

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Supporting professional development for early career pre-tenure nursing faculty using Narrative Reflective Process

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Early career, pre-tenure nursing faculty face significant challenges as they navigate the demands of academia, particularly during their first year. While there is growing research about pre-tenure faculty needs, specific insights into early career nursing faculty, especially in Canada, is limited. It is also not known how professional development strategies such as Schwind's Narrative Reflective Process (NRP) could facilitate integration into academia and support professional growth. The purpose of this article is to explore the application of NRP as a professional development tool for nursing faculty during their first year of a tenure-track position.

**Methods:** At a large urban school of nursing in Canada, four pre-tenure nursing faculty members in their first year of appointment engaged in a series of collaborative, professional development exercises guided by a senior faculty member using NRP. A composite reflection was analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

**Results:** Six themes emerged from the faculty members' experiences using NRP: needing time to reflect, learning process, creative process, sharing experiences and finding our unique path, experiencing emotions, and looking forward.

**Discussion:** This article highlights the experiences of NRP on early career nursing faculty. Findings reveal the need for dedicated reflection time to foster emotional engagement. Creative activities deepened insights into faculty identities, while sharing experiences fostered community and collaboration. Faculty expressed enthusiasm for applying NRP in future educational and research contexts, recognizing its value for ongoing professional development.

**Conclusion:** NRP is a promising tool to promote professional development in early career tenure-track nursing faculty in academia.

**Key Words:** Early-career, Novice, Nursing faculty, Narrative Reflective Process, Pre-tenure, Professional development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview of early-career nursing faculty

The role of early career, pre-tenure nursing faculty in academia can be challenging, particularly during the first year.<sup>[1-3]</sup> The tenure-track process is inherently demanding, with faculty being responsible for balancing multiple roles

including teaching, conducting research, and contributing to service activities such as committee work and community engagement, all the while trying to integrate into the new academic setting.<sup>[4,5]</sup> This stress is further intensified for nursing faculty who have family responsibilities, particularly those with young children at home, and whose nursing educa-

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tion did not specifically prepare them for the responsibilities of an academic role.<sup>[1]</sup> Tenure-track nursing faculty have reported greater levels of exhaustion and burnout compared to non-tenure track faculty.<sup>[6]</sup> This demanding workload, coupled with the pressure to achieve tenure, creates a high-stress environment that can impact nursing faculty recruitment and retention.<sup>[7]</sup>

Transitioning from the role of a nurse clinician and graduate student to that of a tenure-track faculty member creates additional challenges for nursing faculty. Often arriving as expert clinicians, new nursing faculty now must assume the role of a novice academic, which can lead to feelings of uncertainty and stress.<sup>[1,3,8]</sup> Benner's<sup>[9]</sup> "Novice to Expert" framework offers insight into the transition from expert clinician to novice nurse educator and researcher. This shift requires nursing faculty to adapt their clinical knowledge and skills to the specific demands of teaching students, conducting research, and engaging in scholarly activities—each of which presents unique challenges. For example, teaching requires developing pedagogical expertise, research demands proficiency in inquiry and analysis, and scholarship involves contributing to the broader academic community.<sup>[1]</sup> As pre-tenure nursing faculty navigate this transition, they progress through stages of increasing competence and confidence in their evolving academic roles. However, new nursing faculty often lack sufficient knowledge and preparation for the complex and multifaceted role of the nurse-academic, requiring time and support to adapt to this new context.<sup>[10]</sup> Support from colleagues can have a positive impact for pre-tenured nursing faculty by fostering connections, strengthening expertise and clarifying future professional directions.<sup>[11]</sup> Mentorship has been noted as a facilitator in developing a program of research for tenure track nursing faculty in Canada.<sup>[12,13]</sup>

While there is a growing body of research about the needs and experiences of pre-tenure- faculty in general, a recent scoping review found that there is limited research specific to novice nursing faculty, particularly in Canada.<sup>[4]</sup> Additionally, there is limited understanding how professional development can help nursing faculty navigate their early careers, manage their responsibilities, and integrate into academic environments.<sup>[14]</sup> One promising approach to support the professional development of new tenure-track nursing faculty is the use of Narrative Reflective Process (NRP).<sup>[15,16]</sup>

