

**THE THEORY PRACTICE INTERFACE:
A CASE STUDY OF EXPERIENCED NURSES'
PERCEPTION OF THEIR ROLE
AS CLINICAL TEACHERS**

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All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics committees.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how experienced nurses perceive their role as clinical teachers in an environment that is challenged not only with on-going changes in healthcare delivery, but also by the expectation that it will continue to provide positive clinical learning opportunities for undergraduate student nurses.

Schools of nursing in Australia have undergone rapid and far-reaching change as a consequence of the legislated transfer of nursing education to the tertiary sector. Expectations that nurse academics will possess higher degrees and be actively involved in research mean that faculty members have less time to be directly involved in their students' learning during clinical practice placements. The literature indicates that the responsibility for moment to moment teaching and learning thus appears to have been implicitly given to clinical staff who may not possess any formal qualifications for teaching, yet are largely responsible for students' learning through clinical placements. Indeed some clinicians report a worrying lack of knowledge of clinical supervision models giving cause for further concern about the nature of the clinical learning environment. Schools of nursing expect that clinical practice will provide opportunities for students to learn how to be a nurse through guided questioning, analysis and critical thinking. It is evident that in some settings, this represents an ideal situation and not the reality.

Critical reflection on these issues has informed the purpose of this research and helped to shape the following questions that focus the conduct of the study:

Research Question One

How do experienced nurses create positive clinical learning environments for student nurses?

Research Question Two

How do experienced nurses resolve the often-contradictory demands of nursing students and those of the practice setting?

Research Question Three

How do changes in the healthcare environment impact on the experienced nurse's role as a clinical teacher?

The theoretical framework for this study was underpinned by the interpretive philosophies of hermeneutic phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, because they acknowledge the personal experiences and meanings of the participants. A case study approach was utilised because it acknowledges the given context of the participants. Data were collected from six experienced nurses through a series of semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and periods of participant observation supported by field notes and the researcher's diary.

Participants identified that their perception of their role as clinical teachers was constructed of three intersecting roles: that of facilitator of learning, assessor and socialiser. This study concludes that several factors influence these nurses' perception of their role as clinical teachers. In particular, the positivist work culture of the clinical setting and nurses' own past experiences and world view of nursing combine to shape these nurses' perception of their role as clinical teachers.

The research concludes that the expectations that students will be supported in their endeavours to be critically thinking, problem solving and reflective practitioners may, in fact, be unrealistic in the current, economically constrained, clinical environment. It is evident that experienced nurses, despite being willing to be involved with clinical teaching, have to function in rapidly changing environments that do not always offer opportunities for nurses to reflect on their practice. However, the creation of positive clinical learning environments in these circumstances requires an increased understanding and appreciation by both schools of nursing and their students of the impact of change on these nurses and their clinical environment. This appreciation may result in more effective collaboration between nursing education and nursing service to assist student nurses to learn not merely through repetitive practice and busywork, but also through opportunities to observe, question and understand their nursing practice.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACU	Australian Catholic University, established in 1991 as an amalgamation of seven former Colleges of Advanced Education into one national university with campi in three states and one territory of Australia. Bachelor of Nursing courses have been offered at four campi across three Divisions of the University since 1991.
ANCI	Australian Nursing Council Inc. established in 1992 with the purpose of facilitating the development of national standards and processes for the regulation of nursing within Australia.
Buddy Nurse	Clinical nurse who works with one student in an informal teaching relationship that may only exist for one shift.
BN	Bachelor of Nursing. Three-year undergraduate degree, completion of which entitles the graduate to register with the appropriate statutory authority to gain employment as a registered nurse.
Clinical Affiliate / Clinical Associate	Experienced clinical nurse seconded by a university from a healthcare agency to supervise the clinical placement of a group of students within that agency.
Clinical Facilitator	Umbrella term used to describe the experienced clinical nurse who supervises or facilitates a group of students in a healthcare agency for their clinical placement. This term is frequently used to indicate the Clinical Affiliate or Clinical Nurse Teacher.
Clinical Nurse Teacher	CNT: Experienced clinical nurse who works casually or sessionally for a university to supervise the clinical placement of a group of students in an agency.
DRGs	Diagnostic Related Groupings. A method for categorizing patients and reimbursing hospitals based on the diagnosis or reason for their admission. Patients with similar diagnoses are aggregated under the one related grouping.
IDC	Indwelling catheterisation or catheter.
IV	Intravenous therapy
LEVEL 1 RN	A registered nurse with limited clinical experience. A Level 1 nurse is expected to assume responsibility for their own actions while promoting professional standards of practice and conduct. With experience, they are responsible for the supervision of more junior Level 1 Registered Nurses and Enrolled Nurses.

LEVEL 2 RN	A registered nurse who has a broad developing knowledge base in professional issues and demonstrates an advanced clinical expertise in a specialty area. They provide support in the management of human, financial and material resources to ensure quality, cost effective and client focused care. The Level 2 Nurse gives direction and support in the areas of quality management, research education and professional development.
McAuley Campus	The Queensland state campus of Australian Catholic University.
Mentor	An experienced nurse whose focus is the development of a deeper relationship between mentor and protégé, capable of influencing major career changes and promoting self-actualisation in both participants of the process. The mentoring relationship is characterised by its intensity, openness, reciprocity and commitment, which allows the growth of both participants in the relationship.
NLN	National League for Nursing. The national body of nursing responsible for the accreditation of the majority of nursing education programs in the United States of America. The NLN lead the movement to promote nursing's agenda for healthcare reform in the 1990's.
Preceptor	An experienced nurse who works with one student to provide advanced clinical competency and role socialisation that assists the student develop, practice or refine relevant clinical skills and develop a knowledge of the organisation's culture, values, rules and regulations, in what is usually a short-term relationship of weeks to months.
RN	Registered Nurse. A nurse who has completed a pre-registration course of study enabling registration with a statutory authority as a practising nurse within that state. Since 1992, all nursing programs in Australia have been at the degree level, however some nurses may still hold hospital certificates. Most have upgraded their certificate to degree level through further study at a school of nursing, or are in the process of doing so.
UAP	Unlicensed Assistant Personnel. Persons who are employed within healthcare agencies to provide care for patients such as hygiene and feeding. They receive varying levels of training ranging from none to four weeks of basic instruction in hygiene, feeding and positioning. Also referred to as Personal Care Assistants or Assistants in Nursing.

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