Nursing faculty collaboration viewed through feminist process

The process of evolution experienced by a faculty practice group is viewed through feminist process. A decision to write an article describing their model focused group efforts and served as a catalyst for clarifying needs, values, expectations, and feelings about the group and group process. The group, which began as a support group for nursing faculty, used feminist methods in reviewing the process that led to the writing of an article describing a model for faculty practice and the creation of an environment in which collaborative, collegial relationships could flourish. These ideas were useful in viewing the struggle over issues of leadership, authorship, credit, power, participation, and responsibility experienced by group members.

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In this era of nursing science, nurse-scholars have the potential to develop a paradigm and exemplar paradigms for the discipline. If theory development is to become a reality in nursing, it will require more collaboration and colleagueship among scholars, as there must be concentrated, systematic efforts in evolving theory about the phenomena that are important for nursing.[1(p423)]

THE IMPORTANCE of professional unity and collegial relationships has been described in recent nursing literature.[2-4] Collegiality is recognized as "a critical factor in the lives of nurse educators," but "satisfying and supportive interactions within the collegial community are apparently lacking."[3(p662)]

Women's studies and recent nursing literature have identified factors that may

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30   impede the development of collegiality, which Styles defined as the sharing of one's "innermost core identity,"[4(p143)] as well as the sharing of responsibility and authority with one's associates. Styles further described collegiality as "a spiritual brotherhood or sisterhood,"[4(p143)] which, in relation to our colleagues, "causes us to confront [them] in disagreement, disappointment, and disapproval, as well as to stand by [them] in determination."[4(p143)] Beyer and Marshall identified factors such as heavy workloads when "they become so demanding that little time, energy or attention remain for self, much less for colleagues."[3(p663)] They further stated that collegiality "flourishes in an atmosphere of safety and security."[3(p665)]

Grissum and Spengler[5] described patterns of behavior occurring in women's relationships with each other and stated that these same patterns characterize nurses' relationships. According to their findings,

women's relationships with one another in many instances are characterized by a sense of isolation; lack of group cohesiveness; pressure to conform to traditional behaviors through policing activities; competitiveness from a lack of trust; fear of success; lack of support for other women when success is experienced in other than the traditional feminine role.[X(p104)]

These factors lead to the sense of isolation and powerlessness expressed by many nurses.

The call for increased colleagueship and collaboration occurs at a time when women's studies, the holistic health movement, and nursing itself are providing new models for group process and relationships.

The current emphasis on holistic approaches to persons and on seeking wholeness gives rise to the challenge of helping persons "find new structures to meet new needs based on a new-found commitment to wholeness."[6(p27)] Beyer and Marshall[3] suggest that the collegial community itself must provide many of the solutions for improving collegiality. Nursing faculty have the opportunity to creatively explore the challenge of developing, with their colleagues, an environment in which growth of individuals enhances and is enhanced by the growth of the faculty group. In such an environment, the productivity of the group as a whole is more than, and different from, the sum of its parts.

As the nursing faculty group evolved from being strictly supportive into being task oriented (writing an article), the interplay of individual needs and group cohesiveness became more evident.

In reflecting on the group process, members found that the feminist alternatives described by Wheeler and Chinn[7(p7-10)] provided a useful way to view its work and to make sense of its struggle and process. They include the power of process, of the whole, of collectivity, of sharing, of integration, of diversity, and of responsibility. Traditional ways of viewing group process and group dynamics seemed lacking in their ability to describe and name particular aspects of the experience that were felt to be important. The group did not set guidelines for the writing task; but in the process, members recognized that they were struggling to find new ways to work as a group and apply new awarenesses and changing values to this particular group

experience. Therefore, everyone devoted time and energy to the process, affirming the value of each person and the collective relationship, as well as the value of the article being written.

THE FRAMEWORK

A distinctive characteristic of women's studies is the development of collective modes of production.[8] The pooling of resources for collective work provides at least two sources of strength. First, the collective model provides mutual support and reconfirms values within the group. Second, the expertise of more than one person is directed to a particular project or situation.