### 1.2 Use of the narrative reflective process for professional development

NRP, which is informed by Narrative Inquiry qualitative research approach,<sup>[17]</sup> uses creative self-expression approaches, such as storytelling, metaphors, drawing, and reflective dia-

logue, amongst others, to make visible the intersections of personal-professional experiences.<sup>[16,18]</sup> This creative process thus serves to facilitate increased self-awareness and personal discovery, both of which lead to expanded ways of knowing, being, and doing.<sup>[15,16,19-21]</sup> More specifically, creative self-expression facilitates the development of personal and aesthetic ways of knowing, qualities integral to holistic care and education.<sup>[21,22]</sup>

NRP may be used in a variety of ways, recognizing the holistic nature of education, practice and research. For example, in research, it may be used as a data collection tool, allowing data to emerge from creative self-expression through images, metaphors, and stories. As a teaching tool, NRP may be used to engage students in creative activities that allow them to more fully grasp the new concept, deducing relations where none were evident before, thereby deepening their understanding and expanding their knowledge. As a professional development tool, it may be used to facilitate reflective practice and holistic patient care.<sup>[21]</sup> NRP has been successfully used by other faculty at our school of nursing to explore experiences of developing a faculty research cluster with the aim of nurturing faculty creativity and enhancing scholarship production.<sup>[23]</sup> By incorporating NRP into professional development programs for novice nursing faculty, it is our intention to create an environment that nurtures creativity and critical thinking while supporting faculty to manage the complexities of their roles and achieving a balanced approach to their professional responsibilities.

### 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this article is to explore the application of NRP as a professional development tool for novice nursing faculty during their first year of a tenure-track position at a large, urban Canadian university.

Research Ethics Board approval was not required for this collaborative reflective activity as this was a professional development exercise. All faculty, including the facilitator, are co-authors of this reflective report.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Narrative reflective process

As previously noted, the theoretical foundation of NRP is rooted in Narrative Inquiry,<sup>[17]</sup> which is philosophically underpinned by Dewey's<sup>[24]</sup> thinking on experience. More specifically, "*experience happens in a place or places over time, and in a relationship, which may be within oneself and/or with others*".<sup>[25]</sup> Connelly and Clandinin<sup>[26]</sup> identify these as three dimensions of experience, or commonplace. Although all three dimensions of experience are part of NRP activities, Dewey's<sup>[24]</sup> belief that every experience builds

upon the previous experience and that through intentional reflection, individuals can make informed choices, figures prominently. Schwind et al.<sup>[20]</sup> elaborate that “*this philosophical perspective supports one of the key tenets of the narrative reflective process: our experiences inform who we were, are now and have the potential to become in the future*”. In this professional development activity, we engaged pre-tenure faculty members in their first year of appointment in creative self expression using the NRP tool.

## 2.2 NRP process and timeline

Four new faculty members from a large, urban nursing school in Toronto, Canada (Barbara, Sue, Erin and Charlene) participated in a collaborative, professional development exercise with Jasna, a senior faculty member who developed NRP.<sup>[15, 16]</sup> The aim of this exercise was to learn about the NRP process as well as its use in data collection, teaching, research and professional development. Jasna guided and mentored the group through this process. Over the course of three months (June to August 2020), due to the pandemic, our group met monthly in a virtual platform to engage in different NRP exercises, with each session lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. Each faculty member attended every session, which involved completing a Lifeline Activity, Narrative Reflection and Life Metaphor. These exercises allowed us to take the time to ask

ourselves questions about our new role as nursing faculty, such as: *Where have I been? Where am I now? Where am I going?* The amount of preparation time for each faculty member was individualized, with each person determining how much time they wished to dedicate to their reflective work. Faculty members were informed that the more time and effort they invest in the exercises, the greater the return in terms of personal insight and growth.

