

NLN

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TRANSFORMING NURSING EDUCATION
LEADING THE CALL TO REFORM

Doctoral Faculty Collaboration in Nursing Education

*A Living Document from
the National League for Nursing*

NLN Board of Governors

April 2018

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Mission: Promote excellence in nursing education to build a strong and diverse nursing workforce to advance the health of the nation and the global community..

Core Values: Caring, Integrity, Diversity, Excellence

INTRODUCTION

The National League for Nursing (NLN), as the voice of nurse educators nationally and internationally, is calling for inclusivity among faculty and graduates with both clinical and research doctoral degrees. The NLN believes that both degrees are complementary and bring, through scholarly work, diverse strengths to the advancement of the science of nursing in both practice and education. However, as the number of doctor of nursing practice programs has begun to increase significantly (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2017a) and boundaries blur, tension, insecurity, and competition among clinical and research doctorally prepared faculty have followed (Smeltzer et al., 2014; Staffileno, Murphy, & Carlson, 2016). Concern about changes in traditional role descriptions, lack of respect and misunderstandings for other than generative research endeavors, as well as confusion about allocation of resources within the academic environment challenge the development of an inclusive, collaborative community of doctoral faculty and scholars.

Divergent perspectives and frameworks of all doctorally prepared faculty, along with their respective skills and expertise, provide wide-ranging resources to advance nursing science and nursing education and abundant opportunities for reframing the profession's approach to scholarship and research excellence. Differences, rather than similarities, in scholarly outcomes and approaches to nursing sciences, have the potential to enrich the academic and practice environments. "By acknowledging the legitimacy of us all, we move beyond tolerance to celebrating the richness that differences bring forth" (NLN, n.d.).

For more than two decades, the NLN has been a strong advocate for evidence-based teaching and the advancement of the science of nursing education (NLN, 2017). The NLN has also called for the creation of strong links between practice and education, recognizing that the integration of the science of learning into teaching practices can only be successful through close alignment with current and emerging clinical practice outcomes (NLN, 2016). To fully achieve scholarship in nursing science, in both education and practice, the composition of

faculty requires all forms of diversity to co-create a culture of inclusive excellence. Diversity must encompass varying intellectual perspectives and the knowledge and skills of differing academic degrees to provide leadership for transforming education and health care systems. Creating a community of scholars, where doctorally prepared faculty share ideas about research, clinical practice, and curriculum design, has been advocated as a strategy for cultivating inclusion (Staffileno et al., 2016). These approaches have the potential to shift the conversation from how faculty are doctorally prepared to how their scholarly activities contribute to the practice of nursing education, to the advancement of nursing science, and ultimately to the effective use of research to impact quality patient care.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

There is a compelling need for collaboration among research and practice doctorates in nursing education.

- ▶ The landscape of doctoral education in nursing is changing (Staffileno, Murphy, & Carlson, 2017) and the composition of faculties of schools of nursing is evolving. With the call to action by the 2011 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, there has been a significant increase in the number of doctor of nursing practice (DNP) graduates and a relatively stable number of doctor of philosophy (PhD) graduates entering the nursing workforce. Although a recent study revealed that a third of DNP students planned to pursue faculty careers after graduation (Fang & Bednash, 2017), the exact number of DNP graduates employed in the academic workforce is uncertain. In a 2016-2017 national survey of full-time faculty from diverse backgrounds (AACN, 2017b), 14.6 percent of faculty reported being DNP prepared and 18.4 percent reported having a research doctorate. The need to increase the numbers of doctorally prepared individuals in academia, specifically faculty representing diverse backgrounds, remains a major focus for the nursing profession.
- ▶ A call to foster greater collaboration among doctoral faculty has recently emerged. How are these doctoral degrees complementary and essential to advance nursing science? How can all doctoral faculty work together to facilitate learning by students? Creating formal structures to include research and practice doctoral faculty in the development and evaluation of the DNP scholarly project has been suggested as a strategy to build bridges between generative and quality improvement sciences (Staffileno et al., 2016; Carlson, Staffileno, & Murphy, 2017).
- ▶ Programming to assist faculty to better understand the roles of practice and research doctoral graduates, to respectfully consider the uniqueness of both programs, and to explore opportunities for collaboration among other graduate disciplines has also been advocated (Melnyk, 2013; Sebastian & Delaney, 2013). The consensus is that working together on projects has the potential to promote understanding of each other's strengths and areas for development and move the science more rapidly to practice.
- ▶ Early in 2017, the NLN called together a group of nationwide leaders in DNP education to explore ways to support doctoral faculty in creating a community of colleagues working together collaboratively to advance nursing science and, more specifically, to discuss

