

New Faculty Development Leads to the 'Pedagogy of Play'

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Many nurse educators in associate degree nursing programs across the United States are new to their role. In an article published in *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, the official publication of the Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (OADN), researchers found that of those surveyed, slightly more than one-third of nursing faculty in associate degree nursing programs had "less than or equal to three years of experience" (Mizerek, Fritzges, & Perfetto, 2023).

New faculty development programs are invaluable as a support mechanism for new educators (Rahman, 2023). For the new nursing faculty, this is true as they are tasked with educating the future of our nursing workforce. Being comfortable, or even an expert in a nursing specialty, is one thing, but becoming a nurse educator is entirely different.

Delaware Technical Community College has a yearlong new faculty development program to support instructors of all disciplines, including nursing. At the culmination of the program, new instructors present their teaching philosophy to peers with examples of how they utilized the knowledge learned through the courses in the classroom. It is through this program that the author learned to utilize different teaching strategies, and that "play" is something that can be used in higher education.

The program includes courses on learning D2L, the college's learning management system, and three outsourced "micro-credentialing" courses. These courses promote subjects including active learning, inspiring inquiry and lifelong learning, and creating inclusive and supportive learning environments. While

the courses are primarily geared toward distance and online learning, each of them offers tangible methods to use in face-to-face courses.

Two of the modules in a course focused on active learning were extremely valuable as a new Maternal Child Health Concepts instructor trying to teach students about many of the pregnancy complications women might encounter. One module was about producing 'micro-lectures' (lectures about one particular exemplar that are six to seven minutes in length), and one module was about using groups as an active learning strategy.

In a seven-week specialty course shared with pediatrics, faculty have to get creative to make sure that all of the potential pregnancy complications students need to learn are covered. Before finishing the new faculty development courses, as a new instructor, complications of pregnancy were presented in traditional lecture form. This ended up being a very heavy lecture that often happened on the day before their first module exam, which was less than ideal. The faculty recognized that students required more anatomy and physiology before they would understand the pathophysiology of anything, and time to cover the content was lacking. After a course on promoting active learning, ideas on how to lay a better foundation for student learning and retention were available.

Development of effective modules with the microlectures was the first step. These shortened lectures hit the highlights of the expected physiology of a normal pregnancy, and then pathophys-

iology, signs and symptoms, and nursing care for any disease process or subject you choose. Lectures were recorded on several of the complications that are covered in class; for example, preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, placenta previa, and placenta abruption. These complement a longer, more in-depth 40-minute lecture that is pre-recorded and includes information about the reproductive system, hormones of pregnancy, and fetal development, including supportive structures like the placenta and umbilical cord.

Now, students listen to the introductory lecture before coming to class, so faculty can then reiterate the fundamentals discussed during that 40-minute lecture on the first day of classroom lecture. Since several of the complications discussed require an understanding of how the placenta works to maintain—or derail—a pregnancy, students have a better grasp of the complications discussed on day two, as it has been introduced already.

The next strategy used in the classroom was to use groups to ensure active learning. To have the students apply their knowledge of the complications, the faculty divide the class into groups, after laying the groundwork on the first day, and have each group present a complication to the class. The first time this was implemented, faculty brought pumpkins in to illustrate the "mom" and "baby" patients. The students were tasked with illustrating pregnancy complications and were given basic supplies. They could ask for anything else they needed, such as fake blood, gloves, syringes, or fluids. Their creativity was limitless. Each block, the seasons change, so students have gone

on to use snowmen or eggs as the “moms” and “babies.”

This playful activity is followed by two NextGen-style case studies from the University of Maryland, one on pre-eclampsia and one on gestational diabetes, to further apply and assess their knowledge, so no three-hour lecture. The material now gets shared like this: the fundamentals are explained in the recording and reiterated if needed; they listen to the micro-lectures on each of the complications before class; they are actively involved in depicting their complication to their peers; and the class ends with a discussion of the NextGen-style unfolding case studies.

Each block, the cohorts have become more and more engaged in the project. They have asked for more supplies and tested the limits of how they can present their newfound knowledge to their classmates. It has truly evolved from one of the most difficult lectures to one of the most active and engaged days of teaching.

To keep the momentum going at the start of the second module, golf balls were used inside blown-up balloons to illustrate the difference between true and false labor (borrowed from a midwife found online). This simple, five-minute exercise gets people laughing, engaged, and excited to learn what is also an intense subject—nursing care for labor and delivery.

This playful way of going about the “complications” lecture and introducing the labor and delivery lecture has ignited an interest in the “pedagogy of play.” The author has found an online group of “professors at play” who specifically use play in higher education. The discovery of this group would not have occurred without the catalyst that was the new faculty development classes.

Lisa Forbes of the University of Colorado, Denver, writes for the *Journal of Teaching and Learning* that, while it is not well understood yet, play has the potential to truly motivate students. Forbes (2023) stated:

The results from this study provide additional legitimacy for play in learning as a substantial pedagogical approach in higher education. The results indicate that through play, students are better able to face the rigor of, and be more motivated to take risks and engage with, the material they are learning. (p.68)

To conclude, one of my new favorite quotes is “Teaching without learning is just talking.” This quote, attributed to K. Patricia Cross, sums up the author’s feelings about being a new nurse educator with less than three years of experience. The whole time the students have been nursing students, the author has been learning and evolving as a teacher, finding ways to bring new energy and new strategies to learning, aided in part by the institution’s investment in new faculty development. ■

References

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