## 2.3 NRP activities

Before we began the NRP activities, Jasna provided information about the process and how it could unfold. We were reminded that this was a voluntary, creative process and that there was not one ‘right’ way of doing this, and not one ‘correct’ response. We also established group norms to create a safe learning space for all. We committed to the following group process: 1) maintaining confidentiality of all discussions 2) addressing any concerns that arise within the group as soon as possible with respect, care and kindness; 3) agreeing that we are engaging in the NRP for the purposes of professional development. We first engaged in individual activities, and then as a group. We were invited to share to the level of our comfort to ensure everyone’s sense of safety was honoured. Each of these activities is described in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Description of NRP Activities

NRP Activity	Activity Description
Lifeline Activity	<p>Each person constructed/drew our own lifeline to immerse ourselves in past experiences. Specific Lifeline steps may be found at: <a href="http://www.theartofexperience.ca">www.theartofexperience.ca</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We each drew our own lifeline reflecting time from birth to the current date. The line was to represent personal and professional events/milestones/relationships. Professional events were noted above the line and personal milestones below the line.</li> <li>We identified 2-3 events that were of particular significance to us and wrote a story about each of these events noting any patterns, such as repeating words, ideas, themes etc.</li> <li>We shared our individual reflections with the group identifying how the stories inform who we are today as novice nursing professors.</li> </ul>
Narrative Reflection	<p>Following the group sharing from the lifeline experience, each group member wrote a free-flowing individual narrative reflection about how we experienced the sharing session. In reflecting, we were asked to describe the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The context of the session, as if we were writing a friend about it.</li> <li>How we experienced today's session e.g., our thoughts, feelings and perceptions.</li> <li>Our view of NRP from when we first heard about it to now: if it has changed in any way, and if so, how.</li> </ol> <p>Faculty then emailed the individual reflections to [removed for blind peer review], for her to craft a composite reflection.</p>
Life Metaphor	<p>We were asked to select a metaphor that best represents our life to us. Following, we reflected on this activity and were invited to notice how the metaphor plays out in our everyday life. Our reflections were captured in a simple journal, which could consist of selected words, a poem, a story or an image. The journal entries were for personal use only. We were then guided to have the Life Metaphor write us a letter, imaging as though our metaphor were writing to us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The letter would start with, Dear X, for example and be signed off by our selected metaphor.</li> <li>We were asked to consider what our metaphor would tell us if it could speak?</li> <li>We were invited to write freely without the logical mind censorship and see what advice/message/wisdom we ‘received’.</li> </ul> <p>This letter was for our own learning (self-awareness and personal development). At the final meeting, we were invited to share to the level of our comfort about our experiences of engaging in this exercise, but not the content of our letter.</p>

## 2.4 Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to summarize the data.<sup>[27]</sup> Exploration of the composite reflection was done with all co-authors to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis. We coded the composite reflection to identify key themes describing the use of NRP for professional development in academia. Six themes emerged from the analysis of the composite reflection, as detailed below.

## 2.5 Development of the composite reflection

A composite reflection was created by Jasna, using only the words written in individual reflections. This composite reflection was based on a synthesis of each individual written reflection to represent our collective experiences as new tenure-track faculty members (see NRP Activity 2, Table 1). Composite reflections give individuals a voice, while allowing for confidentiality and anonymity.<sup>[22,28,29]</sup> Jasna created the composite reflection by 1) reading individual reflections several times to become familiar with each reflection; 2) excerpting pieces of writing from each reflection into logical groupings 3) reading the entire document and sculpting it into one cohesive story that held all of our voices, without singling anyone out. This step took several iterations. Ultimately, four and a half pages of writing were streamlined into a two-page document. The intention was to include as much detail as possible while maintaining individual anonymity where we were not be able to recognize others' comments. The final draft was reviewed and approved by all group members. As noted earlier, the goal of the composite story/reflection is to reflect some aspects of each group member, where each person can see themselves in the story. This was achieved.