Wheeler and Chinn describe feminist process as "based on a balance between unity within the group and conflict between individuals."[7(p12)] In their conceptualization, the differences (style, background, personality, beliefs) with which persons enter the group are valued and ultimately strengthen the integrity of the group. The authors assert that a "group's principles of unity provide a basis for decision making and for the transformation of conflict into group strength."[7(p12)]

Wheeler and Chinn identify five components to be considered by a group as they identify their principles of unity:

- Who are we?
- What are our purposes?
- What issues are central to our purposes?
- What do we expect of every member?
- What personal values are critical to creating a safe space within our group?[7(pp12-14)]

These components provided a guide for viewing the group and group process.

Who are we?

The faculty practice group was formed in 1978 to facilitate dialogue and learning about issues arising from the development of faculty practice roles. Faculty were encouraged to develop and define a nursing practice so clinical skills could be maintained and students could be socialized into nursing via appropriate role models. The group provided support, nurturance, and a "sounding board" as faculty confronted issues such as synthesizing roles of clinician, educator, and researcher within the health care system. It also worked to identify processes needed to define and demonstrate a faculty practice role consistent with the conceptual framework of the school of nursing. Faculty brought a variety of educational, practice, and personal backgrounds and interests to the group. Some worked full time; others part time. Group members were at many different stages in their own growth and development as women and experienced a variety of personal and family crises and changes during their participation in the group. Membership in the group changed as persons left and others joined the faculty. The group began with five members and had as many as nine at one time.

As a group and individually, members struggled with issues of role overload and the congruence of teaching, practice, and research. A primary concern was how an individual faculty member could establish a viable clinical practice that could support clinical and theoretical learning for students and simultaneously provide the

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potential for research to build and refine the school's conceptual framework. In this respect, the group was probably not unlike many other nursing faculty groups in the diversity of its members and the issues with which it struggled.

What are our purposes?

The group's goals, both stated and unstated, changed as the group's needs changed. Although it was started to provide support, the group altered its goals in the 1982–83 school year after the graduate faculty of the school of nursing provided a workshop to help group members consider their respective philosophies, their understanding of faculty practice, and the relationship of these to the conceptual framework of the school. In the 1983–84 school year individual members began to clarify their understanding of faculty practice in a variety of clinical settings and in relation to the school's conceptual framework. The faculty practice group became a place to share these understandings and to clarify faculty practice as it affected individual members and the entire group.

"We need to write about this!" seemed a natural next step when the group realized that its model was not described in the nursing literature. Thus articulation of the model expressing the group's conceptualization of faculty and practice in an article to be submitted for publication became an explicitly stated goal.

What issues are central to our purposes?

Focusing the group's efforts on an article involved further decision making about "how" the task would be carried out. This task of writing the article proved to be the catalyst for strengthening members' understanding and appreciation of themselves as individuals and as part of the group. The writing process forced the group to deal with issues such as leadership, control, credit, authorship, power, and individual versus group needs.

Another issue that was central to the group's purpose was the creation of an environment that enhanced and facilitated trust, sharing, risk taking, responsibility, and creativity within the context of defining faculty practice as part of faculty role. Another issue that challenged the group was expressed by one member as, "I feel so good about us. I need to be able to take this into our other meetings within the school." The question, then, was how to shape an environment in which collegiality

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What do we expect of every member?

The issue of expectations was significant for the faculty practice group throughout its evolution. "Time, energy, and commitment expectations can take many different forms," assert Wheeler and Chinn.[7(p14)] Clarifying and dealing with those expectations proved to be an ongoing and essential aspect of the group process and growth.

Following the decision to write the article, the next problem was how. The person who had been a group member since its inception and who had been involved in the implementation of faculty practice as a part of faculty role volunteered to assume leadership for the writing of the article. Comments following her volunteering indicated that several group members felt she was "the best" person to begin the process based on her history with the process of faculty practice in this particular setting. "I was hoping that you would volunteer, since you have been with it the longest, but I also know you are as busy as the rest of us" indicated support of the "leader" at this point. The person who volunteered observed that it was important for her to take this role, saying, "I really wanted to do it. I would have been uncomfortable if someone else did it all."

