

## Book Review

### ***Educating Nurses: A Call for Radical Transformation***

**Patricia Benner, Molly Sutphen, Victoria Leonard, Lisa Day**  
**San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009, 288 pp.**  
**ISBN 978-0-470-45796-2**

**Reviewed by Madeleine Buck**

Many authors have suggested that, in response to the skills that nurses require to meet the needs of society and the health-care system, nursing education must be transformed. Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, and Day go a step further and call for “urgent and radical transformation” of how nurses are educated and how nursing educators are prepared for their teaching role. Benner et al. analyze the results of the Carnegie National Nursing Education study, conducted in 2006, and share their interpretations, insights, and worries in a well-organized and logically flowing book. Fortunately, they also propose solutions in this “must read” for any nurse educator, nursing dean, or health-care administrator. True to Benner’s style, vivid examples provide meaningful context to the analysis of the study’s somewhat depressing findings. The authors are not afraid to share their blunt conclusions, using statements like “as observers, we too were distressed at the approach to teaching . . .” They pointedly state that “in short, the answer is no” to the question “Are nurses entering practice equipped with the knowledge and skills for today’s practice and prepared to continue clinical learning for tomorrow’s nursing?”

With a cursory acknowledgement that nursing academia has made strides in the past several years, the authors share their less than positive analysis of the findings of this research study of US nursing education programs involving site visits to nine institutions and three national surveys of faculty and students. Benner et al. caution against the fragmentation of nursing education that arises from the sharp separation of classroom and clinical teaching, conclude that nursing curricula tend to be weak in the natural and social sciences as well as in technology and the humanities, and cite the inadequacy of formal teacher preparation to meet the needs of nursing education today. While the study was conducted in the United States, many nurse educators will be able to identify with the vivid examples offered, especially when the challenges of providing quality clinical education are discussed.

Recommendations for radical transformation are plenty. They include: raising entry standards in areas such as science preparation for RN-to-baccalaureate transition programs; increasing the number of direct entry master's programs in nursing; instituting a high-quality postgraduate residency of at least 1 year for all nursing graduates; increasing the emphasis on the integration of knowledge, clinical reasoning, skilled know-how, and ethical comportment; and minimizing horizontal violence against nursing students. Nurse educators are encouraged to abandon the sharp separation of clinical and classroom teaching in favour of the integration of classroom and clinical teaching in order to strengthen connections between the acquisition and use of knowledge. They are also urged to use "pedagogies of inquiry," whereby students learn to develop the skills necessary to answer clinical questions using the literature, information systems, databases, and the like; to adopt teaching strategies such as situated cognition and thinking in action; and to shift the emphasis from critical thinking to clinical reasoning and multiple ways of thinking that include critical thinking.

The best aspects of *Educating Nurses* are four in number. First, the book acknowledges the complexity of nursing education and will dispel any notion that educating a nurse is a simple matter. Second, the authors provide lovely "paradigm cases" to illustrate the work of exemplary teachers. These model cases offer hope and are likely to motivate any nursing instructor to deconstruct his or her teaching approach in order to improve its quality. Third, the book will bring solace to those nurse educators who have been struggling to develop their students' skills in clinical reasoning, critical thinking, and sense of moral agency, as opposed to "covering content," as in an additive curriculum where it is assumed that if important material is "covered," then thinking will necessarily follow (Ironsides, 2004). The final "best" aspect of *Educating Nurses* is its succinct and provocative 26-item "agenda" for improving nursing education at the program level. While not all of the items will apply to every country, the recommendations on the entry and pathways to nursing, the student population, the student experience, teaching, entry to practice, and national oversight — including accreditation — provide direction that is clearly visionary.

Given that this book was my summer holiday reading, I wish I had read the paradigm cases first. As a nurse educator of several years' standing, I have been well aware of the challenges, gaps, and possibilities that lie before us, and *Educating Nurses* confirms in black and white that we have a long way to go. I worry that if "non-nurses" read the book they will wonder what we've been doing in nursing education to get this far in the face of so many gaps. So, as I prepare for my nursing courses this fall I have decided to get rid of half of my PowerPoint presentations

(a strong recommendation in the book) and am learning to use narrative pedagogy!

### **References**

Ironside, P. (2004). "Covering content" and teaching thinking: Deconstructing the additive curriculum. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 43(1), 5–12.

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