



The Transition from Face-to Face to Online Teaching

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Abstract

The transition of university faculty from teaching face-to-face to teaching online nursing courses was the focus for this researcher's study. Selected nursing faculty from three different nursing programs at different colleges in the southern region in a northwestern state were asked to participate in an in-depth interview process to determine their experiences with transitioning from teaching face-to-face nursing courses to teaching online courses. The study was based on the qualitative tradition of collective case studies.

The significance of this study was timely in that a large portion of nursing schools are transitioning from teaching nursing courses face-to-face to teaching online. The data analysis and interpretation of the data was determined from the in-depth interviews conducted for this research. The five overarching categories which emerged from this researcher's study were a.) time management, b.) faculty support, c.) emotional aspects, d.) professional development and e.) differences in course delivery. This data revealed the distinctive aspects the faculty experienced as they transitioned from teaching live to teaching online nursing courses.

The faculty throughout the study identified a need to have additional faculty development, mentoring, and recognition from administrators for teaching their online courses. This study was exploratory and provided a foundation for future research aimed towards the development of faculty new to teaching online nursing courses and determine ways to implement a sound faculty development process to enhance a smooth transition for their nursing faculty who will be teaching online nursing courses.

Relevance and Significance of the Study

Nursing education is a multifaceted and demanding profession that requires the faculty to be current in the latest nursing and medical advances, teaching techniques and provide the best source of educational opportunities for the nursing students. Online courses have greatly increased in numbers at colleges and universities and faculty need the essential preparation for this distance learning teaching experience. The transition from teaching nursing in the traditional classroom to online courses via the Internet has many facets to be explored and was described by the researcher in this study. Institutions of higher education offering courses via the Internet must provide comprehensive faculty training and course development programs.

Faculty, new or experienced, commonly need assistance in the development of their teaching role. Many faculty now are required to teach online classes and there was the lack of information in the literature regarding the phenomenon of nursing faculty who

make the transition from teaching a course face-to-face to teaching the course online via the Internet. The literature mainly focuses on faculty who have never taught an online course needing to have training in the use of technologies before they are able to teach online courses.

Technology plays an important role in nursing education, which leads to many different implications for the nursing faculty and their institutions. The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the professional development and transitional experiences of nursing faculty who have made the transformation from teaching face-to-face to teaching online nursing courses utilizing a qualitative collective case study design.

The researcher had an idea of what it was like from the researcher's own experience with the transition from teaching face-to-face to online nursing courses, but felt there were issues that warranted further investigation with the possibility of providing information for the development of support for nursing faculty teaching online courses. This qualitative collective case study identified and described the professional development and transitional experiences of nursing faculty who have made the transformation from teaching face-to-face to teaching online nursing courses and added new perspectives to a limited existing body of knowledge concerning nurse educators' transition. The research findings also provided valuable information to nurse educators and administrators who are in the beginning stages of transforming face-to-face classroom presentations to online courses in their nursing curriculum.

Results of the Study

The results of this research study revealed the following informative findings regarding the faculty's transition from teaching face-to-face to teaching online nursing course.

Time Management

Nurse educators new or old to teaching online nursing courses all agreed that designing or modifying an existing course to an online nursing course was time consuming related to professional development, course development and management of their online nursing courses. The element of time is one of the major categories identified in this study by the participants in their transition from teaching face-to-face to teaching online. Time impacts the faculty's teaching practices in respect to how they adjust their time in order to be able to take technological classes in preparation to teach their online course. One participant reported, "It took a lot of time to update my technological skills." Another participant expressed, "It takes time to keep up with the latest technology. I would love to, I don't know how, but I would love to learn how to insert video clips, but I don't have the time." Another participant felt that, "If you are doing this for the first time, it is a huge amount of time and it is a huge amount of different time."

In regards to the aspect of time, the participants identified several areas they thought would be helpful for the transition to online teaching. One participant expressed, "I think it is important to chunk out time. You know an hour or two a week for your online class, so it does not fall to the bottom of the pile, because it is not in my face all the time." Along these same lines, another participant felt, "You have to have dedicated time to teaching an online nursing course." Other participants felt faculty need to acknowledge up front it is time consuming, so you do not resent the amount of time it

takes to create an online course; administration needs to recognize the extra time involved with online courses and consider it in the faculty's workload and good organizational skills are important in order to create your online course in a timely fashion.

Mentoring was identified by the participants both in their recommendations of time management and the aspect of time. One nurse educator reported, "it takes time to seek out the people to get the information that I need." One participant felt, "Mentoring one-on-one is helpful because you can sit down and look at an online posting and learn how to respond, but it takes a lot of time." Mentoring was valued by the participants, but one must dedicate the time to being mentored for their transition to teaching online nursing courses.

Faculty Support

The participants in this study viewed faculty support as an essential component in their online teaching and course development. Faculty shared thoughts on faculty support related to commitment from the nursing department chair, mentoring and compensation in time and money. Faculty spoke about the importance of support, "You need support and don't take me for granted. I wrote a proposal last year to put my course online with a grant and it was denied." Another faculty member expressed the importance of being supported by a mentor for support in teaching an online course, "Get a faculty mentor, I think that is one of the major deficits in this department that we don't have people assigned to help us that are dedicated to doing that."

