

The changing academic role of the nurse teacher in the United Kingdom

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This paper presents findings from a national study conducted over a 3-year period (1991–94) which examined the changing role of the nurse teacher. The study used multiple methods to collect data from a wide variety of respondents (nurse teachers, midwife teachers, clinical nurses, health service managers and higher education lecturers). This paper presents the findings relating to the development of the nurse teacher's academic role following the introduction of Project 2000. The issues presented and discussed include specialization within the nurse teacher's role, the nature of this specialization and the development of academic credibility and scholarship. The implications of these changes in terms of the development of nursing as an academic subject area and the opportunity to contribute to the establishment of research based practice are explored.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Project 2000 — a New Preparation for Practice (UKCC 1986) as the new method of initial preparation for nursing practice has arguably been the major reform of nurse education to date in the United Kingdom and has had many implications for the role and responsibilities of nurse teachers. The effects of the introduction of Project 2000 have also been compounded by concurrent changes in both nurse education and the health service. There have been organizational changes in nurse education with many schools of nursing/midwifery amalgamating to form larger colleges which in turn have formed

links with higher education institutions. Another significant policy development in nurse education has been the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) Post Registration Education and Practice Project (UKCC 1990, UKCC 1994). The health service itself has also undergone major reform following the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 (DoH 1990).

Many colleges of nursing in the United Kingdom (UK) have now become fully integrated within higher education institutions and this closer association has created added pressures for nurse teachers. Not only has it necessitated the acquisition of first and higher degrees, but also the need to adapt to the higher education culture where an involvement in research is expected and where performance is assessed in terms of research and publications. Additionally, in order to maintain their present salary

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scales, nurse teachers have tended to be appointed to senior positions in higher education (for example, at senior lecturer level) without the need to meet the usual academic criteria. This has created tensions with other higher education lecturers and further emphasized issues relating to their credibility as academics according to the Royal College of Nursing 1993.

BACKGROUND

Until recent years few nurse teachers in the UK possessed a degree and as they worked largely in monotechnic institutions, separate from the world of higher education, there was little impetus for them to become academics in terms of conducting and publishing research.

While it is often assumed that the place of nursing within higher education is new it does in fact have a history of being part of higher education. In the 1950s several experimental training schemes were established between hospitals and higher education colleges (Altschul 1987). In 1960 the first nursing degree course (pre-registration) commenced at the University of Edinburgh, and the numbers of these degree courses slowly increased over the next two decades. During the 1980s a similar increase took place in the numbers of post-registration degrees. At these institutions the lecturers conducted and published nursing research which contributed to the development of nursing as an academic discipline.

Project 2000, with its requirement for diploma level preparation and the need for links to be established with higher education institutions, acted as the major catalyst for nurse teachers to strive towards greater academic achievement. The UKCC (1986) recommended that teaching qualifications for nurses should be at degree level, and that teachers should possess an advanced level of knowledge of theory, practice and research in the area they would teach. The Strategy for Nursing (DoH 1989) also noted that teachers should possess an advanced level of knowledge, and in a follow-up seminar the objective was established that all newly appointed nurse teachers should be graduates by 1995. Following this decision there was a growing pressure for all teachers to acquire graduate status.

Traditionally nurse teachers taught all (or most) of the nursing curriculum to students. In spite of recommendations in the 1970s (DHSS 1970, 1972) that nurse teachers should become specialists, it was not until the advent of Project 2000 with the resulting elevation of the theoretical component of initial preparation courses that it became difficult for teachers to continue to be generalists. The specialization of the nurse teacher's role has been noted in the literature (Hardiman 1993, Jowett *et al* 1994) and the precise nature of this specialization has been explored (Burke 1993). The role differentiation in Project 2000 courses, in terms of what nurse teachers and non-nurse

higher education lecturers should teach, has also been debated (Braithwaite & Stark 1992).