challenges with the scholarly work of the DNP project. The group asked a pivotal question: How can the nursing profession instill the belief that the roles and scholarship of the practice and research doctorate are different and that within the profession there is a place for both degrees? The group called for a national understanding that the practice doctorate scholarly project is different, not inferior, to the traditional notion of research as being the generation of new knowledge.

- › At the same time, the NLN disseminated a national survey to DNP faculty to identify faculty perceptions of challenges and professional development needs. Differentiation of clinical versus research doctorate scholarship ranked among the highest identified needs. Clearly, greater collaboration and respect among doctoral faculty is necessary to differentiate the scholarly work of the practice and research doctorate and, at the same time, create true collaboration within a nurturing work environment with administrative support, resources, and clear respect and expectations of the scholarly efforts of all faculty colleagues.

THE NLN'S CALL TO ACTION

The NLN is committed to co-creating a national dialogue to build a transformative community of doctorally prepared faculty. Engagement in scholarship is a vital competency for all nurse faculty and collaborative efforts may better address the linkages between student learning and patient care outcomes (NLN, 2016). Strategic efforts to move the discussion of doctoral preparation, acknowledging the existing tensions, need to be embraced if nursing education is going to meet the demands of the current health care environment through the preparation of a strong nursing workforce. Collaborative efforts among all doctorally prepared faculty to create a nurturing intellectual community are integral to transformation of the nursing education community (Staffileno et al., 2016).

Both research and practice doctorates bring value and expertise to nursing education practice and the advancement of nursing science. The future calls for new ways to acknowledge the complex roles and preparation of all doctorally prepared nurse faculty and to value the scholarly practice of expert clinicians and research scientists. Affirming the worth of both the research and practice doctorate is at the core of collaborative efforts to bring excellence to research in nursing education and practice and to positively advance the health of the nation

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Faculty

- › Explore ways to build collaborative efforts among doctorally prepared faculty to close the education, research, and practice gap.
- › Embrace the strengths of both research and practice doctorates to prepare future scholars, educators, and practitioners in nursing.
- › Model collegial relationships among all doctorally prepared faculty and doctoral students.
- › Create shared opportunities for collaborative curricular design (Staffileno et al., 2016).

- › Inspire nursing students to value the scholarly work of both research and practice degrees.
- › Implement courses and learning opportunities that foster collaborative efforts that build on faculty expertise in knowledge generation and translation of research.
- › Shift the language from how faculty are doctorally prepared to how their scholarly activities contribute to the practice of nursing education and impact quality patient care.

For Deans/Directors/Chairs and Leaders in Nursing Programs

- › Provide leadership buy-in and resources for the co-creation of an inclusive environment for all faculty.
- › Create environments that foster open, honest dialogue and embrace intellectual diversity and inclusive approaches to scholarly endeavors.
- › Advocate for hiring and evaluation practices that recognize all faculty contributions to nursing education practice and the breadth of scholarship.
- › Establish postdoctoral research opportunities to capitalize on the strengths of various doctoral degrees.

For the National League for Nursing

- › Develop and promote leadership programs for all doctorally prepared educators to promote organizational cultures that foster collaboration.
- › Provide research funding for collaborative research projects to investigate linkages between education and practice.
- › Provide faculty development programs that offer practical approaches to fostering collaboration in teaching and scholarship among doctorally prepared faculty.
- › Intentionally solicit the expertise, knowledge, and scholarly foci of both practice-and research-prepared doctoral faculty for engagement in national committees.

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