

Chapter 13

Meeting the Needs of Learners of Various Expertise: From Novice to Expert

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After reading this chapter, the participant will be able to:

- Determine teaching strategies using Benner's levels of competency as a framework

In 1984, Patricia Benner, PhD, RN, published the results of a descriptive nursing study that identified five levels of competency in clinical nursing practice (Benner, 1994). Although based on dialogues with nurses, this framework can be applied to almost anyone who works in healthcare. As you plan your programs, think about learner needs based on their experiences in their chosen professions.

Using Benner's Framework for Program Planning

Brief descriptions of each level of learner identified by Benner are offered as a framework to help you plan your learning activities. Following the descriptions, you'll find suggested teaching tips for that level.

Level I: Novice

The novice is a beginner in his or her chosen profession. Novices have no experience as professionals in their work-related environments. They need objective, concrete learning situations and rely

on rules and guidelines to function. Although they possess the intellectual knowledge of academic training, they need opportunities to apply their knowledge as skills in the actual work setting. They also need a supportive environment with mentors who are eager to help colleagues enter the health-care setting.

The term “novice” is often used to describe students. However, for the purpose of this chapter, “novice” refers to the newly licensed nurse who is being oriented to his or her first licensed nursing job. Novices have successfully completed their academic training (including supervised clinical experiences) but have no experience as licensed nurses.

Teaching considerations

- Offer case studies to allow novice learners to practice translating knowledge into practice.
- Encourage mentorships with more-experienced nurses.
- Offer programs that add to learners’ basic knowledge. Develop didactic programs combined with opportunities to discuss translating knowledge into practice to meet their needs.
- Give novice learners opportunities to demonstrate newly acquired psychomotor skills.

NPD alert! Newly licensed nurses are accustomed to (and expect) simulation to be part of their learning activities. They also expect learning on demand via a variety of technological devices. Most NPD departments have already incorporated (or are in the process of incorporating) these types of education strategies. Be aware that novice nurses learn best if they have opportunities to continue learning in the styles to which they are accustomed.

Level II: Advanced beginner

Advanced beginners are able to demonstrate marginally acceptable performance and have successfully completed orientation. They’ve dealt with enough real-life situations to recognize their most meaningful aspects and intervene appropriately in similar situations. They begin to rely on guidelines formed from their own experience but still use the rules they have been taught in the academic setting to a large extent.

New situations often confuse advanced beginners. They don’t have enough experience to cope effectively with new situations and need guidance to do so. Advanced beginners also need help setting priorities.

NPD alert! A teaching/learning priority when working with advanced beginners is to help them recognize recurring patterns of clinical experience even in situations faced for the first time.

Teaching considerations

- Offer advanced-beginner learners activities that give them a chance to use their experiences to acquire new knowledge.
- Offer interactive e-learning, lecture/discussion, case studies, and simulation opportunities to improve organizational skills and prioritize workloads.
- Provide guidance to help them think critically, to recognize recurring patterns in their clinical practice, and to apply knowledge from these patterns to new patient-care situations.
- Provide advanced beginners with mentoring opportunities.

Level III: Competent

Competent clinicians have worked in the same or similar environments for at least two to three years. They view their actions in terms of long-range plans as they organize and prioritize tasks that must be completed.

The competent nurse hasn't yet acquired the speed and flexibility (and confidence) of the proficient nurse. However, these nurses do demonstrate the ability to manage unforeseen events that are part of day-to-day nursing practice. The prominent characteristic of the competent nurse is conscious, deliberate planning of nursing care. This helps them to grow in efficiency and organization.

Teaching considerations

- Give competent-level learners opportunities to develop leadership skills.
- These learners value programs that provide updates and recent advances in their specialties.
- They enjoy interactive learning and more complex case studies than the first two levels.
- Provide simulation opportunities that give them practice in planning, setting priorities, and coordinating nursing care for multiple, complex patients.
- Allow them opportunities to partner with proficient and expert learners (see the following descriptions) during learning activities.

Level IV: Proficient

Proficient clinicians look at situations as a whole rather than breaking them down into guidelines or isolated tasks. They are able to anticipate events in given situations based on their past experiences. They can plan ahead with a fair amount of certainty.

Proficient nurses are able to comprehend clinical situations as a whole because they perceive patient care in terms of long-term goals. The ability to perceive, rather than to rely on rules, is characteristic of the proficient clinician.

Teaching considerations

These learners benefit from learning activities that present a challenge.

- Provide opportunities to develop instincts and intuition by using complex interactive case studies presented via e-learning and/or simulation.
- The previous three levels look to proficient-level staff for assistance. Proficient-level employees need to develop leadership skills, so leadership training is a good idea.
- Provide formal mentorship training.

Level V: Expert

Experts no longer rely on analytic principles, nor do they need to refer to past experiences to grasp the important elements of a situation. Experts have an instinctive, intuitive grasp of each work-related situation. They are able to quickly focus on the crux of a problem and intervene appropriately without considering a large range of alternative solutions.