THE STUDY

This paper emanates from a larger research project funded by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting which investigated a number of areas in relation to the role of nurse teachers. This paper focuses on the academic role of the nurse teacher. Other aspects of the nurse teacher's role (e.g. the clinical role) are discussed elsewhere (Luker *et al* 1995).

Aims of the study

- 1 To identify the future role of nurse teachers within a Project 2000 course framework
- 2 To assess the perceptions of nurse teachers regarding the appropriateness of existing nurse teacher courses in preparing them for their present role and their role within a Project 2000 framework
- 3 To identify the professional and academic needs of registered nurse teachers to teach within a Project 2000 framework and the ways in which these needs could be met
- 4 To identify changes consequent upon the amalgamation of training institutions and the formation of links with centres of higher education

Sample

The sample consisted of six sample groups

- Nurse teachers,
- 'Specialist' nurse teachers (a group comprising midwife teachers, lecturers in health visiting, district nurse tutors and occupational health nurse teachers),
- Clinical nurses from a variety of specialities,
- Health service managers,
- Teacher education lecturers (involved in nurse teacher preparation courses),
- 'Link lecturers' (individuals based in higher education institutions with whom colleges of nursing/midwifery have formed links for Project 2000 and who have an input to the Project 2000 course)

Table 1 details the stratification of the sample for the various stages of the study.

A random sample of nurse teachers and midwife teachers was obtained through the use of the database held by the UKCC. The other groups in the sample were purposively sampled using factors such as geographical region and clinical specialty. The sampling process ensured representation from all the institutions conducting teacher preparation courses in 1990-91, and from all the Project

Table 1 Sample stratification for the three stages of the modified Delphi study and telephone interviews

Group	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2	Focus group interviews	Telephone interviews
Nurse teachers	267 (51.7%)	193 (54.2%)	11 (38%)	36 (66.7%)
Clinical nurses	44 (8.5%)	26 (7.3%)	2 (6.9%)	—
Managers	48 (9.3%)	33 (9.3%)	2 (6.9%)	—
Teacher educationalists	43 (8.3%)	31 (8.7%)	3 (10.3%)	18 (33.3%)
Link lecturers	46 (8.9%)	28 (7.9%)	5 (17.2%)	—
Specialist nurse teachers	68 (13.2%)	45 (12.6%)	6 (20.7%)	—
Total	516	356	29	54

2000 higher education link institutions (1991) who had responded to the request for information. This main sample was used to identify participants for the focus group and telephone interviews.

Research methods

The research strategy utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches and consisted of three parts:

Part one a case study

A case study was conducted of one college of nursing/midwifery that was in the process of introducing Project 2000, with data being collected from this site throughout the life time of the project. The case study focused exclusively on the experiences of nurse teachers and the data collection methods included observation, documentary review, a survey using a postal questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

Part two a modified Delphi study

Part two of the research project was a modification of the Delphi technique developed in the 1950s by the Rand corporation (Dalkey & Helmer 1963). The technique attempts to gather expert opinions to use as a basis for decision making. The Delphi technique classically involves the distribution of a series of questionnaires to a nominated panel of experts. However, this project modified the technique by using random sampling and by having a series of focus group interviews between two questionnaire stages as a means of exploring in depth the issues arising from the study and generating rich qualitative data with which to inform further stages of the research.

The first stage of the modified Delphi study was a descriptive survey using a postal questionnaire to collect information about the characteristics of the sample and their views on issues relating to the aims of the study. The second stage of the modified Delphi study consisted of four focus group interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the discussion. This second stage was seen as a way of exploring in greater depth areas of

importance which arose from the first stage of the Delphi study and the case study.

