Developing a Learner-Directed, Learner-Paced Activity

abstract

The American Nurses Credentialing Center Primary Accreditation Program manual has for many years included the concept of learner-directed, learner-paced activities. However, due to many logistical challenges, this type of activity has not been implemented. In 2014, one organization successfully piloted the process. The methodology for developing this type of activity is explained in this article.


Learner-directed, learner-paced activities are defined by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC, 2013) as those in which “the learner takes the initiative in identifying his or her learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. The learner also determines the pace at which the learning activity is engaged” (p. 103). Learner-directed, learner-paced activities have been included as educational options in the ANCC Primary Accreditation Program manuals for many years. Historically, these lived in the domain of accredited approvers, so individuals were required to seek out nurse peer review leaders in accredited approver units to implement an individualized plan. However, this created several difficulties for learners, not the least of which was that individual nurses were not familiar with approver units or the processes to make this experience a reality. In addition, approver units did not have the infrastructure or resources to provide assistance to individual nurses who might request such an opportunity.

With publication of the ANCC 2013 manual, the opportunity for learner-directed, learner-paced activities was moved into the scope and authority of an accredited or approved provider unit. This enabled learners to work one-to-one with a nurse planner to develop a personalized learning experience for which contact hours could be awarded. To the best of our knowledge, no provider unit has developed this type of learning activity.

The nurse peer review leader (P.S.D.) for the Montana Nurses Association approver unit was approached in fall 2013 by the primary nurse planner (J.A.C.) from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, which comanages the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC), with a request for consideration of a learner-directed, learner-paced opportunity for one of the nurses in her hospital. The authors decided to work on a process to facilitate this request.

DEVELOPING THE ACTIVITY PLAN

The following key points were considered in developing the activity plan:

- All accreditation program criteria needed to be met, regardless of the format of the learning activity.
- A provider unit nurse planner needed to guide the process.
- All contact hour issues needed to be finalized prior to the learner engaging in the educational experience, as retroactive awarding of contact hours is not acceptable.

The authors developed a tool to provide evidence for the activity file. It included categories of demographic data, assessment of learner needs, and educational design principles. Demographic data included the title of the learning experience, the name and credentials of the learner, the ex-
pected date(s) of the activity, and the date the tool was completed. In the assessment section, the learner was asked to complete a series of open-ended questions. These included the self-assessed need for the proposed educational experience, including why this particular experience was considered important to the learner’s professional practice; how this identified need came about (e.g., reflection on personal practice, surveying peers or managers, reviewing quality studies, reviewing trends in health care); and the anticipated outcome, stated in measurable terms. To help the nurse planner work with the learner in analyzing the identified gap, the learner was asked the following questions:

- On the basis of your planned outcome, where do you currently rate yourself in your knowledge, skills, and/or ability to apply this information? (Current state.)
- On the basis of your planned outcome, how do you feel you will be able to apply this knowledge, skill, and/or ability to your practice after participating in this educational experience? (Desired state.)
- In what ways do you anticipate that participation in this learning activity will assist you in making the transition from the current state to the desired state?

After discussing the responses to the above questions with the ANMC nurse planner, the learner was then asked to provide some structure around the planned learning experience, such as the nature of the experience itself, awareness that the activity is based on best evidence, data to support that the activity is free from bias or commercial control, and justification for the amount of time expected to be spent.

Finally, the nurse planner provided input to address the relevance of the educational experience for the learner, the importance of the experience for the learner’s professional development, the evidence of the integrity of the educational experience, and the number of and rationale for contact hours to be awarded on completion. At that point, the learner was given the approval to engage in the activity.

**POSTACTIVITY EVALUATION**

The learner was asked to provide evaluation data to the nurse planner within 2 weeks of completion of the activity. The evaluation questions included:

- What is your overall evaluation of the learning experience? How did it meet or not meet your expectations?
- How will this experience assist your professional development as an RN?
- On the basis of the outcome expectations identified in the planning phase, what measurable data do you have to demonstrate success?
- Is there a variation between the identified outcome expectations and the actual outcome expectations? If so, please explain.

In addition to submission of this information, the learner was asked to provide any objective evidence that may have been received (e.g., a letter from a project leader) to support the learner’s engagement. After reviewing all of the evaluation data, the nurse planner documented the number of contact hours awarded and issued the certificate to the learner.

**APPLICATION IN PRACTICE**

The nurse planner met with the learner to discuss the process. The learner was an RN who was certified in critical care and trauma nursing. She identified an opportunity to expand and enrich her skills in prehospital trauma care that would improve outcomes for patients in the hospital’s emergency department and critical care areas.

In addition to improvements based on her own care delivery, the learner anticipated that she would be able to use her new skills to educate other emergency department staff, as well as the families who provide initial support for loved ones while waiting for trained medical personnel to arrive. The nurse was able to identify specific situations within the past 2 weeks where her lack of knowledge and skill impacted patient care (current state) and what she saw that she could do differently with a stronger knowledge base and skill set (desired state).

After participating in the educational experience, the learner evaluated the activity as highly effective in providing practical tools that were immediately implemented in practice. At the time of the 2-week evaluation, the learner had not had the opportunity to implement the planned teaching experiences to other staff and the families of patients, although those activities were still part of her professional development plan. Both the learner and nurse planner positively evaluated the overall experience with a learner-pace, learner-directed activity.

**SUMMARY**

Using existing criteria for quality educational design, the ANMC-approved provider unit was able to effectively create a learner-paced, learner-directed educational experience that supported improvement in patient care and enhanced the professional development of the RN. Key questions during both the design and evaluation phases enabled the nurse planner to work with the learner to ensure adherence to criteria, yet allow for creativity in crafting an educational experience that was timely and valuable.

**REFERENCE**

American Nurses Credentialing Center (2013). *Primary application manual for providers and approvers*, version 3.0. Silver Spring, MD: Author.