Although the group, which then consisted of seven persons, clearly wanted to write the article, individual members had different expectations of the process which were not made explicit when the task was begun. The only explicit expectation was that the person who had volunteered to "start the article" would lead the process. Later discussions indicated that each one had a different expectation about what "leadership" involved. For example, one member expected the leader to do most of the initial writing and then to submit the material to the group for revisions and critique; one member expected the leader to do most of the writing but to involve the group more actively in thinking about what to write; and one member expected the leader to make assignments as she judged necessary.

The leader found that new directions were emerging as she worked on the article and that the focus of the article needed, in her opinion, to shift from faculty practice to faculty role. She sought out another group member, shared her ideas, and presented a revised draft and her feelings about the needed change in direction to the faculty practice group. After discussing her rationale, group consensus supported her work and shift in direction.

In retrospect, it became clear that these changes involved changing expectations, many of which were unstated at that time. The leader explicitly asked for others to work with her, and two persons volunteered. Other persons became more actively involved in the process of writing the article with continued input from the group. Those members less involved in the actual writing were able to clarify and articulate their own needs and expectations more clearly, especially expressing their willingness and desire to be involved in ways that would be helpful to those assuming the major writing task.

At this point, group members understood that members would share their needs and expectations and would ask for clarification when necessary. Another shared expectation was that group issues would be considered in the group. The process to this point emphasized the need for frequent clarification of meanings since each person entered the group with a unique frame of reference and expectations.

What personal values are critical to creating a safe space within our group?

In considering those values and characteristics that make the faculty practice

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group a safe place to work, several members noted that differences in this group were not only recognized, but affirmed. Some members expressed discomfort with the feminist process as it was understood at that point. "I've been socialized to be more goal oriented, and I get uncomfortable with loosened time lines." "I appreciate the structure and push you give to our group."

A critical point in the writing process serves as a focus for considering some of the values and expectations that were crucial both in the functioning of the group and in the creation of a safe space within which to work. As work on the article progressed, the person who had assumed major responsibility for the writing of the article began to struggle with several issues. She was able to articulate some of the issues, such as authorship, participation of group members, commitment to the work, and her own feelings of person needs versus group needs to another group member. Deciding to bring her issues to the group involved a "leap of faith" for the leader, who approached this encounter with "fear and trembling." Would individuals in the group be able to hear her concerns and needs? Would they be threatened by them? What would be the long-term consequences of her sharing her feelings and needs? In the words of one member, "Would the group be blown apart at this point?"

In sharing her concerns with a few other persons, the leader received support for bringing her issues to the group, as well as recognition of her fears about doing so. She followed through with a suggestion to submit her concerns in writing to all group members prior to the next meeting so that they would have time to consider and reflect on them. This was considered less threatening than bringing up difficult issues "cold" at the meeting and gave others time to consider their own reactions and whether and how they wanted to share those with the whole group. By sharing her own feelings and needs, the leader took a risk and modeled that behavior for other group members. The leader recalls feeling "accountable to get it (the article) done and knowing I could not do it without the group."

Group members experienced a variety of reactions to the leader's written communication, a memorandum which focused on the work that had been done on the article, ideas about a change in direction, and her request for primary authorship.

The meeting in which these issues were discussed was significant in growth and development of the faculty practice group. The air of tension surrounding the meeting reflected the awareness of each individual that this was a critical time for the group. Feelings expressed by group members included: "I was afraid going into the meeting, but I had hopes for us, too"; "I trusted we could work it out"; "I was afraid we would lose our group"; "I thought about all our work and how it really did reflect something of each of us and that none of us could have done this by ourselves"; "I felt like my commitment was being questioned"; and "I wish I had known she felt that way."