## 3. RESULTS

The below composite reflection is broken into four parts that coincide with the: experiences of engaging in NRP, descriptions of engaging in the Lifeline Activity, descriptions of engaging in Life Metaphor activity, and future uses of NRP.

### 3.1 Experiences of engaging in NRP

*Today I have some quiet time, some 'me' time. No one is home to interrupt or need my attention. I need this time. I need alone time to recharge and reset. So, it is the perfect time to reflect on my experience of engaging in Narrative Reflective Process (NRP). NRP is a form of deep reflective practice, which allows us to explore who we are, where we have come from, and where we could go, both personally and professionally. NRP is a process – one in which we continue to evolve as individuals and professionals. I don't think it is necessarily an easy process. I think the more that we put into it, the more we will receive back from the process itself.*

*I was unsure of what to expect and did not have any concrete expectations. However, I believe this uncertainty is part of the process and the point of this approach. I am trying in earnest to learn how to feel comfortable with discomfort. This is indeed such a big learning curve for me. I am not used to this creative scholarly output, but I must admit, I am enjoying it.*

*I cannot help but again feel as if I am coming in with a very different mind view from others. It is tiring to have the internal debate on how much I want to share. I find the limitations of a video call are apparent, as there is little opportunity to read body language and feel truly present. It is challenging to gauge the degree to which my colleagues are engaged with what we are each saying. I ask myself as I speak: "Am I talking too much? Too little? Is this boring? Should I stop talking now?" For me, these thoughts are proving especially intrusive and distracting.*

*But deep down, I know all my colleagues are human and have their own highs and lows. I realize we all have a lot that is on the 'underside of the iceberg'. As colleagues, there is a lot we do not know about each other. So, it is important to support one another, while respecting privacy. Thinking back, because the session was so intimate and we were invited to share only what we felt comfortable sharing, I felt safe to engage in NRP and welcomed the opportunity. I trust the process, and I want to challenge myself and learn from and together with my colleagues. I felt honoured to listen to my colleagues' stories.*

### 3.2 Descriptions of engaging in the lifeline activity

*Prior to completing the homework, which involved creating my lifeline and writing a story of significant life events in my life, I felt a slight tinge of apprehension because I am not very comfortable with drawing and writing my personal stories. I tend to be insular and largely cautious in exposing aspects of my personal self, outside of people I know and trust. I think this really depends on my own inner confidence, which has its ups and downs. Sometimes I don't like to talk about my 'downs' because it makes me feel exposed and less confident.*

*At the beginning of the session, I was eager to hear everyone's stories, yet I felt slightly self-conscious and intimidated by the brilliance of my colleagues. I wondered if the imposter syndrome ever goes away completely. However, sharing my lifeline and seeing the lifelines of my colleagues highlighted some of the similar journeys we have been on: motherhood, migration, nursing, academics. For example, I was completely engrossed to hear my colleague's passion and commitment to learning how best to support vulnerable clients.*

*Her story moved me personally, because I am deeply drawn to work with vulnerable people who are facing barriers to accessing healthcare.*

*The lifeline activity helped me see more clearly why I am passionate about and focused on research and education related to nursing work environments, interprofessional practice, and workforce development. I also felt quite excited that, in the process of creating the lifeline and writing the personal and profession stories, I discovered a connection between my childhood and my area of research. It is a real privilege to hear the stories of my colleagues, and I am thankful for their willingness to move through this process together as a unit. I realize others are also experiencing discomfort with bringing down walls.*

*The lifeline exercise enabled me to see the intertwining of personal and professional life events that have led me to where and who I am today. Sharing in our group was fine because we have created a safe space to do so. I think people tend to compare themselves to others, which may invoke various feelings – sometimes inadequacy and other times a sense of normalcy. We are diverse individuals with different professional and personal backgrounds none of which is better than the other – sharing our stories allows us to see this and to get to know one another better, as this is an important step in developing trust and respect for working effectively together.*