Faculty support in regards to compensation in time and money was important to one interviewee. The participant revealed she did get a monetary benefit for teaching her online nursing course "which helps because we did not get any relief of any additional time for the development of the class." Therefore it was felt by the participants; faculty support in regards to support from administration, mentoring, compensation and resources is all a part of supporting the faculty who are making the transition from teaching face-to-face to teaching online nursing courses.

Faculty Emotions

Several emotions emerged from the interviewees as the themes in this research study. The essence of the faculty's comments included: "don't give up, keep plugging away," "dig in and know that is it not going to be perfect and that you can learn," "I just did not like it at all at first, I tolerated what we did online and sort of lived for the weekends, when the students would come to campus for class," "I felt kind of stupid in the workshops because I did not catch on to some of the technology pieces as quickly as some other people did," "you have to be willing to let it develop and have a positive attitude," and "Being an A teacher in the live classroom and now I was going to be a C teacher with a new online class and that was really hard for me because I felt that I had worked very hard to become an expert."

These faculty emotions ranged from fear to patience to lack of confidence, resistance and frustration. Fear keeps many teachers and trainers from exploring the potential of online instruction. From an instructional perspective, fear of the unknown, fear of change and fear of failure post major barriers to online instructional success. These emotions are all a part of transitioning to a new teaching arena. As the faculty becomes more comfortable with online teaching and are provided with more support, their fears and frustrations should subside with time and emotional support.

Professional Faculty Development

The participants all had a different perspective on what they had as far as professional development for the preparation of teaching their online nursing course. The amount of instruction varied from outside resources such as taking an online course to attending mini-workshops on campus. One faculty conveyed she did not take any classes in preparation for her teaching online nursing course, "It was just trial and error and get into it and go." Another faculty told the researcher her professional development for teaching online nursing courses consisted of "attending a three day workshop."

Some faculty had taken a software courses to learn how to put together their online course using the programs provided by their institution. One of the faculty described her professional development as, "I learned a lot by myself and we have a technical center that helps us with things, which is really nice." One other faculty's comments addressed the value of a mentor, "I sought out mentors. People who had done it for a long time and had done it well."

One of the most beneficial professional development experiences was described by a faculty member who had done online training for an online university. She shared that, "That has been absolutely the most valuable training I have ever received because they really train you. You have to participate as a student in online classes which is what everybody should experience. It is phenomenal." Comments regarding other interviewees' learning styles were identified by the researcher such as, "I learn best by talking to other faculty and by comparing notes," "I learn best with hands on, especially with computer things, it is awfully hard for me to follow written directions," and another interviewee shared, "I want to read it through, even if somebody talks about or shows some examples of how this might be applied and then let me play with it."

The results from this research study showed the differences in professional development the faculty have received and what the participants considered as important aspects of their preparation for teaching an online nursing course. This study will provide institutions with an insight on what needs to be done to insure the faculty is given the necessary professional development opportunities before teaching their online course.

Differences in Course Delivery

The most evident difference noted from the interviewees was with communication. The participants identified they did not have the "eye to eye contact" and one reported, "It has been ingrained in me to look at someone, to read the nonverbal, to make eye contact, to read expressions, to see the shifting of all that, has been a very difficult thing to do in my mind." Another aspect of communication noted by one interviewee was "The care you have to take in communicating. You can't do that just off the cuff. You have to be so very careful in the way that you word things. You have to be much more prepared."

Other differences noted were: student learning and participation as far as there is more responsibility on the student with an online course, the instructor becomes the facilitator for the online course, the use of technology becomes more imperative for the student and faculty, the work becomes 24/7 rather than a two hour lecture and teaching online allows the faculty and students to work at their own pace.

The Transition

The researcher developed a conceptual display illustrating the transition of the nursing faculty from the traditional classroom to teaching online nursing classes (See Figure below). Once the emergence of the overarching categories became clear, the researcher was able to develop the conceptual display to organize the transitional process in this collective case study.

