

Academic nurse leaders and the development of successors: a phenomenological study

Elyana Teixeira Sousa¹ 
Denize Bouttelet Munari² 
Karina Machado Siqueira² 
Marcelo Medeiros² 
Luana Cássia Miranda Ribeiro² 

¹Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso (UFMT),
Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, Brazil.

²Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), Goiânia, Goiás,
Brazil.

Corresponding author:

Elyana Teixeira Sousa
E-mail: elyanasousa@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: to understand leadership succession experiences in nursing in daily academic life and to describe the strategies adopted for the development of successors from the academic nurse leaders' perspective. **Methods:** a phenomenological study, whose data were collected from nursing faculty members considered leaders, selected using the snowball sampling technique, in which each participant indicated three other individuals with leadership profiles from different Brazilian states. Sixteen interviews were conducted with faculty from eight states between May and October 2018. The meetings were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed based on the situated phenomenon structure analysis method. **Results:** sixteen nursing faculty members from eight Brazilian states, representing public higher education institutions, participated in the study. They were nominated by their peers for their leadership profile. The results pointed to the following categories: "Meetings that inspire and liberate for training leaders"; "Cultivating future leaders in daily work"; and "New seeds have been sown, and the future belongs to them". **Conclusion:** interaction among faculty at different stages of leadership skills development is key to ensuring leaders are capable of handling succession, especially in settings without formal strategies for developing future leaders.

Descriptors: Nursing Administration Research; Leadership; Health Workforce; Nurse Administrators; Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing leaders are retiring, and this has had a significant impact on teaching, research, management, and care. Despite this, in most institutions, systematic actions are rarely undertaken to discuss this issue, address the shortage of qualified leaders, and promote succession planning⁽¹⁻³⁾. In academic settings of undergraduate nursing courses, a significant portion of faculty members are nearing retirement^(3,4), which can generate negative implications for training new professionals, academic management, and the continuity of knowledge production.

The roles involved in nursing leadership in academic settings are complex, requiring qualification and maturation time^(3,5), as they involve in-depth activities in topics built up over time for performance in teaching, research, extension, and management, which are indispensable requirements in universities.

Institutions' commitment to ensuring leadership succession through the identification, recruitment, development, and mentoring of new leaders⁽⁶⁻⁸⁾, and the provision of development programs that provide opportunities to prepare leaders for the next generation⁽⁹⁻¹²⁾, are important actions to address the issue.

Preparing new leaders capable of replacing more experienced ones requires investment in succession strategies that include formal development programs^(2,13-15). In the context of nursing, the main objective of this effort is to systematically prepare future leaders who are able to respond effectively to new challenges and opportu-

nities, with the competence to continue their work for the benefit of the team, the organization, and the profession^(1,2,8,13,16).

The strategies indicated for planning leadership succession in academic settings remain incipient⁽¹⁵⁾. Interventions such as structured mentoring and continuous institutional support are effective as leadership development programs, but require time for preparation and adaptation^(6,17).

Experience reports from North American universities describe leadership development programs⁽¹⁸⁾, and some field studies describe leadership development strategies based on faculty experiences^(19,20). Others focus on how to become a leader in academic settings⁽²¹⁾, elaborate on perspectives of nurses' future workforce in a given professional area⁽²²⁾, and investigate how much leadership can influence the level of nursing faculty's professional satisfaction and organizational commitment⁽²³⁾.

However, nursing faculty's experiences have not yet been explored to understand how the phenomenon of leadership succession has occurred in Brazilian academic settings. Unveiling facets of this phenomenon can contribute to the development of strategies that assist in planning leadership succession in nursing within this context.

In this regard, this research aimed to understand how the phenomenon of leadership succession in nursing has been experienced in daily academic life and to describe the strategies adopted for developing successors from the academic nurse leaders' perspective.

METHODS

This qualitative study, based on a phenomenological framework, was conducted between May and October 2018 at higher education institutions offering undergraduate nursing programs in Brazil. The COnsolidated criteria for REporting Qualitative research checklist was used for preparing this text⁽²⁴⁾.

