

NURSING

Journaling as a Strategy for Developing Reflective Practitioners Families in Transition Practicum NURS 373 and Adult Transitions Practicum NURS 361

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The Ignatian Mentoring Program provided the opportunity in the fall of 2006 for me to spend dedicated time with my friend and colleague, Cecile Walsh. Because Cecile mentored two people, I was fortunate in that I was also able to share this experience with Kelly Beischel a friend from the department of nursing. I gained an even greater appreciation of Ignatian spirituality through our discussions. As a result of this sharing I chose to incorporate Ignatian characteristics into the curriculum through journaling which would serve as a strategy for 60 junior year nursing students and six faculty members to reflect on how they incorporate Ignatian characteristics into their daily living.

Journaling is a method frequently discussed in nursing and educational literature as an “active learning technique that is meant to enhance reflective practice” (Blake, 2005). Reflective practice is a means of self-examination that involves looking back over what has happened in practice in an effort to improve, or encourage professional growth (Ruth-Sahd, 2003). Why is journaling important? The literature cites numerous reasons for utilizing journaling/reflective practice in the academic setting. According to Pinkstaff (1985), students find that ideas become clearer when they must write them down. Students get a better sense of the whole as they view their own actions embedded in the complex interactions between self and others (Cooper, 1991). Writing requires students not only to make connections, but to declare them in concrete form. Students are thereby involved actively in the process of their own teaching/learning (Pinkstaff).

Since the nursing students at Xavier already engage in reflective journaling in all of their practicum courses, it occurred to me to ask the question “could reflecting through journaling on Ignatian characteristics advance the integration of these spiritual characteristics into the everyday living”? It is from this platform that I included criteria in the syllabus for both NURS 373 and 361, in addition to the existing journaling framework, for weekly reflection on the personal application of Ignatian characteristics. During orientation to the course, each student was presented with two documents; *Do You Speak Ignatian?* and *Student Life in the Jesuit Tradition*. The objective of the weekly assignment was discussed by the faculty and students. The journaling activity was worth ten percent of the final grade for both courses.

I was hopeful that as discussed by Blake (2005) regarding the many advantages of journaling as a means of developing reflective practice that these students and faculty would experience a heightened awareness that includes the following:

- Discovering meaning
- Instilling values of the profession
- Gaining perspectives of others
- Developing affective skills
- Caring for self (page 2)

Witherall (1991) states that journaling enables the writer to discover connections between self and other barriers to understanding, and to know more deeply about the meanings of one's own cultural narrative. Journaling provides a form of educational encounter that renders us human and frees the moral imagination.

Below are some of the quotes excerpted from over 500 journal entries. Student excerpts:

- "Ignatian principles and characteristics work really well with holistic nursing"
- "I've actually never been asked to include Ignatian principles/characteristics into my care and truthfully have never thought about it while I was caring for someone. But, I've always tried to keep a positive attitude about what I'm doing even though I'm nervous. I do my best to stay respectful of the patient and others on the unit by talking calmly in the hallways and addressing needs for the patient at the first available opportunity. If students need help, I assure them everything will be ok because we are all in this clinical journey together."
- "The Ignatian principle that I witnessed today was seeing "good" in the universe and being grateful for the gift. The entire surgery staff seemed really aware of respecting the patient and wanting to provide the best care possible. They respected each other and the roles they each played in the surgery as well. When I went to the PACU, I also saw this respect for the patients. The nurses were with them the whole time, giving them support as they came out of anesthesia. It gave me a positive feeling to see this consistently happening."
- "Discernment and 'magis' are two Ignatian principles I have been thinking about lately. As a nurse (and also just a person in general), I always hope to make good decisions. In the nursing profession, it is especially important to make decisions that are good for clients and staff. Making good choices is not always easy because of the number of factors to consider or the nature of the issue (legal/ethical dilemmas). The idea of "magis" has become a challenge for me. I try

to push myself beyond basic expectations in the classroom, at clinical and also other areas of my life. I have found that the highest expectations I encounter are the ones I have for myself. My hope is that these expectations will help me to always strive for excellence, for more."

- "I found God in all things with my patient. Although she was grumpy at first, I was able to be patient and help her have less pain. I did not become angry with her, but I understood and tried to put myself in her position."
- "I told my patient everything that I was doing, held her hand, and sat with her in hopes that she would feel less anxious and more like an individual of importance. I did not yell at her like I heard someone else do, I really wanted her to feel like a respected human being. I see this as women and men for others not just doing what I am supposed to do as a student nurse."
- "I feel that this clinical experience has opened my eyes wider to the Ignatian principle of being 'men and women for others.' Through my interactions with the nurses, my fellow classmates and Shannon, I have come to realize that this is our main purpose in life, to be 'men and women for others.' As a nurse, I will get this opportunity everyday."

Faculty response:

- "I think the principle of "magis" can be a double-edge sword. In striving for more or excellence, it is sometimes hard to know when enough is enough. Over the last couple of weeks, I have had two students that have been very hard on themselves, in terms of grades on assessments, written in their journals or verbalizing frustrations that they were not more independent, functioning at a higher level or getting better grades. While I can certainly understand their striving for more or excellence (which I do encourage), I have tried to impart that this time in their education, is a time for learning and growing. It is unreasonable for them to expect to have mastered all those skills at this time. I don't want them concentrating only on the negative, I am trying to get them to acknowledge the significant advances they have made and will continue to make throughout the remainder of their education. I believe that I encouraged caring for self or 'Cura Personalis' through my reflections."

In conclusion, the assignment of weekly reflective journaling upon personal application of the Ignatian characteristics for many was a meaningful experience. I valued the opportunity to witness growth in awareness and understanding over

time and most students agreed that the assignment should be included in subsequent years. As described by Cooper (1991) "these small, insignificant objects, filled with the simple words of our lives can serve to make us whole."

References

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