### **3.3 Descriptions of engaging in life metaphor activity**

*When we were asked to draw a metaphor, I again felt slightly intimidated, but knew this wasn't any kind of competition. Thinking metaphorically is different for me. I am a very pragmatic thinker, so thinking this way is a stretch; but it is valuable to reflect on how a chosen metaphor reflects who we are. It was about exploring and understanding ourselves better so we can be better teachers and researchers. Even though I knew we needed to draw a metaphor and knew what a metaphor was, when I put my pencil on the paper, I drew a very simplistic picture and went back to my stories to pull out recurring words. My metaphor resonated with me and truly spoke to my life's path, sometimes smooth, other times bumpy.*

### **3.4 Future uses of NRP**

*This NRP session made me feel even more validated to continue with my research. I am so glad that I trusted my instincts to complete my PhD in an area that was new, but one that I was so deeply passionate about. As we move forward with this work and with the intention to fully engage, I find NRP to require more emotional labour than I had initially anticipated. I believe this balance of emotional labour as I*

*move through the process will require patience and thoughtfulness. I will look to my colleagues to hear how they are handling this reflective work.*

*I'm still not hundred percent comfortable with exploring my feelings through NRP, but I am willing to work on this. I am even more committed to learn about how I can use this process with my students and possibly research participants. I've learned that this process does not need to be 'follow the exact recipe' – there is variation because each group dynamic is different. NRP also takes time - I liked the comment that 'if you force a flower to open before it is ready, it will be damaged. This makes a lot of sense to me and will be helpful if I use NRP in the future with students or participants.*

*This creative process of exploring our experiences is incredibly fascinating and not at all what I expected. I assumed we would be just reflecting on our first year as new faculty. However, after this past week's project and discussion I have come to realize how my life and experiences have shaped that first year. Reflecting on the lifeline really highlights how those experiences have influenced the way I teach, engage with students and colleagues, my program of research and clinical practice.*

*I believe in lifelong learning for personal and professional development. I continue to pursue opportunities to develop as an educator to inform new and innovative ways of teaching others. I am interested in exploring how NRP itself can be used as both an educational and a research strategy to continue to build new knowledge. I believe that it will provide us with new learnings about ourselves, about how we can engage with students in different ways and how we can add to our own toolbox of research approaches. While we are still early in the journey, I am looking forward to what lies ahead.*

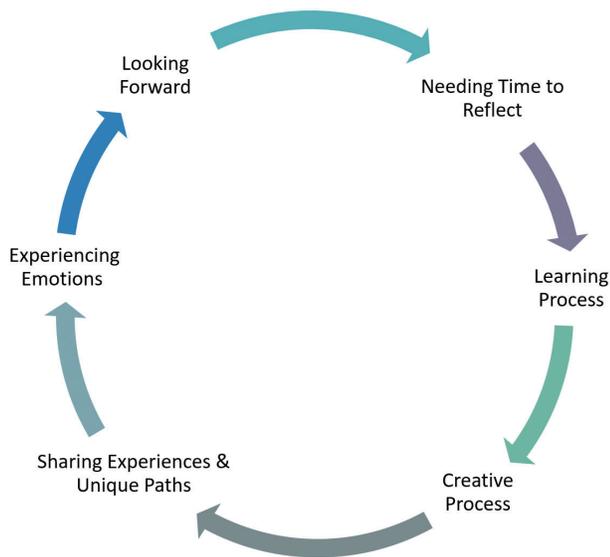
### **3.5 Themes**

The following six themes from the composite reflection identify the experiences of using NRP for personal-professional development. They reveal an unfolding progression over the course of the sessions, which suggests a gradual and dynamic growth that occurred in an iterative manner (see Figure 1).

#### **3.5.1 Needing time to reflect**

Faculty emphasized the importance of needing time to engage in NRP and described the process as one that requires time to focus and reflect on one's experiences: *"I need this time. I need alone time to recharge and reset. So, it is the perfect time to reflect on my experience."* The notion of taking time and not rushing the process was also reflected *"NRP also takes time - I liked the comment that 'if you force a flower to open before it is ready, it will be damaged'."* Sim-

ilarly, NRP was recognized as a slow process that requires “patience and thoughtfulness”.



