioner must ensure that educational content is clear, concise, and contains the appropriate level of detail for the learners. Content should encourage critical thinking, clinical judgment, and be thought provoking for the target audience to achieve the desired learning outcomes (Harper & Maloney, 2016). It is ultimately the responsibility of the NP or NPD practitioner to confirm that content of an educational activity is developed based on best available evidence to foster achievement of desired outcomes for the activity.

**ANCC PRIMARY ACCREDITATION CRITERIA IMPLICATIONS**

EDP 4 requires the provider unit to have an operational process that evidences adherence to the principle of content integrity. This includes ensuring that content is based on best available evidence, is fair and balanced, and supports learner achievement of desired outcomes. A process description articulates the mechanism that is consistently used within the provider unit to operationalize the criterion. Utilization of EDP 4 in educational activities should demonstrate selection of appropriate content to address the identified professional practice gap in accordance with the process documented in the criterion.

**REFERENCES**