The leader began the meeting by referring to her memo and saying she would begin by reviewing the work to date and looking at changes in the model. A few minutes into the presentation of new direction, one member of the group said, "In

thinking about your memo, I picked up some feelings that I need to discuss and get out of the way before we go on with this." This statement opened the door to discussion of the more difficult group and process issues.

In the process of this meeting and in later reflections on that meeting, the issue of unclarified expectations was apparent. The leader had functioned in the way she expected of herself; others in the group felt that she had done much more than they "expected," but were not sure how to become more involved in the process, particularly since the leader's work was "so good." Some group members stated that they had assumed they would be asked to help more specifically if the need arose. Based on input and written critiques of the circulated drafts, the leader felt that commitment and input "varied tremendously." She expressed feeling a great deal of responsibility and a great deal of power, too.

In the group, members expressed support for the leader's request for primary authorship. She had clearly done most of the "actual writing" of the article. Group members openly expressed appreciation for her work and also for her willingness to bring her concerns and needs to the whole group. She acknowledged their support and also the support she had received from individuals to approach the whole group. She also voiced her reservations about sharing her needs and feelings. In the discussion that followed, some members expressed concern that authorship also reflect the expressed group belief that the article was in reality a product of group thinking, conceptualizing, processing, and energy and not merely a compiling of individual input. The balancing of individual needs and group needs was discussed.

Following the intense, difficult, but somehow exhilarating meeting, a variety of individual responses were expressed: "I didn't expect it to go so well ... I hoped for it, but didn't expect it"; "In working it through as we did, we had an even firmer base on which to stand"; "Next time will be a little easier because there is this history of success ... and trust"; and "The growing and healing will go on ... and take time ... this has been good."

Values critical to the development of a safe environment were clarified during the process. Behaviors indicated that members valued the group process in and of itself. In spite of the felt need to get the article written, the process of the group was important enough to merit the time and thoughtful consideration of each group member. Members also valued each other as persons with particular abilities, skills, perceptions, and gifts to share. Behaviors supported increased sharing of those abilities and open affirmation of the importance of individual contributions to the overall group effort. Creativity was expressed by members' willingness and eagerness to seek new ways of dealing with group issues and of viewing their group experience. Risk taking was expressed in decisions to share needs, concerns, and thoughts that might be rejected or not even heard. Behaviors indicated an acceptance of self and others, which enhanced the safety of the group for sharing honest criticism. As members "checked out" their perceptions and feelings with other members away from the faculty practice group setting, support for taking group issues to the group was the norm. In the words of

36   one member, "We didn't leave the group.... We stayed.... We demonstrated our commitment."

LOOKING AT ALTERNATIVES

Power of process

Feminist alternatives[7] proved useful in reviewing and understanding the group process. In contrasting the power of results ("achievement of the goals justifies the use of any means")[7(p7)] and the power of process ("Goals, programs, and timetables are used as tools, but are less important than the process itself.")[7(p7)] Wheeler and Chinn described an ongoing issue for the group. Even as the group worked toward development of the article, members were aware of the importance of the process by which the goal was reached. Group members became clearer about the nature of their values, beliefs, and struggles in relation to process and expressed them more clearly.

Power of the whole

The power of the whole, which values sharing of knowledge and skills and "the flow of new ideas, images and energy from all,"[7(p7)] was identified by all group members as having particular significance for the group process. The variety of experi-

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ences, skills, and ways of understanding and perceiving were recognized as valuable and important aspects of the whole. Valuing the whole involved recognizing that the work involved group thinking, conceptualizing, processing, and energy and that its outcomes represented generation and synthesis of effort and ideas, not merely a compiling of individual input.

Power of collectivity

Related to the power of the whole is the power of collectivity, which values the personal power of each individual and the use of consensus in making decisions in which each member has a part.[7] All group members cited the valuing of every other member as significant to the group process. "In this area we are learning and growing as a group.... We renew our commitment at each meeting." This valuing furthers the development of a safe environment in which persons make explicit their needs, opinions, feelings, and ideas in the process of enriching the fullness of the whole. Group members learn to agree, to disagree, to confront differences without divisiveness, and to trust that they are valued.