The choice of phenomenology as a theoretical and methodological framework for this study is justified insofar as its focus is on the universal structures of faculty members' intentional experience in the leadership succession process in nursing schools. The understanding of the phenomenon studied in this work was based on livingness, lived experiences, and ways of being and existing in the world of these faculty members.

Phenomenology seeks to unveil the structures in which experience occurs and, in the description of experiences, reveals their universal structures⁽²⁵⁾. To this end, a researcher asks subjects to describe how they are living and what experiences are significant in that life situation. From these descriptions, the phenomenon is unveiled and studied systematically in order to understand the object in its essentially total intention⁽²⁶⁾.

To phenomenologically understand intentional experiences regarding leadership succession in academic contexts, we chose to speak with nursing faculty members from different training institutions, such as nursing schools and nursing colleges located in

Brazil, who, during the data collection period, hold or have held academic leadership roles.

Leaders were considered to be faculty members who had previously held academic management positions, led research and extension groups, or were recognized by the academic community for their excellence in teaching, considering their role in maintaining and ensuring continuity of knowledge production and nursing education, contributing to constructing the nursing field as we know it today.

Data collection began with the leading faculty, chosen by researchers for convenience. To continue selecting participants, the snowball sampling technique was used, which allows for new selections based on participants' own social networks. Thus, after each meeting, participants were asked to nominate three other significant leaders in the national academic community from different Brazilian states. All nominations were justified by the current performance of faculty members who, in the perspective of their co-workers, demonstrated leadership characteristics in nursing and in teaching, research, outreach, and management, regardless of their years of experience.

Five faculty members were directly contacted by the researchers, and considering the 47 referrals, the total number of eligible faculty reached 52. We contacted 30 faculty members at least three times via email or telephone. Of these faculty members, six did not respond to our attempts to contact them; five refused to participate in the study; three agreed to participate, but we were unsuccessful in scheduling a meeting; and the remaining sixteen agreed to participate and attended the meeting for data collection.

The remaining 22 eligible leaders were not contacted due to data saturation, meaning convergences in the information provided by subjects, signaling the data collection completion⁽²⁶⁾.

The choice of interview location followed faculty preferences and was conducted either in person at the higher education institutions to which a professor was affiliated or virtually, through applications with audio and video interaction. The interviews were conducted by the researcher, who holds a master's degree and has experience in conducting qualitative research and is duly qualified to conduct interviews according to the phenomenological framework⁽²⁶⁾.

The interview sessions were recorded with participants' permission and averaged lasted approximately 40 minutes. The content was transcribed in its entirety and verbatim by the same researcher who conducted the interview. A script was used as a guide, containing guiding phenomenological questions about participants' experience in leadership succession, namely: what management positions they had held; how they experienced and perceived leadership succession in academia; and how they felt about their legacy when they were no longer active.

For data analysis, the situated phenomenon structure analysis framework was used, which occurred in four stages. In the first stage, all transcripts were read from beginning to end numerous times, attempting to put themselves in participants' shoes, without interpretations, and seeking to arrive at a general meaning of the

descriptions. The second stage consisted of restarting the reading in order to discriminate the “units of meaning”, focusing on the phenomenon being researched. This stage is important because it allows the text to be divided into units as a consequence of the analysis. In the third stage of the analysis, daily expressions were transformed into language, with the purpose of grasping the meanings contained in participants’ speech. Finally, in the fourth stage, the synthesis of units of meaning was transformed into propositions that consistently described the phenomenon, leading to the construction of categories or topics⁽²⁶⁾.

All units of meaning were taken into consideration, being, at least implicitly, contained in the phenomenon description. The discussion of the categories that structure the phenomenon was anchored in Martin Heidegger’s existential phenomenology⁽²⁷⁾, which seeks to understand being in its concrete existence. According to this framework, phenomena reveal themselves within the context in which they occur, carrying their own meanings. Analysis allows for an understanding of beings in their openness to existence, considering their relationships with themselves, with others, and with the context that surrounds them⁽²⁷⁾.

