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The Road Was Paved with Good Intentions

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This special issue of *Clinical Simulation in Nursing* focuses on the work of doctoral students and recent graduates. It emerged through recognition of the changing landscape in doctoral education where a perfect storm is brewing. There is a pressing need for venues where emerging researchers and scholars can begin to disseminate their work; however, the process of publishing is new to many of these authors. Furthermore, nursing journals are receiving record numbers of submissions; therefore, the rejection rate is higher, particularly for work done by doctoral students and recent graduates. This issue was conceived to address this and also showcase emerging scholarship. It was a road that was paved with good intentions. However, like many such paths, there can be hidden potholes, and through this process, we have gained important insights for academe and publishing.

More nurses are pursuing doctoral education and contributing to knowledge in the field. Almost 15,000 nurses were enrolled in Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs and just over 5,000 in PhD programs in the United States in 2013 to 14 (Kirschling, 2014). The essential PhD curriculum is designed to prepare nurses to be independent researchers able to foster a program of research based on scientific inquiry for contribution to the discipline. As a result, core curricular elements in PhD programs include “mentored research experiences and

preparation of research grants and manuscripts for publication” (AACN, 2010, p. 5-6). Concurrently, the DNP curriculum focuses on “translation of new science, its application and evaluation” because “DNP graduates may generate evidence to guide improvements in practice and outcomes of care” (AACN, 2006, p. 11-12). In academe then, the capstone or synthesis project required of DNP students often relates to practice issues or the translation of research into practice, but it may include independent research. This DNP scholarship offers opportunities for innovative publications and new understanding of how academic work is utilized in practice. The dissertation, required of students seeking a PhD, relates to the production of new knowledge whether reported in a traditional or the newer three-paper dissertation option. With the emergence of the three-paper option, this work is now being submitted for publication either before or just after degree completion. As a result, many new researchers and emerging scholars are seeking opportunities to disseminate their work via publication. Theoretically then, devoting an issue of the journal to the work of doctoral students and recent graduates was an easy decision, and from an editorial board perspective, it was enthusiastically endorsed.

Ah, but have you ever tried to get somewhere you have never been before without a map or GPS and only a generally good idea of where you want to be when you arrive? The road less traveled can be full of unexpected twists and plenty of adventure. Thus was the 18-month journey of this issue. Although it was widely publicized, submissions were initially slow to arrive. Just at the deadline however, manuscripts arrived in a flurry similar to student assignments that come in as the clock is ticking midnight. Although this was not entirely unexpected, it was surprising to discover the range and rigor of work received. Discovery work and the generation of new knowledge varied from small poorly constructed studies to large multisite and repeated measures designs. Only a few submissions demonstrated translation or application of research into practice. The wide variability in the submissions received also required considerably more time than anticipated for the initial reviews. The authors' lack of experience with the publishing process and customs was evident and subsequently many required numerous revisions and communications; therefore, the time line to publication was also longer than was projected.

Publishing was new to many of these authors and rather than outright rejection, some articles were chosen for significant revision; something we knew would not have occurred if this was not a dedicated issue. Authors were grateful for a chance to revise their work and to learn the unfamiliar process of responding to peer reviewers. Many welcomed feedback and took advantage of the option to revise and be reviewed again rather than be rejected outright because getting early doctoral work published can be very trying. However, surprisingly, more than a few authors never responded to the request to revise or they resubmitted without doing the revisions and even missed final deadlines to do so. The learning curve was very steep for everyone! Nonetheless, it was satisfying to hear how many doctoral students and recent graduates appreciated a venue specifically designed to showcase their work.

