OPENING THE DIALOGUE: 
WHAT COUNTS?

To the Editor:

Thank you for the thoughtful editorial in the September issue (Oermann & Yoder-Wise, 2012). I appreciated it very much. My observation is that the short-burst repeated practice of high-risk, low-frequency skills is a hallmark of professional development activities inside health care facilities. Fortunately, it is becoming a more sophisticated and context-specific activity with the increasing availability of high-fidelity simulation in hospitals. I have personally developed continuing professional development activities with contact hours that have included the attainment of psychomotor skills. However, I would venture to say that the majority of such continuing education programs do not, for a variety of reasons (e.g., time and space constraints, shifting to online formats, and so on), focus on psychomotor skills. An interesting question is being posed: How does skill performance equate to continued professional development? Perhaps the issue is a broader one: What are the dimensions of continuing competence in nursing, and what ways are best able to demonstrate attainment? My sense is that there are multiple ways of knowing that form a composite of a competent practitioner. A counterpoint piece to this editorial would spark some good dialogue.

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To the Editor:

Thank you for publishing such a timely editorial in the September issue (Oermann & Yoder-Wise, 2012). I would add that it’s not just “what counts” but “how it counts”—how do we evaluate learning and award contact hours based on outcomes rather than the traditional seat time? The ANCC’s Commission on Accreditation is looking at a number of non-traditional ways to address both of these issues. As an example, the Commission on Accreditation has removed the 30-minute minimum requirement for a learning activity. This was based on evidence similar to that in the editorial—that just-in-time learning and reinforcement clearly add to the knowledge, skill, and ability of the practicing nurse. Similarly, the Nursing Skills Competency Program bases recognition of programs on the reliability and validity of evaluation data showing the ability of the learner to apply skills competencies in a contextual setting, again reinforcing the need to have repetitive opportunities to hone skills and develop confidence and competence.

I love this chance for educators to reflect on new opportunities and shifts in thinking!

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