The aim of the third and final stage of the modified Delphi study was to present to the sample the main issues generated from the research project for their assessment. These issues related to the nurse teacher's academic and clinical role, the effects of the formation of links with higher education and the amalgamation of colleges of nursing/midwifery, the continuing educational needs of nurse teachers and the preparation they require for their role following Project 2000. This process was achieved by developing a self-administered postal questionnaire for distribution to all sample groups. The questionnaire required sample members to assess issues identified from the earlier stages of the research using a series of six point linear analogue scales in terms of the probability and desirability of the events occurring within the next five years.

All research instruments were piloted with an appropriate sample.

Part three telephone interviews

The final stage of the research project was a telephone interview survey using a sub-sample of teacher educationalists and newly qualified nurse teachers (four years or less). The schedule that was developed and piloted comprised mainly fixed choice response questions, but also included a number of questions using Likert scales and some open questions. Table 2 details the response rates for all the stages in the study.

Data analysis

Questionnaire data were coded and analysed using the Statistical and Presentation Software Systems program (SPSS/PC 4.0). While the data from the case study questionnaire, the first questionnaire of the Delphi study and the telephone interview schedule were subjected to a descriptive analysis, non-parametric statistical tests were used in the analysis of the final questionnaire.

The data from the final questionnaire were analysed to produce descriptive statistics for the relative probability

Table 2 Response rates for the study

Stage	Number	Percentage
Case study questionnaire	39	68.0
Case study interviews	10	100.0
Modified Delphi study first questionnaire	516	68.6
Modified Delphi study focus group interviews	34	63.0
Modified Delphi study final questionnaire	356	71.3
Telephone interview survey	54	89.0

and desirability of each question. For the purpose of this study a change was identified as being 'probable' if at least 70% of the respondents had rated it in this way and this criterion was applied to all variables.

Content analysis involving open-coding (Strauss & Corbin 1990) was used to analyse the qualitative data in order to discover the categories and themes which linked with the main aims of the study. A full discussion of the methods used in the study is presented in Luker *et al* (1995).

The data reported in this paper have been obtained by multiple methods. Where it is not explicitly stated in the text from which stage/method the data have been derived a key is used (CSQN for the case study questionnaire, CSI for the case study interviews, FGI for the focus group interviews, QN1 for the first questionnaire of the modified Delphi study, QN2 for the final questionnaire of the modified Delphi study and TI for the telephone interviews).

Academic background of the sample

One hundred and fifty-three (64.3%) of teachers (this term in this paper refers to both the nurse teachers and 'specialist' nurse teachers in the study) in the sample had achieved degree status by 1993 (Table 3). This figure is slightly higher than the latest available national statistics which indicate that 59.9% of teachers have acquired a degree (English National Board 1993). As separate groups, it was

found that 136 (70.5%) nurse teachers and 17 (37.8%) 'specialist' nurse teachers were graduates.

However, teachers with a higher degree remain a minority ($n=62$, 26.1%) (Table 3), with only 5 (2.1%) having a research degree (Masters/Doctorate) (Table 4).

Degree subject areas

The data collected by questionnaire 1 regarding the degree subject areas held by the teachers in the sample found that there was a concentration of degrees in education and the social and behavioural sciences (120, 65.2%) with only 32 (17.4%) of degrees being in nursing/midwifery and 12 (6.6%) in the biological/physical sciences (Table 5).

Current degree studies

Questionnaire 1 revealed that 158 (47.5%) teachers were studying for a degree with 64 (40.5%) studying for a Bachelor's degree and 94 (59.5%) for a higher degree (Table 6). When these degree subjects were examined (Table 5), the most popular subjects again appeared to be education and social/behavioural sciences. Only 27 (17.3%) teachers were studying for degrees in nursing/midwifery.