**Figure 1.** Narrative Reflective Process Themes from Early Career, Pre-Tenure Nursing Faculty

**3.5.2 Learning process**

Being introduced to NRP was new to all faculty members. None had previously engaged in this form of reflection, but all were open to learning and engaging with colleagues to explore this professional development exercise as tenure-track faculty. Faculty described that engaging in NRP was a way to “challenge myself and learn from and together with my colleagues” and “pursue opportunities to develop as an educator to inform new and innovative ways of teaching others.” Similarly, faculty discussed not being “100% comfortable with exploring myself and my inner feelings through NRP... however I am even more committed to learn about how I can use this process in the future with my students and possibly research participant.” Although the process was new for all, there was a sense of trusting in the process to allow our learning to unfold.

NRP was described by faculty as a form of learning having a “big learning curve” that “required more emotional labour” than initially anticipated. NRP is a “form of deep reflective practice to allow us to think more deeply about who we are and where we have come from both personally and professionally.” Further, NRP was alluded to as a process in which “we continue to evolve as individuals and professionals. I don’t think it is necessarily an easy process. I think the more that you put into it, the more you will receive back from the process itself.” NRP was recognized as having some guidance and structure, yet it was also noted that the process may vary depending on the group engaging in the process, “I’ve

learned that this process does not need to ‘follow the exact recipe’ – there is variation because each group dynamic is different.”

**3.5.3 Creative process**

Engaging in NRP was both a learning process and a creative process, something different from our usual way of learning. Faculty described that “this creative process of exploring our experiences is incredibly fascinating and not at all what I expected.” The structured activities of creating a timeline, writing the personal/professional stories and life metaphor and enabled further understanding of ourselves as educators and researchers, such as discovering “a connection between my childhood and my area of research.”

Creating the metaphor allowed faculty to think differently about how we understand who we are and where we have come from in our personal and professional journeys. “Thinking metaphorically is different for me – I am a very pragmatic thinker so thinking this way is a stretch, but it is valuable to reflect on why a chosen metaphor represents who we are.” Reflecting on the timeline deepened our understanding of how our personal and professional life experiences have influenced “the way I teach, engage with students and colleagues, my program of research and clinical practice.”

**3.5.4 Sharing experiences and finding our unique path**

NRP involved a sharing of experiences and stories among the group members. There was a sense of privilege among faculty members of being able to share our personal and professional stories with each other acknowledging the willingness of all to engage fully in the process together as a unit/group. The sharing of experiences and stories “highlighted some of the similar journeys we have been on motherhood, migration, nursing, academics.” It also helped faculty to understand our own journeys and those of our colleagues created a sense of respect for each other’s expertise and work. Every experience and program of research is varied but unique to and important to the nursing profession in different ways: We are diverse individuals with different professional and personal backgrounds none of which is better than the other – sharing our stories allows us to see this and to get to know one another better, as this is an important step in developing trust and respect for working effectively together.

**3.5.5 Experiencing emotions**

Participating in the NRP evoked a variety of emotions among faculty. There was a mix of excitement and uncertainty. The excitement was about learning something new and hearing everyone’s stories yet there was also a sense of uncertainty and discomfort about what to expect as part of the process. For example:

*I was unsure of what to expect and indeed, did not have any*

*concrete expectations of what would come about with the NRP method. I believe this uncertainty is part of the process and the point of this approach however, and am trying to learn, in earnest, to feel comfortable with discomfort.*

The notion of not being comfortable with the NRP approach was also expressed and not feeling “*very comfortable with drawing and writing my personal stories.*” In addition, faculty expressed a sense of feeling self-conscious during the NRP, stating “*I was eager to hear everyone’s stories, yet I felt slightly self-conscious and intimidated by the brilliance of my colleagues*” and “*I have a tendency to be insular and largely cautious in exposing aspects of my personal self-outside of a handful of people I know and trust.*” A final but important feeling expressed was the notion of feeling “*safe to engage in NRP.*” Faculty specifically recognized the efforts of the facilitator to create a safe space for learning.

