Chapter 6

Transforming From the Classroom to an Online Nursing Educator
A Transformative Learning Experience for New Online Nursing Faculty

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores through phenomenological methodology the experiences of nursing faculty who transitioned from live to online teaching. These experiences are further examined through the theory of transformative learning to determine whether participants were able to transform their teaching identity from traditional classroom teacher (sage on the stage) to facilitators of learning. One-on-one interviews were conducted with 16 full-time nursing faculty at four state universities. Findings revealed that most faculty were originally hesitant to teach online and had multiple misconceptions regarding teaching methods and online student communication. With one exception, professional development for online teaching was limited. Most participants described transforming their teaching methods and philosophies as they gained more experience. Results implicate that faculty development should focus not only on educational principles and technology, but also on ways to connect with students and develop course content that helps maintain faculty identities.

INTRODUCTION

Dale was an experienced educator and a nursing scientist. She had just accepted a new position at a large state university and was summoned to the dean's office. "When the dean told me I'd be teaching online, my first concern was that I'd just gotten a mortgage and how was I going to pay for it now that I was losing my job." Fearing for her livelihood, she searched for online teaching development courses and enrolled in a costly program located across the country. A few weeks later she learned the reality

of her situation, no one at her new university knew how to teach online. Because she seemed to have some technical aptitude, the dean gave her the assignment. Eventually, she discovered that she preferred teaching online, being somewhat reclusive, she had the opportunity to interact with students in a way that suited her personality and provided her with more flexibility to do research.

Like Dale, many faculty, particularly those in a field such as nursing that is very "hands on", are initially uncomfortable with the online teaching process. Most faculty in today's environment were educated in traditional classrooms and have no personal experience with the online format. In this study, completed in 2009, only a few of those interviewed actually chose to teach online. Their first forays into the online classroom were often clumsy and unsuccessful. Additionally, they feared losing what they most valued in their teaching experience, communicating with their students.

In the rush to implement online education, adequate preparation of faculty is often overlooked or put aside until there is "more time." Not only must traditional faculty members continue to fully participate in the mission of their universities and colleges, which includes service and scholarship as well as teaching, but they must also teach in ways that are new to them – ways in which they have never been prepared pedagogically or technologically. Faculty, particularly nursing faculty, tend to be older, 60% are greater than age 50 (American Nurses Association (ANA), 2011), and received their own educations at a time when online education was unheard of or at the least was talked about in futuristic terms for somebody else, not us, not nurses. Now, many of these same nursing faculty find themselves in an environment where online education is a prevailing mode of education, either through fully online programs for licensed registered nurses (RNs) acquiring their baccalaureate degrees and graduate students, or at a minimum, to provide supplemental information to their students.

Growth in online nursing education has seen a sharp increase not only as a means to alleviate nursing shortages, but also to meet the Institute of Medicine's demand of providing a more highly educated nursing workforce to improve the safety and quality of patient care (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Institute of Medicine, 2010). The growth of online nursing education has provided multiple opportunities for students and faculty members alike. As demand for more online classes increase, the need to ensure that online education is at least as effective as education delivered by "live" classes also becomes an issue. Therefore, it is imperative that faculty members who are moving to this teaching venue are aware of the inherent challenges and the needs that should be addressed to ensure quality of learning and adherence to accreditation standards. This chapter describes how a group of nursing faculty approached this transition and whether they were able to transform themselves from traditional classroom teachers to online facilitators of learning.

BACKGROUND

Despite some reluctance on the part of nursing faculty to move to online programs, comparisons between online and face-to-face learning have shown no significant differences in learning outcomes with the exception of highly technical clinical skills (Mccall et al., 2018). Learners and potential learners have come to value the convenience and flexibility of online education enabling them to continue their education regardless of locale or major life disruptions (Toufaily, Zalan, & Lee, 2018). With the inclusion of online courses, students can lower the time to graduation thereby reducing costs and enabling them to seek employment sooner (Galbraith & Mondal, 2018).

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