This research has been approved by a Research Ethics Committee, meeting national guidelines⁽²⁸⁾ relating to ethical aspects of research involving human beings, under Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Consideration (In Portuguese, *Certificado de Apresentação para Apreciação Ética – CAAE*) 83707418.1.0000.5078. All faculty members invited to participate in this research were informed about the study objectives, and those who agreed to participate signed the Informed Consent Form. Data confidentiality and protection of participants’ identities were guaranteed through the exclusion or replacement of information that could identify them.

RESULTS

Sixteen nursing faculty members from eight Brazilian states participated in the study, mostly women (14 faculty), aged between 39 and 70 years, with only two under 53 years old. All worked at public higher education institutions (13 faculty affiliated with federal higher education institutions and three with state higher education institutions), with four to 40 years of teaching experience, with only two faculty members having been active for less than 15 years. All had previously held or were holding management and/or administrative positions at the time of data collection.

The faculty members nominated by their peers hold or have held highly relevant positions in academic administration. Furthermore, they demonstrate a high level of scientific productivity, developing research projects recognized both nationally and internationally, and are involved in postgraduate programs. Also noteworthy is the presence of young faculty members who already distinguished themselves in their respective fields.

Speech analysis points to three categories of analysis: “Meetings that inspire and liberate for training leaders”; “Cultivating future leaders in daily work”; and “New seeds have been sown, and the future belongs to them”.

The synthesis of the first category, “Meetings that inspire and liberate for training leaders”, converges on the idea that it is the meaningful human interactions throughout faculty’ careers that underpin how they develop their successors. This process begins with the interaction of current leaders with more experienced faculty who were their mentors throughout their own training. The idea that commitment to nursing and support for developing future nurses, faculty, and researchers pave the way for training new leaders remains consistent in this category. Genuine and meaningful human meetings constitute, essentially, the greatest legacy of the leadership training process. Table 1 describes the synthesis of the data from category 1 and the subcategories (“Who I am today reflects those I have met along the way”; “Being someone who supports the development of young people”; and “Commitment to nursing”).

The second category, “Cultivating future leaders in daily work”, was consolidated around data that points to strategies in the preparation of young leaders. These are based on the faculty’s understanding of the importance of preparing people to continue their work. The process of developing leaders for the future occurs through the identification of young people with potential who are willing to learn and who take responsibility of becoming new leaders. To achieve this, learning collaborative work, the division and/or delegation of responsibilities, and participation in deliberative bodies and committees is essential. Fundamentally, the strategies are based on dynamic interpersonal relationships and the strength of collective work. Table 2 describes the synthesis of the data from category 2 and the subcategories (“Identifying leaders”; “Working together”; “Sharing responsibilities”; and “Participation of organized collectives”).

Finally, the third category, “New seeds have been sown, and the future belongs to them”, gathers data indicating that training new leaders primarily involves the idea of detachment from more experienced individuals so that their successors can take over roles and positions, building their own career paths. Table 3 presents a summary of the data from this last category: “New seeds have been sown, and the future belongs to them”.

DISCUSSION

The essence of the results of this study is based on the idea that meaningful meetings between experienced and younger faculty offer a possibility for developing successors. This interaction allows for the identification and development of leaders, enhancing the building of bonds and networks, and enabling the exchange of information and collaborative work.

The analysis of the meanings of the first category, supported by the phenomenological framework, allows us to affirm that the significant meetings between faculty and students in leadership learning occur in the field of interpersonal relationships, strengthening the idea of a social man, a being-with-others. Coexistence is an existential aspect of Dasein, contributing to the development of

human identity⁽²⁷⁾. *Dasein*, or presence, for Heidegger, is an indication of experience and means that it is only possible to understand being-there-in-the-world from its possibilities of being, constituted in the relations of being-with-others and in the relations of being-with-the-world⁽²⁷⁾.

To build opportunities for future leadership, settings that foster spaces for learning and leadership development^(18,29) can be central to enhancing young scientists' ability to pursue their professional careers within a culture of mutual support⁽³⁰⁾. What we observe is that interaction with experienced faculty allows for constructing models of how to exercise leadership, expanding the possibilities for younger faculty to acquire their own identity as leaders, and making it easier for emerging leaders to find their way^(9,18,31).