### 3.5.6 Looking forward

Faculty made reference to the notion of looking forward to what lies next in terms of how we could use NRP going forward as “*both an educational and research strategy to build new knowledge*”. NRP was valued as a new skill/approach which could be used to help us become “*better teachers and researchers.*” In this way, using NRP provided us with an opportunity for our own professional development in our new academic roles.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Findings from this experience highlight the positive impact of NRP on the professional development of early career, pre-tenure nursing faculty members in a large urban university. Professional development for early career nursing faculty has been shown to be a vital means for enhancing confidence and competence in academic roles.<sup>[30]</sup> Through this experience, NRP served as a critical tool for fostering an environment conducive to creative and holistic reflection, honouring mind-body-emotion/spirit. Faculty members were able to explore their experiences, values, and goals, which helped identify areas for growth. NRP provided a structured yet flexible framework for reflection, enabling faculty to articulate their experiences and gain insights into their professional journeys.

NRP not only enhanced self-awareness but also fostered a supportive community where faculty could exchange ideas, understand each other in new ways, appreciating our uniqueness and our commonality. Through this creative holistic reflective exercise, we were able to recognize our value and contribution to the school and to the profession, despite being ‘new faculty’. In essence, it helped to normalize our individual experiences as new faculty.

The act of sharing personal stories and experiences fostered a sense of community among group members. This collective narrative building enhanced relationships, deepened mutual understanding, and cultivated respect for diverse backgrounds and research trajectories. NRP thus served as a powerful mechanism for promoting collaboration and support among novice faculty, which is crucial for navigating the challenges of early academic careers.<sup>[10]</sup> This collaborative environment reinforced the notion that academic growth is a shared journey. These findings build on Metersky et al.’s<sup>[31]</sup> study that used Narrative Inquiry with a specific focus on self-study, which highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of collaboration and support among new nursing faculty members.

Guidance by a tenured faculty member with expertise in NRP and early career nursing faculty proved to be a very beneficial and supportive learning experience. Not only were the pre-tenure faculty able to learn about NRP firsthand as a creative self-expression tool, but by engaging in this reflective dialogue, faculty developed insight into ways to improve their teaching, research practices, and overall academic performance. Faculty members emphasized that engaging in NRP required an intentional pause from their hectic schedules, allowing for a deeper exploration of their experiences. As Schwind et al.<sup>[20]</sup> explain, metaphoric reflection has the potential to be a useful and powerful tool to creatively “access the intangible nuances of our lives”.

Importantly, the reflective dialogue positioned faculty members to navigate the complexities of academic life with greater confidence. The increased self-awareness gained through this process helped to align professional practices with personal values and long-term career aspirations. This alignment is crucial for sustaining motivation and passion in academia, especially in the face of challenges such as job pressures and the demands of tenure-track expectations.<sup>[4, 10, 12]</sup> The value of working with expert colleagues and researchers and obtaining mentorship and support from senior colleagues has been shown to have a positive effect on pre-tenure faculty.<sup>[1, 12]</sup> For example, McPherson and Wendler<sup>[32]</sup> found that establishing a mentoring program could enhance the retention of qualified nursing faculty. By providing guidance and personalized support, mentoring programs could help pre-tenure faculty navigate the complexities of academic life, from teaching responsibilities to research expectations, ultimately contributing to their growth and success within their institution.

Participating faculty also recognized NRP as a novel learning opportunity that required emotional labor, trust in the process, and a commitment to self-exploration. While some faculty

members struggled with vulnerability, others appreciated the safe space created by the facilitator. This balance of emotions is an important consideration for designing effective reflective practices, as a supportive environment can significantly impact faculty's willingness to engage authentically. While initially uncomfortable, many faculty members found value in this vulnerability, suggesting that embracing discomfort can lead to significant personal and professional growth. This aligns with literature suggesting that reflective practices can foster resilience and adaptability in academia.<sup>[3,11]</sup>