The specialization of teaching

A trend towards increased specialization of teaching is one which was emphasized by the sample throughout all parts of the project. The majority (90.7%) of the sample in the final stage of the modified Delphi study believed that it was probable that nurse teachers would become specialists rather than generalists in the areas they teach. It is interesting to note that a high proportion (80.0%) of the sample

Table 4 The types of degrees awarded to the nurse teachers and 'specialist' nurse teachers at the time of the second questionnaire ($n=238$)

Status	Number	%
Bachelor's degree	130	54.6
Taught Master's degree	58	24.3
Research degree	5	2.1

Table 3 The degree status of the nurse teachers and 'specialist' nurse teachers

Degree status	QN1 ($n=335$)	QN2 ($n=238$)	CSQN ($n=39$)
Bachelor's degree	137 (40.9%)	130 (54.6%)	16 (41.0%)
Higher degree	53 (15.8%)	62 (26.1%)	1 (2.6%)
Bachelor's degree only	103 (30.8%)	91 (38.2%)	15 (38.5%)
Higher degree only	19 (5.7%)	23 (9.7%)	0
Bachelor's degree and higher degree	34 (10.2%)	39 (16.4%)	1 (2.6%)
Achieved degree status	156 (46.6%)	153 (64.3%)	16 (41.0%)
Not achieved degree status	179 (53.4%)	85 (35.7%)	23 (59.0%)

Table 5 Classification of degree subject areas (first questionnaire)

Subject	Degrees held (n = 147)	%	Degrees studied for (n = 156)	%
Education	62	33.7	42	26.9
Social/behavioural sciences	58	31.5	33	21.2
Nursing/midwifery	32	17.4	27	17.3
Physical/biological sciences	12	6.5	6	3.9
Arts/humanities	10	5.4	8	5.1
Health studies	7	3.8	16	10.3
Management	3	1.6	9	5.8
Research degree (subject area not specified)	0	0.0	9	5.8
Other	0	0.0	6	3.9
Missing	0	–	2	–

NB This table includes both first and higher degrees and therefore individuals with two or more degrees will be recorded more than once

Table 6 Present degree studies (n = 158) (first questionnaire)

Degree studies	Number	%
Bachelor's degree	64	40.5
Master's degree	82	51.9
Doctorate	12	7.6

also saw this as a desirable role change (Table 7). Exactly what was meant by 'specialization' was a topic explored in more detail by the focus group interviews.

The meaning of 'specialization'

The move from generic to specialist teaching appeared to be one towards academic discipline orientations, or the 'ologies' as they were colloquially termed. It appeared that most colleges of nursing and midwifery had developed theme teams or core subject teams, of which the 'nursing'

theme was just one of a number of curricular themes such as sociology, psychology, biological sciences and so on. It is noteworthy that in addressing the question of what was meant by 'specialization', the participants in all stages of the research primarily identified the 'ologies', rather than nursing. However, some participants in the research project believed that nurse teachers should specialize within the discipline of 'nursing'.

This apparent divergence of views was further explored within the final questionnaire, with opinions being sought on the relative probability and desirability of the changes in the subject areas taught by nurse teachers. It was seen as improbable and undesirable that nurse teachers would make a major contribution to the teaching of the 'ologies' (Table 7). On the other hand, over 80% of the sample saw it as probable (though undesirable) that non-nurse lecturers would make the major contribution to the teaching of the 'ologies'.

Table 7 The relative probability and desirability of the changes relating to the subject areas taught by nurse teachers and non-nurse higher education lecturers (final questionnaire)

Change	Probability (%)	Desirability (%)
The major contribution of nurse teachers will be the teaching of nursing theory	91.4	92.0
Nurse teachers will become specialists rather than generalists with regard to the areas they teach	90.7	80.0
The major contribution of non-nurse lecturers in higher education will be the teaching of the 'ologies', while the major contribution of nurse teachers will be the teaching of nursing theory and nursing practice	87.9	53.4
The academic specialization of nurse teachers in nursing theory and nursing practice will lead to the enhancement of nursing as an academic discipline	75.4	88.3
The academic specialization of nurse teachers in the 'ologies' will lead to the marginalization of nursing as an academic discipline	70.0	16.4
The major contribution of nurse teachers will be the teaching of the social sciences	45.0	56.4
The major contribution of nurse teachers will be the teaching of the behavioural sciences	43.8	58.7
The major contribution of nurse teachers will be the teaching of the biological sciences	40.5	52.1
The major contribution of nurse teachers will be the teaching of the humanities	31.9	49.7