The faculty members participating in this research indicated that those they considered leadership role models are the people who inspired them in their academic careers. These individuals are identified with skills such as empathy, engagement in nursing, communication, technical competence, and ethics. While these characteristics are considered innate, they can also be learned and improved.

Learning leadership through meetings with inspiring role models and the possibility of developing leadership skills reinforces the importance of formally investing in academic leadership succession strategies by creating spaces that guarantee interaction, because it is through this interaction that individuals build their potential to be leaders in the world.

Table 1 - Summary of data from the analysis category "Meetings that inspire and liberate for training leaders", Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil, 2018

Analysis category	Meetings that inspire and liberate for training leaders
Subcategories	Excerpts from speeches
Who I am today reflects those I have met along the way	<p><i>"Everything I learned in terms of research groups; everything I learned in terms of mentoring, of having project insights, of managing my project; everything I learned, in fact, during the period, I got my master's and doctoral degrees" (P. 1)</i></p> <p><i>"The influences were happening. Many good people that we meet in this life, who have a genuine interest in nursing, a genuine focus on seeing nursing as a recognized, valued profession, and taking over, within the range of health professions, the true role that belongs to it" (P. 4)</i></p> <p><i>"She was able to grasp things and make certain predictions of situations and anticipate them. So, our department was always at the forefront because of this ability she had, and I greatly admired this ability" (P. 9)</i></p> <p><i>"It was with them that I learned to be the professional I am, to believe in the potential I have, with tears or with joy, and that's part of a process. Amazement and disappointments happened with these people" (P. 12)</i></p> <p><i>"And she was the one who first said, 'You have the ability, you can do it'. And she opened the first doors of my career. So, this person is very significant to me" (P. 13)</i></p> <p><i>"So, I think she was someone who demonstrated so much competence in an area I was already interested in, that she became a bit of a role model. She was my master's and doctoral advisor. She was someone I looked up to" (P. 14)</i></p> <p><i>"This life at the university has a fantastic thing: we can always have incredible meetings. And I had brilliant students who wouldn't leave me alone, who made me study, who were people who thought a lot, who were very critical, so they were students who made me develop intellectually and as a person" (P. 16)</i></p>
Being someone who supports the development of young people	<p><i>"A good professor is one whom students surpass. A professor whom students don't surpass hasn't done their homework" (P. 1)</i></p> <p><i>"So, anything I think is important for people's development isn't something I tell them how to be, it's about being. So, in this process, in undergraduate and graduate classes, in the moments we spend together (...) you can build leadership succession in everyday life" (P. 2)</i></p> <p><i>"It is up to us, in the exercise of leadership, to prepare new leaders. So, when I told you that, throughout my journey, I did everything that, according to my judgment, within my reference, my values, I fought to develop, to contribute to raising the name of nursing" (P. 3)</i></p> <p><i>"It's about giving them the tools to think and then carry out their management process in the best possible way, ethically, and ultimately, creatively, in a collegial, collective setting" (P. 8)</i></p> <p><i>"When I look at my students, those I supervised in their dissertations, for instance, they have all already completed their master's degrees. Half have already completed their doctoral degrees because they had the right profile; it's about believing in people and awakening talents" (P. 12)</i></p> <p><i>"Essentially, we have been working towards empowering young researchers who are entering academic life. Some are former advisees or completed their training here in the program, co-workers from the department and program who have joined more recently so that they open new paths, or at least continue on the path we've already managed to open, achieving better and more powerful things" (P. 13)</i></p>
Commitment to nursing	<p><i>"It makes us think about how to prepare these people so that they engage in nursing projects, because taking on a nursing position in any of these instances, or entities and institutions, means thinking about the profession, and you have to be engaged with the profession" (P. 7)</i></p> <p><i>"I think we have some challenges, and perhaps the strongest in this sense, and I think the most decisive for us to continue the advances that we have already achieved in the last 40 years of nursing. I think we need to think about this ethical-political training of our students" (P. 13)</i></p> <p><i>"I hope to live up to everything I have experienced, and to be able to contribute to the profession, to science, to teaching and to the profession, in its various fields of activity, respecting the advances that need to be made. And I understand that it is a responsibility of mine and of all the co-workers who are arriving at the university at this moment" (P. 15)</i></p>

In this way, experienced leaders play an important role in this interaction: that of being inspirational and mentors in young faculty's careers. The development of institutional mentoring structures, such as mentoring programs, socialization groups⁽³⁰⁾, as well as mentor development spaces, becomes crucial to encourage experienced faculty to improve mentoring skills⁽³²⁾, developing skills to perform this role and leadership competencies, which can influence the guarantee of qualified leaders in the future.