The creative aspects of NRP, including the use of timelines and metaphors, facilitated unique insights into personal and professional identities. Faculty members expressed excitement about discovering connections between their past experiences and their current research interests. This creative engagement not only enriched their understanding of themselves as educators and researchers but also highlighted the potential of integrating artistic approaches into academic reflection, ultimately enhancing scholarship and academic productivity.<sup>[23]</sup>

Looking ahead, faculty expressed enthusiasm about the potential applications of NRP for both educational and research purposes as well as with their students. Following Dewey's<sup>[24]</sup> philosophy we came to appreciate that who we are as persons informs who we are as researchers and teachers. Since faculty's engagement in NRP activities, they have made attempts to bring aspects of their learning into various professional endeavors. However, they recognize that for more in-depth application of NRP into their respective roles, further theoretical and experiential learning would be beneficial.

#### 4.1 Implications and recommendations

Building on the results from a recent literature review, academic institutions should implement specific measures to intentionally support pre-tenure nursing faculty.<sup>[33]</sup> NRP is a useful process to support novice tenure-track faculty within their first years starting a position at an academic institution. There is the potential to use NRP in faculty orientation programs, ongoing professional development, career development and planning. Reflecting on our career paths to date and engaging in the NRP activities enabled us to gain a better understanding of ourselves as new researchers and teachers. For example, we can better understand how our research aligns with who we are as individuals and clarify our passions for the scholarly work in which we are engaged. This process could also be used as a series of workshops for graduate students seeking tenure track faculty positions.

As academic institutions seek to cultivate supportive environ-

ments for new nursing faculty, the integration of NRP into faculty orientation and ongoing professional development initiatives is recommended. For example, NRP could be used to inform annual reports and the development of tenure dossiers. This approach not only aids in individual reflection but also enhances the collective resilience and collaboration among faculty, ultimately contributing to a vibrant academic culture. Additionally, a mentoring program that incorporates NRP could offer tenure-track nursing faculty a valuable opportunity to engage in thoughtful self-examination, fostering both personal and professional growth. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of NRP on faculty retention and professional satisfaction, as well as its applicability to graduate student training programs. By prioritizing reflective practices like NRP, academic institutions can better support the development of future nurse educators and researchers.

#### 4.2 Limitations

This reflective professional development project had some specific limitations that could possibly preclude it from being widely implemented. First, the reflective process was time-intensive, requiring a facilitator with both expertise in NRP and the ability to effectively guide participants through creative and often vulnerable self-exploration. Also, the success of the project was heavily dependent on the facilitator's skill in navigating these complexities. Additionally, the effectiveness of the process relied on participants' openness to deeply engage with their fears, hopes, and aspirations regarding their professional journeys. This willingness to explore personal and sometimes uncomfortable emotions may have varied among participants, potentially affecting the depth and richness of the data collected.

### 5. CONCLUSION

NRP has demonstrated significant potential as a transformative tool for the professional development of early career, pre-tenure nursing faculty. By fostering a structured yet safe, flexible and adaptable environment for reflection, NRP has enabled faculty to explore their personal experiences, values, and goals, facilitating both individual growth and community building within an academic context. The emphasis on shared narratives has helped normalize the challenges faced by novice faculty, reinforcing the understanding that their diverse experiences are valuable to the institution and the nursing profession. Moreover, leadership and role modelling by a senior faculty member enhanced the NRP experience, providing early career faculty with guidance and support to navigate the complexities of academia. The insights gained from this reflective dialogue have not only strengthened confidence and competence in teaching and research practices but have also aligned faculty members' professional endeavors

with their personal values and aspirations.

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## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Drs. Chyzy, Bookey-Bassett and Schwind conceived this project. Dr. Schwind was responsible for the design and preparation of the professional development activities. All authors participated in data analysis. Drs. Chyzy, Bookey-Bassett, and Schwind drafted the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed equally to this project.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## INFORMED CONSENT

All participant data were from the article co-authors, all of whom provided informed consent.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## DATA SHARING STATEMENT

No additional data are available.

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