Power of sharing

The power of sharing, where leadership changes according to ability, need, interest, and other variables emphasizes the sharing of knowledge and skills to enhance growth.[7] As expressed by a group member, "We've grown as a group and the individuals have grown." The issue of authorship can be considered in light of this feminist alternative. The person who volunteered to begin writing the article and who subsequently assumed a major part of the writ-

ing described her struggle with her own needs versus the group's needs and her need to "let go." She described the transition period when she was "more ready for a variety of reasons to let others assume more responsibility for the writing process." She shared with the group her ideas about group thinking and group effort, which helped members to better understand the validity of the group effort and process.

Power of integration

The power of integration, which encourages the integration of the qualities of self-love with love for others and actions based on respect for each person's "entitlement to self-volition,"[7(p9)] was evident in the efforts of each group member to accept her own needs and to view, as well, needs of the group and individuals within the group. For some group members, the "group process" and relationships were of primary importance; for others, completion of an article was the primary goal. Working out the process of integration made it possible to operate within a "both/and" structure rather than an "either/or" structure and to meet a variety of goals. A both/and framework is based on the belief that qualities that are sometimes seen as mutually exclusive (either/or) can, in fact, coexist and perhaps enhance each other. The group needed the benefit of both "hard thinking" and "soft thinking," that is, of both task focus and process focus, of both doing and thinking, and of both Type A and Type B personalities.

Power of diversity

The power of diversity "encourages creativity, values alternative views, encourages

flexibility, and takes dissenting views into account in decision making."[7(p10)] As the group process evolved, members became increasingly comfortable expressing opinions and feelings, even when they were different from those already expressed or from the majority view. "On the other hand" was heard and heeded more often. The power of diversity also supported the entry and exit of persons to and from the group in ways that acknowledged the contributions of members who had been a part of the process and welcomed the anticipated contributions of new members. Persons entering the group during the writing process were accepted as contributing members whose critiques were recognized as being valuable. Members were increasingly able to state their limitations of time and energy and, at the same time, contribute their support to particular aspects of the process.

Power of responsibility

The power of responsibility, which encourages open criticism and self-criticism motivated by caring for the individual and the group,[7(p10)] grew with the development of the group. Members looked at their own behaviors and asked for feedback and support. Members described this power or responsibility as an ongoing aspect of the group's functioning and one fostered by the safe environment, in which there was a sense of trust. Responsibility of each member as an individual and for the group was a unifying point. This sense of responsibility led members to volunteer for particular aspects of the work, to share limitations at specific times, to offer support in tangible and intangible ways, and to contribute personal best efforts.

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38   TRANSFORMING THE PROCESS

In the face of calls for greater unity and collegiality within the nursing profession, new and different approaches are needed. In discussing the history and philosophy of nursing science and research, Gortner wrote, "The profession surely can accommmodate multiple paradigms ... and modes of inquiry...."[9(p7)] Mac Pherson[10] emphasized the need for a variety of scientific approaches, including qualitative research that complements quantitative studies.

The creation of environments that value differences and within which persons can work together to maximize strengths and encourage mutual support is essential to guarantee that nursing will benefit from the many talents nurses bring to their profession. As nurses learn to recognize excellence in many forms and in a variety of endeavors and to support and nourish the development of excellence through collaborative and collegial relationships, the nursing profession will flourish.

The modern university has been a mainstay of important scientific activity in many fields. Will it also house and nurture the fledgling science of nursing, recognizing its potential and its contributions to date? The answer to that critical question may well accelerate or impede nursing's progress as an academic discipline in the next decade.[9(p7)]

The ability of nurses to work together, to multiply their efforts, to support each other through critique and affirmation, and to create and discover new ways of working together is crucial to the development of the nursing profession. The feminist process can be a useful guide in the search for new ways of working together to create those environments in which creativity, collegiality, and individual and group growth are enhanced.

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