The greatest consistency of opinion with regard to relative probability and desirability was that the major contribution of nurse teachers would be in the teaching of nursing, with just over 90% of the sample seeing this change as both desirable and probable (Table 7). In terms of differentiation of role it therefore appears that the major contribution of non-nurse lecturers in higher education is predicted as being the teaching of the 'ologies', while the nurse teacher's major contribution will be the teaching of nursing theory and practice.

It is also interesting to note that 75.4% of the sample felt that it was probable that the academic specialization of nurse teachers in nursing theory and nursing practice would lead to the enhancement of nursing as an academic discipline (Table 7). This is reinforced by 70% of the Delphi sample stating that, if the academic specialization of nurse teachers were in the 'ologies', this would probably lead to the marginalization of nursing as an academic discipline (Table 7).

The choice of specialist area

The focus group interviews explored the ways in which decisions were made concerning the choice of a nurse teacher's specialist area. Many of the nurse participants stated that the decision was often made on the basis of first degree studies, for example if a nurse teacher had studied sociology to degree level then assignment was to the sociology theme team. This basis did not go unchallenged, with some participants (noticeably those who were not nurses) questioning whether a first degree alone in a subject qualified

a person to lecture on that subject. The point being that if one just teaches a subject, and does not practice it or conduct research in that field, how can credibility be maintained?

One higher education lecturer (non-nurse) felt that many nurse teachers agreed to teach subjects without the necessary knowledge base.

I have been, quite frankly, appalled at the number of nurse tutors who have put themselves in this exceedingly vulnerable position by agreeing to do teaching when they don't have sufficient knowledge (FGI)

It was evident that some nurse teachers at the case study site also recognized this occurring.

We all had to take on teaching areas that looking back we really weren't prepared to teach. There were subjects that you felt you were literally cramming and you were just half a page ahead of the students which was very demanding (CSI 048)

The fact that nurse teachers were still being asked to teach subjects from a rather shaky knowledge base was one which was repeated in all the group interviews. Some respondents identified that the decision on who taught what appeared to be made on an 'ad hoc' basis, with some teachers being asked to teach a subject because they had a reputation of 'enjoying doing it'.

In order to provide further clarification on specialization in nurse teaching, the nurse teachers and the teacher educationalists who took part in the telephone interviews were asked to identify what they considered to be the main basis for a nurse teacher's choice of specialism. Clinical background and first/higher degree subject area were identified as being the main rationales for choice (Table 8). It is noteworthy that only five respondents viewed a college-based strategy as the main basis for teachers' areas of speciality (Table 8).

Academic credibility and scholarship

The years following the publication of Project 2000 in 1986 have seen a great deal of activity in terms of the academic development of nurse teachers, in particular with respect

Table 8 Main basis for choice of speciality (telephone interviews)

Main basis	Number	%
Clinical background	20	37.0
Subject area of first/higher degree	16	29.6
General interest	5	9.3
College-based strategy	5	9.3
Other	6	11.1
Don't know	2	3.7

Table 9 Changes relating to the degree status of nurse teachers rated as probable by 70% or more of the sample with the respective desirability of the response (final questionnaire)

Change	Probability (%)	Desirability (%)
There will be an increase in the number of nurse teachers with taught Master's degrees	96.3	94.9
There will be an increasing trend for nurse teachers to obtain higher degrees in nursing	92.9	90.9
There will be an increasing trend for nurse teachers to hold first degrees in nursing	92.6	90.6
There will be an increase in the number of nurse teachers with Doctorates (PhD)	92.3	90.3
There will be an increase in the number of nurse teachers who hold Master's degrees by research (e.g. MPhil)	90.1	93.7
There will be workforce planning within colleges to ensure an appropriate mix of degree subjects/areas are held by nurse teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum	74.6	94.8

to the acquisition of degree status. While this study discovered that 153 (64.3%) of teachers had achieved degree status, only a minority were found to have a higher degree (62, 26.1%). However, the possession of a first degree alone is perhaps not sufficient to confer academic credibility in the higher education context where the vast majority of staff will have a higher degree. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that a large majority of the sample regarded it as both probable and desirable that there will be an increase in the number of nurse teachers with higher degrees (Table 9).