For young faculty, formal interaction with experienced leaders can contribute to institutional leadership, as they receive career support and share inspiring characteristics such as empathy and ethics, fostering emotionally intelligent leadership within the institution⁽³³⁾.

The strategies indicated by the faculty members participating in this research for preparing future nursing leaders in educational

institutions are evident in the analysis of the data from the second category. They indicate that, in the absence of institutional succession planning programs, each faculty member individually invests in the training of new leaders at work, based primarily on meaningful relationships between faculty and students. This reinforces the importance of experienced leaders in maintaining the legacy built by generations of nursing faculty.

For Heidegger, as being-with, humans exist essentially by virtue of others. In this sense, supported by Heidegger's perspective that man, as being-with, in co-presence, turns towards others and projects their own being onto themselves "in another"⁽²⁷⁾, in the daily coexistence of being-with-others, the faculty indicates strategies for recognizing and cultivating future leaders. These strategies begin with the identification of young people with leadership potential

Table 2 - Summary of data from the analysis category "Cultivating future leaders in daily work", Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil, 2018

Category	Cultivating future leaders in daily work
Subcategories	Excerpts from speeches
Identifying leaders	<p><i>"This is someone I've identified as a leader who could succeed me. I've internalized this, and I've invested a lot in her training" (P. 1)</i></p> <p><i>"I've always been concerned about who would continue my work. And I've been calling people and students, advisees, especially master's and doctoral advisees who have an academic profile (...) over the years, I've always sought to identify these students and worked with them" (P. 10)</i></p> <p><i>"These are the students I always try to stay in contact with and keep close, offering more opportunities and bringing them to work with me. And I get the reciprocity; they are always available, always want to help, participate" (P. 14)</i></p>
Working together	<p><i>"If we function as a network, exchanging experiences and ideas, discussing difficulties, solving difficulties together, I believe this will be work that can bear fruit" (P. 4)</i></p> <p><i>"We have numerous demands (...) and she shared the tasks with me. She participated in all the meetings. We defined things together" (P. 6)</i></p> <p><i>"Working with people in building projects allows these people to continue when we stage away" (P. 7)</i></p> <p><i>"You prepare young leaders within your work process. Thus, they experience issues that they themselves are preparing for, we discuss issues together. For instance, if you are a department head, and the other is a deputy head, you share the process; they will learn as they go along with their management" (P. 8)</i></p> <p><i>"We managed to create a process that wasn't easy. We worked on a large project that brought together 53 people, always discussing and making decisions together. Not that there weren't problems, but it was a process that I think was really good for everyone who worked on it and was able to learn" (P. 16)</i></p>
Sharing responsibilities	<p><i>"In every position I've held, I've passed the work on to my successor, every single one. From holding meetings to leaving messages. Look, this was done for this reason, for that reason, for that reason. So, I never finish and turn my back. I always make myself available (...) sometimes, I've taken on heavy responsibilities without anyone passing anything on to me. I never did that. So, I always left the information and even a written script, all of them handwritten" (P. 3)</i></p> <p><i>"I've always been concerned about who would stay and continue my line of research. Thus, I experienced the development of four leaders who continue the work. One of them, in fact, has already taken on a large part of my responsibilities" (P. 10)</i></p> <p><i>"In this leadership succession process, I could make an analogy with shift handover. The co-workers who left or are leaving, or are thinking of leaving, they hand over what they did, passing on the responsibilities. When I arrived here, my advisor was considering retirement, so she passed on to me the coordination of our distance learning specialization course, which she was responsible for. So, this leadership succession process, in my case, happened with this transfer of responsibilities" (P. 15)</i></p>
Participation of organized collectives	<p><i>"I have always encouraged students to participate, even during their training, in professional associations, especially the Brazilian Nursing Association, which is open to students" (P. 7)</i></p> <p><i>"We need to encourage students to start with very simple things, such as leading an academic center, for instance. These spaces are fundamental for the development of new leaders, so encouraging students and recognizing it as an important activity is a way to develop leadership attitudes" (P. 13)</i></p> <p><i>"The student union was a space parallel to my undergraduate studies (...), and it was the most important space because it was a space where I wasn't just concerned with building myself as a nurse, but also as a citizen, as someone who participates in this world and whose experiences also affect us. So, there I interacted with people from various health professions, all people who were in training. And my involvement within the university context, participating in meetings with vice-rectors, rectors, and making demands, helped me to have this more collective perspective" (P. 16)</i></p>

