Preserving the Practice of Teaching in Nursing

The curriculum revolution is a call for innovation in nursing education at a time when needed funding has never been more scarce. With little federal funding, zero funding from the National Center for Nursing Research, and infrequent success in the competition for Department of Education funds, we face a dim future. At a time of innovation and renewed dialogue, this situation is a portent for only small scale studies, doctoral studies without follow-up, or no research at all. What will guide us in our future as we struggle with the issues of schooling in nursing?

Many nurses continue to receive doctoral degrees in the discipline of education but return to clinical research. Some tenure track faculty wish to continue in nursing educational research but fear they are jeopardizing their tenure cases because so little funding is available. We need nurse researchers who bring in and test approaches from other disciplines. But we also need new cadres of nurse scholars and researchers committed to the explication of the practice of teaching in nursing.

If we think of our work as teachers as our practice of teaching in nursing, new possibilities emerge. From this perspective, we can consider how we teach as teachers and how we teach as nurses. That is, how does our move toward understanding nursing practice inform our practice of teaching? If nursing practice is central and guides us as we practice teaching, then our scholarship and research in the context of teaching can both enlighten practice as well as be enlightened by it.

Research in the practice of teaching can inform our dialogue and help us as we seek approaches that are more than mere applications of educational research. Nursing research can lead and inform the research being done in public education. We do not practice teaching as our other academic colleagues. As a predominantly female discipline of caregivers, we need to understand the differences in our practices to create a future that is grounded and enhanced by our understandings of how we practice nursing.

There is a more profound reason to preserve the practice of teaching in nursing through research and scholarship. Teaching and nursing are ancient practices, marginalized by our technological culture. Devalued and insignificant, these practices remain marginal, but still a part of the current technological epoch. In important ways, while our tools may change, many of the traditional practices of teaching and nursing remain. According to the philosopher Martin Heidegger, saving power may grow out of preserving practices that resisted the homogenizing nihilism of the current epoch. Retaining an understanding of these practices through hermeneutic scholarship and research is one way to unfold a future of new possibilities for the practices of teaching and nursing. Gathering all these understandings together by reflecting and researching our practice of teaching in nursing will create, collect, and preserve the ways and the voices of these ancient practitioners and ourselves.

What does this mean to us as teachers and nurses? We can support a movement for Congress to act to restore funding for research in nursing education. We can also embrace research in nursing education in ways that uncover its importance to our practices as clinicians and nurse researchers. This approach can inform those of us who include the practice of teaching as an important part of our research practices.

Perpetuating the myth that nursing educational research is merely educational research in nursing closes down the possibility of discovering what is unique about our practice of teaching in nursing. The curriculum revolution is simultaneously a scholarly, political, and social movement that both empowers and reveals our future through our attempts to understand practice.

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