Teaching considerations

- Experts need to have quick access to advances in their given specialties.
- Experts need to be challenged with simulations of very complex patient cases as well as leadership and management issues.
- They need to implement leadership skills and help others acquire such skills.
- Programs on how to facilitate learning among their colleagues are appropriate.
- Experts must be able to help assess the quality of their colleagues' work.
- Classes on quality management, performance improvement, and management training are appropriate.
- Be alert to boredom and burnout among experts. They need complex clinical and leadership challenges. They also need to be protected from burnout, as their less-experienced colleagues turn to them for guidance and mentoring.

NPD alert! Incorporate characteristics of the various levels of expertise in not only preceptor training but in continuing education activities as appropriate. Such education will help nurses to recognize the strengths and areas for improvement of their colleagues and how to facilitate job performance among all nurses.

NPD alert! The mentor relationship is a valuable one regardless of the level of clinical experience and expertise.

Figure 13.1 summarizes the characteristics of the various levels of expertise and teaching tips for facilitating learning. The figure contains some additional information not presented in the preceding paragraphs.

FIGURE 13.1 TEACHING TIPS FOR NURSES OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERTISE		
Novice Level		
Characteristics	Teaching interventions	Comments/ideas
Has fulfilled the academic and clinical practicum requirements of an accredited school of nursing Beginning practitioner No experience of the real-life situations in which they are expected to perform as a licensed nurse Expects education to be readily available and to have ample opportunities to practice skills via simulation Relies on orientation to effectively help him or her to assimilate into the role of licensed nurse	Explain how rules and guidelines can be used to help recognize patterns of clinical practice and to use this recognition to deal with new clinical and professional situations Offer simulation learning activities that allow for not only practice of psychomotor skills but enhance the ability to think critically Provide adequate preceptor training for those who are orienting newly licensed nurses, including characteristics of the novice learner	
Advanced Beginner Level		
Characteristics	Teaching interventions	Comments/ideas
Has successfully completed orientation Demonstrates marginally acceptable performance Coped with enough real-life situations to identify recurring meaningful components	Provide guidelines for dealing with unfamiliar or unexpected situations Offer simulation learning activities to help advanced beginners learn to set priorities and think critically	

FIGURE 13.1 TEACHING TIPS FOR NURSES OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERTISE (cont.)		
Advanced Beginner Level		
Characteristics	Teaching interventions	Comments/ideas
<p>Is not sure how to handle new situations</p> <p>Treats all challenges as equally important and has difficulty setting priorities</p> <p>Still relies on memorized rules to guide their clinical practice but can be helped to recognize patterns of clinical practice even in new situations</p>	<p>Incorporate characteristics of the advanced beginner into preceptor education</p>	
Competent Level		
Characteristics	Teaching interventions	Comments/ideas
<p>Has worked in the same or similar circumstances for 2–3 years</p> <p>Correlates actions with long-range goals</p> <p>Can deal with complex challenges</p> <p>Plans actions consciously and deliberately</p> <p>Lacks speed and efficiency of proficient nurses</p>	<p>Facilitate the development of leadership skills</p> <p>Provide updates and recent advances in respective clinical specialties</p> <p>Facilitate mentorship opportunities</p> <p>Provide simulation education that gives them practice in planning, setting priorities, and coordinating nursing care for multiple, complex patients</p>	
Proficient Level		
Characteristics	Teaching interventions	Comments/ideas
<p>Is able to perceive a clinical situation as a whole rather than individual aspects</p> <p>Can anticipate challenges that occur in various clinical situations</p> <p>Can revise plans in response to on-the-spot changes in such situations</p> <p>Can make long-range plans and prioritize needs</p>	<p>Offer opportunities to acquire and enhance leadership skills</p> <p>Facilitate perusal of graduate education and/or management training</p> <p>Enhance knowledge and skills by providing complex interactive case studies presented via e-learning and/or simulation</p>	

FIGURE 13.1 | TEACHING TIPS FOR NURSES OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERTISE (cont.)

Expert Level		
Characteristics	Teaching interventions	Comments/ideas
Does not need rules or guidelines Performs intuitively Bases all aspects of practice on evidence Swiftly grasps the complexity of a situation and takes immediate action to correct or improve situations as needed May become bored and unable to identify new opportunities May become burned out as less experienced NPD practitioners ask for help and advice	Recognize signs of burnout and frustration and intervene Offer opportunities to assume responsibility for projects at the upper management level Education should involve presentation of very complex clinical situations Facilitate perusal of graduate or post-graduate education Encourage the use of research findings to identify benchmarks and best practices	

NPD alert for those with organizationwide education responsibilities! Managers and leaders of all departments, not only nursing, may benefit from a study of Benner’s levels of expertise. These levels can be adapted for all types of clinicians.

Reference

Benner, P. (1984). *From Novice to Expert*. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.