Table 3 - Summary of data from the category “New seeds have been sown, and the future belongs to them”, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil, 2018**Category: New seeds have been sown, and the future belongs to them**

Excerpts from speeches

“Someone or several people will take this forward [interviewee referring to her research group’s assets]. My way? Obviously not! And you want frankness? Good! You understand? Because it’s necessary to innovate” (P. 3)

“I’m going to retire and whoever stays here will do it the way they want to do it, the way they think is best” (P. 8)

“People, they build a history, and we leave that history for the world. I think that each person who acts in life is also responsible for leaving a legacy for future generations, but cannot be held responsible for 100% of the future that will come, because we are not able to live for the future, to live the future. We always live in the present” (P. 9)

“Everyone’s life story is different. Now, if they had good foundations while they were with me, I can already consider that a legacy. A structure, I think that’s the legacy; now, what each one will develop, doesn’t have to be my offspring; “Each one has their own trajectory” (P. 11)

“It’s not that the person left and the business ended, no. The business continues to thrive; what changes are the ways in which the proposal is managed” (P. 12)

“My hope is that this legacy will at least be inspiring for those who succeed me. Each person will certainly shape their own story. I have followed a path, I have a history, I built an academic and professional career from one perspective, but I am also very clear that each person who succeeds me will build their own career, their own story. So, in that sense, I think my legacy isn’t something that someone else will have to pick up and continue, but rather that it should be inspiring so that they can forge their own path and their own professional and academic trajectory” (P. 13)

“So, I see that there are already people taking on various roles within our research group, and things will continue differently. I think that some people are already carrying on. I can rest easy; I separate myself from things, and things keep happening. And very cool things happen, so I think that’s the result of your work in the lives of those people who continue” (P. 16)

and continue through collaborative work, task sharing, and encouraging participation in management committees and commissions.

Although the teaching of leadership concepts and practices needs to be present in all education programs⁽³²⁾, in its absence, experienced nursing leaders need to take on the preparation of their co-workers^(3,12,31).

The recognition of leadership skills in others needs to happen as early as possible in teaching careers^(5,32) to ensure the presence of qualified people to lead nursing^(3,8), as the complexity of leadership roles in academic settings requires preparation and maturation time to take over these positions^(1,5,12).

Once potential leaders were identified, faculty members described how they began planning ways to develop them. One of the strategies identified in the data is investment in collaborative work, such as research groups, partnerships to coordinate research, joint mentoring, preparation, discussion, and submission of scientific articles, among other functions. Faculty members believe that sharing these functions and participating in discussions and decisions allows them to prepare others for the role, favoring younger members’ involvement in management. The literature indicates that young individuals with leadership skills need to be encouraged and mentored by experienced faculty leaders so that they can develop their potential^(12,18,32).

The faculty who participated in this study indicated that, when undertaking strategies to identify and develop future leaders, they do so based on their own experiences throughout their academic and professional careers. Thus, when faculty members focus on developing future leaders, they reproduce their own experience and existence. What each person lives and has lived, such as their history and culture, opens up possibilities for being. Humans and things are defined by relationships. Thrown into the world, beings apprehend the world’s occurrences and, based on what they have been, elaborate and decide what they can be⁽²⁷⁾. Upon entering the world, faculty, in their quest to learn leadership, come to understand

their role and interpret the possibilities of being a leader based on their past experiences and interactions with others. They define themselves and learn to be leaders based on the relationships they establish with other faculty they consider leaders, with co-workers, and with future leaders.