This special issue was a challenge for the peer reviewers and editors also. Some of the customary guidelines for highly rated articles typically published in this journal just did not fit the submissions. Many PhD and DNP students are doing their first independent research or translation into practice, and we discovered four common themes: single-site data collection, low numbers of subjects, common use of subjective instruments, and instrument cherry-picking. These are concerning for the mission of advancing the science or taking experimental work into practice; yet, the first two were easier for reviewers to overcome than the latter. Early work often lays the foundation for larger multisite studies with external funding and reviewers identified with novices involved in this trajectory when the work was strong and demonstrated promise for future research. We could justify overlooking the preference for multisite studies with larger sample and effect sizes when there was meticulous attention paid to study design and consistency of concepts throughout the work.

The selection and use of instruments to measure concepts of interest in nursing education research however remains a concern that we saw demonstrated in the submissions for this issue. Subjective measures were

prevalent and caused a number of articles to be rejected outright. Many questions about outcomes, findings, and implications going forward were raised because of the combination of self-reported data and low sample size. Moreover, there were more than a few emerging scholars and researchers who pulled several items from a number of instruments (with or without validity and reliability data), put them together without further testing, and called the new iteration valid and reliable. This alarmed us! We began to wonder aloud, where are the faculty to guide these students and how is this work getting to external peer review without internal critique? Clearly as a discipline, we need to focus our attention on instrumentation: development, selection, critique, testing, and use within nursing education research and in doctoral education curriculum for students in both degree programs. Also, as faculty, we need to identify these types of errors and limitations early in the development of dissertation, thesis, or capstone work and guide students carefully and thoughtfully in their development of rigorous work.

This was not the only time we wondered aloud about the faculty mentoring role. As the submissions began to arrive, a disturbing number of both PhD dissertations and DNP capstone projects were submitted in full. Yes, the entire document, including signature page with three committee members! There were also submissions with spelling and grammatical errors and visible markup from numerous iterations. Clearly, these emerging researchers and scholars did not know how to prepare and submit an article or a revision to a journal. Even more disheartening however was the number of times these were sent back, directing authors to have their committee members give guidance before resubmission, and *the reply was that they had already been involved or the committee had no further suggestions*. This of course did not happen every time, but the fact that it happened more than once, felt like we were repeatedly slamming on the brakes for unexpected obstacles that showed up in the road. It was challenging to respond to these authors. Clearly, with larger numbers of doctoral students in both programs, the time needed for mentoring increases exponentially, and perhaps faculty are unable to closely support doctoral students as a result (Smeltzer et al., 2014). These questions about curriculum, faculty, and mentor roles and responsibilities need to be considered as more nurses chose doctoral education and want to disseminate their work.

Furthermore, the difference between an article deemed publishable by committee faculty for graduation requirements and one that peer reviewers and editors would actually accept for publication was sometimes starkly different. Issues with research design, methods, instruments, statistical analyses, and conclusions were the common areas of discrepancy. As we sat with these articles, we wondered how to best deliver these messages to emerging researchers and scholars? At one such crossroad with a particular article, a reviewer suggested that the next time we embark on a similar special issue, the cover letter should come from the Committee Chair or Academic Advisor to formalize accountability and ensure communication was occurring as a part of the dissemination effort. It is an interesting and provocative thought. Undoubtedly, as faculty, we need to be aware of these issues and ensure that student work is internally reviewed and carefully scrutinized in preparation for peer review and dissemination, as this work indirectly reflects the quality of the faculty and program.

We could go on and on about this enlightening journey. There were moments of joy as we read work that made us smile as the pages were turned. This affirmed the importance of having a dedicated edition and the excitement of seeing the work doctoral students and recent graduates are producing. There is significant and interesting research and scholarship begin done which will continue to inform the discipline and contribute to the science of nursing education research. The varied topics are relevant and informative, and many offer new insight, methodology, or outcomes which will take our understanding about these foci forward. It is exciting to showcase the work of these emerging researchers and scholars. Take note for no doubt you will continue to see their work being disseminated throughout their careers as doctorally prepared nurses.

To all the emerging scientists and scholars, we welcome you into the world of academe and look forward to your continued contributions to the discipline. Working on this issue has been a great honor, and we thank everyone who submitted their work for consideration. The road is a better place when we travel it together!

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