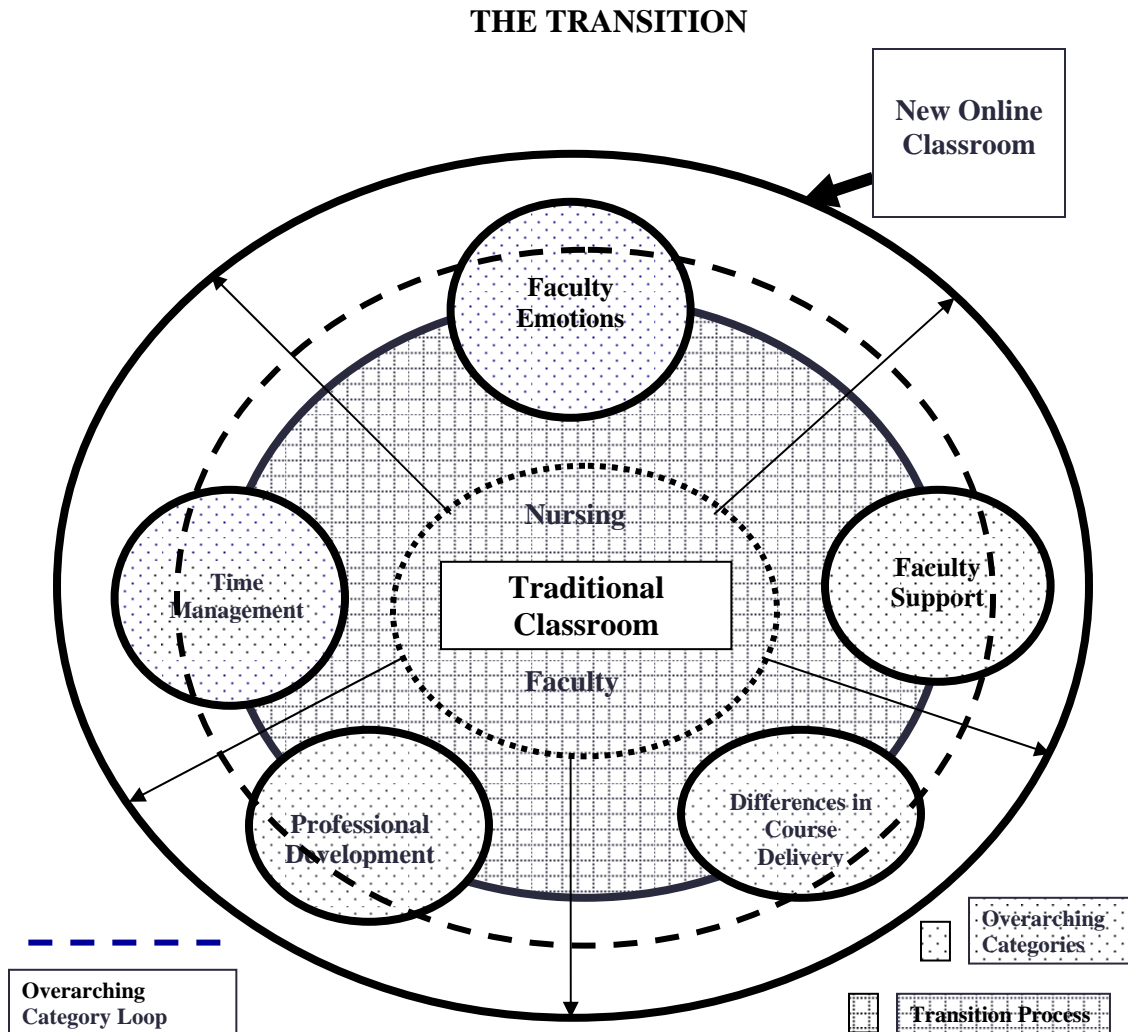


Figure: Illustrates how the nursing faculty in the traditional classroom transitions from teaching in their live classroom through different experiences encompassed in the five overarching categories. Some of the themes appeared in more than one of the categories, thus creating the overarching category loop. Although each faculty had their own journey from the traditional classroom to the online environment, they all made the transition from teaching their nursing courses face-to-face to teaching their nursing courses online.

Recommendations

It is imperative to understand the elements of the transitional experiences of nursing faculty who make the journey from teaching face-to-face in the traditional classroom to teaching online nursing courses. Nursing faculty in this study have identified a need for faculty development, mentoring and partnership to enhance their online teaching experience. The following presents the recommendations the researcher identified from the findings of this research study for nursing education and nursing education administrators in regards to the results of this qualitative collective case study:

- Nurse educators should have roundtable discussions on different ways faculty have implemented different techniques that work for their online teaching environment-sharing of ideas.
- Develop a “buddy system” or a mentor (formal or informal).
- Peer review of online courses being taught for the first time.
- Faculty should participate in development workshops- the “how tos”-how to communicate online, how to evaluate what students learn online, how to “read” the students emotions online, and how to navigate through the online environment.
- Faculty should actively participate in and online course with threaded discussion boards, chat rooms, learner assessment surveys, multimedia, and interactive teaching, learning, and evaluation strategies. A commitment of approximately 20 hours would be necessary to interact with the course content and materials, and to participate in discussion and chat work groups.
- Offer faculty forums periodically for faculty development in teaching online courses
- Designate a mentor within the faculty who will be given workload credit to mentor a faculty new to teaching online courses
- Faculty should actively participate in an online course.

This research study also provides an insight to nursing program administrators for enabling faculty success in the transition from face-to-face teaching to online courses. University administrators and department chairs can increase this success by supporting staff development for the faculty teaching new online nursing courses and by building more incentives in the area of tenure, promotion, workload, and release time for faculty to participate in distance education, such as:

- Have incentives for faculty’s participation in teaching online courses i.e. credit for online courses as far as teaching load and or tenure, release time
- Recognition from administration that online teaching requires more time and should be counted differently the faculty’s workload.
- Recognition from the department chair that being a faculty mentor requires time and should be counted in the faculty’s workload.

Every university department should provide faculty who are new to teaching online, the necessary support and training as reflected in the above recommendations.