Openness to the possibilities of being developed from history and shared experiences redirects attention to the importance of sharing experiences and information among faculty of different generations. This is especially important in an academic context when institutions lack formal strategies to develop future academic leaders.

In addition, faculty understand that the commitment to developing projects to cultivate future leaders allows for the planting of living seeds of their legacy. These seeds enable leadership succession, as well as progress continuity and transformations that the future will demand. This is the central idea of the third category, and data supporting it indicate that being-professor is committed to and “pre-occupied” with caring for future leaders, understanding that the possibility of being part of the future has been exhausted, and because they do not exercise governance over it. Thus, at a certain point, they cease to take responsibility for what will happen in the future, as they feel they should only care for new faculty and allow them the freedom to do what they deem appropriate.

Concerned about the profession’s future, faculty embark on a journey of dedication and care for young nurses. However, the care they offer is not one that dominates, taking the place of the other, but rather the care that enables the other to evolve and build their own path, with freedom.

According to Heidegger, concern can manifest itself in two extreme ways. In one of them, it can take care of others away and take their place, jumping into their position. In this mode, others’ occupation is taken over, making them dependent and dominated, even if silently. There is also the possibility of a concern that does not replace, but rather leaps forward, anticipating them, not to withdraw care, but to restore it as such⁽²⁷⁾.

Hence, the study results, through faculty members' statements, relate to Heidegger's thought, referring to solicitude as zeal, care for the other, enabling their growth, and the exercise of their freedom. Thus, the responsibility of experienced faculty is built in the present, and in the future, what remains is their capacity to care in a liberating way. By doing so, they enable young faculty to find their way and know how to act when their mentor is no longer around.

The faculty's legacy is anchored in the essential structure of being-together, not just being together, because it is not their stories, but the seeds, that remain in each person who lived with them. What was planted will allow younger generations to build their own paths.

By using the snowball sampling technique, starting with faculty members considered key informants based on their leadership profile, not all states in Brazil were reached, which can be considered a limitation of this research.

Despite this, the study points to clues that can assist in the succession planning of academic nursing leaders, as well as gaps in workforce development policy in academic settings.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that leadership succession in academia occurs through meetings between generations of faculty, as well as through the openness of experienced leaders to a liberating approach to care.

Concerned about the future of their own work, experienced faculty use their relationships with younger co-workers, especially their advisees, to develop leadership skills. To do this, they adopt strategies that they experienced in the past with their mentors or built throughout their careers. The interaction between experienced faculty, students, and junior faculty plays a significant role, as it allows faculty to identify potential future leaders. Furthermore, through collaborative work and encouragement to take on administrative and academic management responsibilities, faculty create opportunities for learning and development.

While we understand the importance of formalizing strategies for leadership succession in institutions, experienced leaders have an essential role in ensuring that new leaders are prepared for the future. To do this, they need to understand the finite nature of their professional careers and the importance of nurturing young faculty members so that these individuals have the capacity and freedom to build solid careers, equipped with the necessary tools to guarantee the continued growth of nursing within institutions and the profession as a whole.

In this context, it is also important to highlight the need for institutions to reflect on the importance of establishing, in their planning, development strategies aimed at leadership succession, which, in the academic context, proves to be even more complex due to the involvement in specific topics and the long-term nature of the career itself.

Furthermore, this issue deserves discussion at the governmental policy level, as the breakdown of leadership directly impacts the

core activities carried out, in this case, of immeasurable value, since it concerns nursing education.

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Authors' contributions - CRediT

ETS: conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; project management; validation; visualization; writing – original draft and writing – review & editing.

DBM: conceptualization; data curation; methodology; supervision; validation; writing – original draft and writing – review & editing.

KMS: conceptualization; methodology; supervision; validation; writing – original draft and writing – review & editing.

MM: methodology; validation; writing – original draft and writing – review & editing.

LCMR: validation; writing – original draft and writing – review & editing.

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Conflicts of interest

None.