Our Future Is Bright

Recently, I conducted a workshop for some of the doctor of nursing practice (DNP) graduates from “my” school. These graduates came together as a cohort reunion with the intent of collegiality and learning. We often engage in one activity or the other, and we are missing something when we do not integrate the experiences. Let me explain.

Because the planning group wanted to emphasize their relationship with each other (key to any successful endeavor, including a doctoral program), we decided to begin with reports from each person about what he or she had done since graduation, slightly more than 1 year ago. Were we engaged in this activity? Well, we took about half of the time for the program accomplishing this sharing. Did we learn from this sharing? You can judge for yourself.

Some stayed in the same positions, others had promotions, and others found new positions. No matter what they were doing, though, they could articulate the differences that education made. Many of them are not what might be expected. In my view, some of these differences are what education is really about. You may be thinking, but this is about formal academic education for a small percentage of the population (those who are already master’s prepared). However, what they had learned had to do with the integration of collegiality and learning, something that can be done in any kind of educational setting. These were “life lessons” that we can share and learn from in any educational setting.

My favorite comment was “seeing beyond.” Think about that. Expert nurses do this all the time. They are filtering tons of information in any encounter, whether with a patient or a colleague. They attempt to learn from each event of the day so that tomorrow’s activities will be better. Seeing beyond has the potential for us to expand our horizons either in breadth or in depth. Seeing beyond the factors in the current interaction allows individuals to think about the future before responding in the present.

Or, seeing beyond allows individuals to think about how one situation can apply to other situations.

“Being at the table” was another key message. (One even said the table was palpable!) This saying refers to the idea of being where decisions are made. One of nursing’s historical messages related to the idea of wanting to be considered a full partner. Part of this change of culture has derived from the acknowledgment that care must be provided by teams. Another part, however, has to do with the fact that nurses have produced great evidence about the difference nursing care makes. As we show we make an important difference in care, more place settings become available at the table because our evidence precedes us. The third part is how any learning allows us to become more skilled at important professional competencies, including how to be at the table.

The third message that had relevance for me was the idea of confidence. I agree that the title “doctor” (referring, of course, to the name of the degree and not a role) carries significant weight. However, if confidence isn’t part of the execution of a role, the title is meaningless. Confidence comes through education and experience. Confidence contributes to seeing beyond and being at the table. This integration of these experiences reflects both learning and collegiality.

The opportunity to share experiences and ideas with others can potentiate knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Isn’t that the core of team training? Experiencing knowledge acquisition with others bonds people and provides various views of what might otherwise be a simple piece of information. This greater world view can only enrich us as professionals and make our futures bright.

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