As previously noted only a minority of teachers have degrees in nursing/midwifery and this picture looks unlikely to change according to the data collected regarding present degree studies (Table 5). Given that the sample questioned viewed it as probable and desirable that the nurse teacher's major contribution would be the teaching of nursing, it is perhaps not surprising that they also thought it as probable (and desirable) that there will be an increasing trend for nurse teachers to hold first (92.6%) and higher (92.9%) degrees in nursing (Table 9). It was also viewed as probable by 74.6% of the sample that there would be workforce planning within colleges to ensure that an appropriate mix of degree subject areas are held by nurse teachers in order to meet the needs of their individual curriculum (Table 9).

Scholarly activity was further explored in the final questionnaire, and desirable changes forecast by the sample included nurse teachers achieving academic credibility in terms of conducting and publishing research (93.8%) and obtaining research grants (93.1%) (Table 10). However, these two changes were regarded as being improbable.

Given that conducting and publishing research were seen to be important components of the nurse teachers role (Table 11), the telephone interviews explored research interests in more depth. Nurse teachers were asked to identify the areas in which they would be specifically interested in undertaking research. Two thirds of the teachers expressed an interest in clinically based projects,

Table 11 Chosen field of research if resources available (nurse teachers) (telephone interviews) (n = 36)

Research held	Number	%
Clinical practice	16	44.4
Educational issues	9	25.0
Patient/client specific problems	8	22.2
Management issues	2	5.6
Other	1	2.8

either in clinical practice generally or investigating patient/client-specific problems (Table 11). This is an interesting discovery in light of the findings in other areas of this study which highlighted their minimal clinical role (Luker *et al* 1995). Teachers may also lack the formal preparation to conduct research as this study found that only five (2.6%) of the teachers in the sample had a research degree (QN2).

DISCUSSION

The generic role of the nurse teacher in the UK as someone who is able to teach anything and everything is in decline, and it would seem that the profession is having difficulties finding an appropriate niche for the nurse teacher in higher education. It is seen as both probable and desirable that the future role of the nurse teacher will be one of a specialist rather than a generalist. The nature of this specialization in terms of specialization outside of nursing (in the 'ologies') or within the discipline of nursing itself is a central issue for nurse educators to address. Although there is a wish to be involved in the teaching of the 'ologies', the participants in this study see the major contribution of nurse teachers in the future to be in the teaching of nursing.

While other studies have noted the growth of specialization (Hardiman 1993, Jowett *et al* 1994) the focus on

Table 10 Changes in the role of the nurse teacher relating to research and scholarship rated as desirable by more than 70% of the sample with the respective probability of the response (final questionnaire)

Role change	Desirability (%)	Probability (%)
Nurse teachers will achieve academic credibility in terms of conducting and publishing research	93.8	69.5
Nurse teachers will obtain research grants	93.1	53.3
Conducting research will be an important component of the nurse teacher's role	91.7	77.9
Publishing in peer review journals will be an important component of the nurse teacher's role	89.5	77.7
Presenting research based papers at conferences will be an important component to the nurse teacher's role	87.5	75.1
Publishing in professional journals will be an important component to the nurse teacher's role	87.3	80.6

nursing as the main specialist subject is new. Part of the explanation for this more definitive focus on nursing could be found in the view of the respondents that the academic specialization of nurse teachers in nursing theory and practice would lead to the enhancement of nursing as an academic discipline, and that if nurse teachers were to specialize in the 'ologies' the probable outcome would be the marginalization of nursing as an academic discipline. Entering higher education with a strong sense of the parameters and the value of one's own specialist subject area could be one way that nurse teachers could develop their own academic discipline and be recognized for their expertise in that area. The concern to maintain the integrity of the specialized subject of nursing is one which is gaining increasing emphasis in the nurse education literature (Burke 1993, Elkan *et al* 1993), and it would appear that this debate is one which concerns the respondents in this study.

