Nurse educators are not born to be teachers, but becoming effective at teaching requires special knowledge and skills. This competency is achieved by student nurse educators (SNEs) undergoing teaching practice (TP) sessions to acquire pedagogical skills and learn how to teach. In South Africa (SA), preparation of nurse educators is done at universities by departments of nursing science. At the institution concerned in the present study, TP is a component of a bachelor’s degree programme leading to registration as a nurse educator. The degree is offered online, as the university is an open distance electronic learning institution (ODEL). It is undertaken by students who are at their third-year level of training in a simulated environment for a period of 1 week.

Simulation workshops are a common feature of student teacher preparation and are done in other countries to teach SNEs how to teach. In India and Iraq, TP is termed a simulation workshop and forms part of SNE preparation as an educator.

The link between theory and practice is often skewed in favour of theory. The one-week exposure of SNEs currently practiced at the institution under study is short, to enable them to rapidly acquire the requisite pedagogical skills.

**Objectives**

The aims of the study were to:

- explore the experiences of SNEs who attend the TP workshop
- gather suggestions from participants on improving TP
- develop a supportive framework to guide and enhance TP

**Methods**

A qualitative, phenomenological research design to gain insight into the depth, richness and complexities inherent in the lived experiences of SNEs who attend TP workshops was adopted. TP workshops at the institution under study are spread over a period of 3 months, from June to September of each year. Data were obtained from two groups: the first group (9 students) attended between 14 and 18 July 2018 and the second group (11 students) between 14 and 18 August 2018.

Using non-probability purposive sampling, a total of 20 (out of 35) SNEs participated in the study after signing consent forms. Data were obtained from SNEs using written narratives as proposed by Hopwood and Paulson. Participants were requested to reflect on their experiences and to write them down on the narrative guide that was given to each participant. The guide included two questions:

- Share your experiences on TP workshops you have attended.
- How can the quality of TP workshops be enhanced for maximum acquisition of pedagogical skills? Give suggestions.

Data were analysed using Tesch’s (1990) eight steps of the coding process. The researcher read and re-read written narratives, identifying similar ideas and patterns which were coded and grouped together into themes.

**Ethical approval**

Ethical approval was granted by the Health Studies Research and Ethics Committee (HSREC) of the Department of Health Studies, University of SA, and the College Ethics Committee (ref. no. HSDC/821/2017).

**Results and discussion**

Participants were requested to indicate their experiences during TP workshops and to suggest solutions for improvements. A mixed bag of
responses were given, of which the negatives outweighed the positives. Themes that emerged were: poor orientation, lack of support, use of teaching strategies not aligned with ODEL, use of technology without preparation, outdated study guide, and a short period of time for TP leading to poor mastering of teaching skills.

For each negative experience, participants were requested to suggest solutions to alleviate the challenges experienced during TP. Suggestions included:

1. Improved orientation practices
Findings revealed that orientation was poorly done, making students frustrated, anxious and without any clarity regarding how to prepare for TP and what to expect. Participants suggested extending the orientation period to 2 weeks:

‘... There should be more orientation before the workshops to prepare more effectively and efficiently. Unsure of certain things like case study – should be clearer – and state it is “problem solving” was misinterpreted.’ (P3)

‘... I was not happy with the online orientation because I was unable to watch it later that day. As an open distance learning, I feel the online presentations should be available anytime for those who were busy during the presentation time to watch it later.’ (P5)

Poor orientation of SNEs was also mentioned in a study conducted by Summers, where SNEs reported inadequate academic support by facilitators.

2. Use of transformative teaching strategies
Participants’ views were divided among those who had resources such as computers and internet access v. those without technological resources. Participants suggested teaching strategies that are in line with ODEL such as video classes, podcast and smartboards; others preferred conventional teaching methods:

‘... As student nurse educators, we must be taught teaching strategies in line with ODEL, such as podcast, interactive chat forums etc.’ (P15)

‘... Teaching methods for rural areas and colleges must also be accommodated. Not every student has access to computer or internet access.’ (P20)

3. Effective and adequate support
Poor student support during preparation for the workshop emerged as yet another issue:

‘... Little/no guidance with preparation of the lesson plans.’ (P4)

A mock demonstration was suggested before the start of the teaching session:

‘... Demonstration before practicals to be given to get a chance to learn as we are here to learn.’ (P8)

The same findings were reported by Musingafi et al. where student teachers reported inadequate academic support by facilitators.

4. Inclusion of technology lessons in the TP programme
Some participants indicated they had never used a computer before and needed to be taught basic computer skills including PowerPoint:

‘... To have a teaching session on basic computer skill and PowerPoint presentation.’ (P17)

Inclusion of technology in the nursing curriculum is supported by Gonen et al. who propound that informatics and technology need to be accommodated within the nursing curriculum, including different types of electronic health record.

Most participants indicated that the TP workshop period should be extended to give them enough time to learn teaching skills. The same sentiments were shared by Mukumbang and Alindekane, who stated that there was an unequal link between theory and practice in the preparation of nurse educators. They viewed this as one of the basic problems in SNE preparation.

Some participants indicated that the mentoring and coaching received was beneficial in their preparation as educators, but the majority felt unsupported by the facilitators.

The findings from this study prompted the researcher to develop a teaching practice supportive framework (Fig. 1) with the purpose of enhancing TP and improving the acquisition of teaching skills by students. The practice-
oriented theory by Dickoff as cited by Justus and Nangombe was used to guide the development of the framework, and prescripts of the South African Nursing Council regulations (R118) were incorporated.

**Conclusion**

Findings from the present study concluded that orientation of students for TP workshops should be detailed; conducted via online platforms such as video classes and podcasts, etc.; and accessible online after sessions for referral purposes during preparation. Student support should be strengthened to promote learning of teaching skills, study guides be regularly updated, lessons on computer skills be provided, and duration of the workshop be extended. Well-planned and well-executed TP sessions are critical in the preparation of nurse educators. There is a need to develop a supportive framework to improve TP.

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