Teaching of nursing

However, there are still barriers to nurse teachers focusing on the teaching of nursing. Relatively small numbers of nurse teachers currently have either a first or higher degree in nursing, and this begs the question of how the major contribution of nurse teachers can be the teaching of nursing when their academic base is not within that discipline. Degree level studies in nursing provide the individual with not only the study of nursing in depth but also breadth. The broad-based, multi-disciplinary nature of these degrees with their emphasis on nursing give a strong base from which nurse teachers can take their place alongside other higher education lecturers.

Recognition within higher education was, not surprisingly, on the minds of the respondents in this study. There is a belief that nurse teachers are not regarded as having equal academic status with higher education lecturers who are viewed as regarding the discipline of nursing as practice based and not academically equal to other disciplines (Luker *et al* 1995). Although it has been argued elsewhere that nursing is field of practice and not an academic discipline (Jarvis 1992), the same could be said for other health care professions such as medicine and dentistry. It would not seem unreasonable to expect that the growth in the numbers of nurse teachers who would be focusing on extending the knowledge base of nursing from a theoretical perspective would afford the profession a better opportunity to take their place alongside other academic disciplines. Alternatively a strong clinical research base could achieve the same objective. In order to gain academic credibility, it is essential that nurse teachers strive for equitable academic achievement.

There is a need for the profession to think strategically, as the nature of teacher specialization has implications not only for the development of nursing academically but may

also have implications for the very existence of the nurse teacher's role. A number of questions remain to be debated. Why are nurse teachers teaching subjects such as physiology and what does this say about the value they place on nursing as an academic subject? Is it more appropriate (and one of the reasons for linking with higher education) for students to be taught by true academic 'ologists' rather than nurse teachers with perhaps only a first degree in the subject area? Are beliefs that nurse teachers need to apply the 'ologies' to nursing for the students valid in a higher education context? If non-nurse higher education lecturers in the future teach the 'ologies', then what will be the role of those nurse teachers without a nursing degree?

Further emphasis on 'nursing' as a discipline in its own right was provided by the interest which nurse teachers expressed in conducting research in clinically based projects. However, it is interesting to look at this area alongside work which suggests that the nurse teacher has a limited and reduced clinical role following Project 2000 (Luker *et al* 1995).

Research activity

Academic credibility is not, however, just about the acquisition of first and higher degrees. It is about conducting and publishing high quality research. Nurse education is entering a world where the major emphasis is on the quality of research rather than teaching. Questions have been raised regarding the expectations which colleges of nursing/midwifery have of nurse teachers' involvement in research (Champion 1991), and there are a number of issues which emerge from the potential requirement of nurse teachers to become engaged in empirical work. It could also be questioned whether it is necessary for all nurse teachers to acquire research skills apart from those necessary to critically appraise research reports.

CONCLUSION

There is a danger that the development of the teacher's academic role will divert attention from the development of a clinical role. The two can be seen as complementary, as involvement in research should potentially contribute to the growth and utilization of evidence-based clinical practice, as well as enhancing the academic discipline of nursing.

Project 2000 and the formation of links with higher education has provided the opportunity not only to fully establish nursing as a profession but also as an academic discipline. As more integration takes place in higher education and as nursing matures as an academic discipline, nurse teachers will find their niche within higher education. However, the challenge of how to retain and develop a clinical role alongside an academic role will remain.

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