

## **ALTRUISM & EGOCENTRISM: THE TEACHING AND PERFORMING OF MORAL POSITIVE CONCERN**

### **GOAL:**

To teach professional nursing students that critical thinking is the process of purposeful regulatory judgment as a part of the professional nursing role. This process considers evidence, context, conceptualizations, methods, and criteria. (American Philosophical Association's Delphi Consensus Definition)

### **WORDS FOR APPLICATION:**

Professional Nurse

Nursing Process

Critical Thinking

Magnificent Obsession

### **WHO IS THE PROFESSIONAL NURSE?**

In my world, today and tomorrow's, entry into professional nursing commences with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Nursing academic education, theory, and clinical practice regarding the known "nursing process" of nursing on behalf of a client/patient include the ability to:

- *Assess* correctly nursing care/healthcare needs
- *Plan* an effective course intended to meet the nursing care/healthcare needs
- *Implement* successfully the plan to meet the nursing care/healthcare needs
- *Evaluate* correctly the outcomes designed to meet the nursing care/healthcare needs
- *Re-establish and implement adjustments* to the plan to hopefully and more accurately meet nursing care/healthcare needs

The professional nurse today and in the near future have additional exceptional abilities to:

- *Recognize* physical and mental health problems and their relationships to healthful living.
- *Confer* with other supportive healthcare providers as an integral part of determining healthcare behaviors.
- *Perform* leadership and management roles within the healthcare system to coordinate all healthcare disciplines successfully.
- *Possess* the intellectual ability of critical thinking to apply, analyze, contrast concepts, evaluate situations, and create new and more accurate healthcare decisions that produce positive healthcare outcomes.
- *Research* comparative intellectual concepts and ideas to determine a known accurate course of healthcare behaviors.
- *Practice* within acceptable and forever advancing clinical healthcare behaviors.

- *Mentor* new nursing students in the present and future nursing theories and clinical practice.
- *Collaborate* effectively with academic nursing faculty to incorporate nursing theory with clinical nursing behaviors.

### **THE BEGINNINGS OF PROFESSIONAL NURSE CRITICAL THINKING THOUGHT**

It was the first day of classes. How could someone not be excited—after all, for most of these professional nursing students, it was a lifetime dream finally coming true. They know (or at least told) that the road to such a professional role of caring for others is a challenge for most professional nursing students. Yet, here they are, facing me, their instructor, with their eyes wide and enthusiastic smiles that cannot be ignored. I watch them carefully and glance around the room into the faces of what seem to be some students who are too young for such professional responsibility and some who appear to have a few years of lifetime and work experience.

As a nursing instructor/professor, could I be so nursing oriented in my chosen nursing profession to be the role model they desire to see? How can I, as their instructor, present the beginning essence of critical thinking that I know they are about to encounter within the next few year(s) of education? I DO HOPE SO! As a nursing instructor, I know their challenges—to be intellectually astute, warm, and kind toward humankind. My role as a nursing instructor to those who will become our finest nurses is to teach the ability to think deeply, critically, and clearly about challenging healthcare subjects as these students advance to intellectual maturity.

Yet, I know that for all things, there is a season. There is a time to learn the basics, to be intellectually mature and challenged, and for professional nursing students to test their understanding of their intellectual reasoning that spurs them into the professional nurse's role.

And, so, the first challenge begins—the first assignment that challenges and forces professional critical thinking:

1. Remembering specifically related and pertinent knowledge
2. Understanding the newly acquired meaning of specific information
3. Applying the understanding of the newly acquired information
4. Analyzing relationships between advanced concepts and information
5. Using information to make decisive and accurate decisions
6. Creating new ideas, thoughts, and precise knowledge of concepts

### **THE PERSONAL INTROSPECTION OF ALTRUISM AND EGOCENTRISM**

The first and foremost homework question that pushes the boundaries of personal and basic nursing intellectual understanding for the professional student nurse is:

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EGOCENTRISM AND ALTRUISM IN PROFESSIONAL NURSING?

After I announce the assignment, I watch the blank faces throughout the room, and I can almost hear the confusion in their brains as they look at me in silence. I would guess, by the response, that the

relationship between Egocentrism and Altruism is a new critical thinking exercise—at least as it relates to their new intended pursuit of professional nursing.

The lady or gentleman somewhere in the room often says what I was waiting to hear, “Well, how do I find the answer to that?” I try to respond quietly, “You research the words, compare them to your feelings, and intellectually relate them to your understanding of the role of a *professional nurse*. I cannot give you the answers. They are your answers that require your introspection and thought. It deserves your research, personal and professional consideration, and contemplation. It is a personally unique assignment that each professional nursing student must perform to help understand the foundation of what is to be your future role as the professional nursing component of the healthcare profession. It is your Magnificent Obsession—your compelling motivation! The next class will be the discussion related to your research and answers as you critically think about your answers. You are graded on your understanding of the concepts of Altruism and Egocentrism and your internalization of their meaning to you as a professional nursing student.”

The next class reconvenes to discuss their answers to the meaning of Altruism and Egocentrism.

I watch the hands go up and consistently hear the general definition of Altruism as “Wanting to help others”—or similar words of kindness and concern for others. “Why would I ask you to do such a comparative analysis,” I asked. The room goes quiet, as if no one could figure out why life has brought them to this academic setting to answer, what they believe, is a simple general question—but they seem to have no idea! “Because, I said, perhaps your lives have been about the positive aspects of caring and concern for others? Or, in some way, your life has been impacted by the love and care shown to you by others. If that is the case, perhaps you have experienced self-sacrifice and consideration of others. If so, you have experienced Altruism from others. There is a need for some people to “Live for the Sake of Others.” I write the word on the board behind me.

And—how about Egocentrism? While I write this word next to the word Altruism, the room goes silent. “What is Egocentrism?” With a little help, the room verbally agrees that Egocentrism is a condition of thinking of self and self-importance—not necessarily considering others, as in Altruism. (I think the “Ego” part of the word gave away the self-center concept, and the “centrism” part of the word gave away the self as the center of concern). I continue: “Egocentrism,” as a word, indicates selfishness, narcissism, and belief in self-importance rather than caring for others. The totality of the meaning of Egocentrism, at times and in some situations, is self-serving. It is an immature thought not to see the total dynamics of the professional nursing role as the nurse cares for the needs of others. However, understanding Egocentrism and its relationship to our personal needs allows us to understand better and appreciate the needs of others. Without Egocentrism awareness, we might not reach out to others with the same individual needs. Without the need to be cared for by others as a need within ourselves, we might not fully understand the need experienced by others. Consequently, there could be a less than thoughtful understanding and willingness to reach out to help others.”

I say quietly to encourage careful listening to my words. “It is true--we cannot give to others (a sense of caring) what we do not understand or have experienced as a need within ourselves (Egocentrism). Then, we can truthfully say, as professional nurses, we know the feelings we want to impart because we have personally experienced the need for empathy, loving concern, and the human touch to soothe the body and soul and perhaps mend an unseen broken heart. Is there any other behavior (Altruism) that so significantly imparts the true meaning of professional nursing and speaks so profoundly of (hopefully)

your Magnificent Obsession to be a professional nurse?” The room goes silent, and I add—“I think not!” I look around the room and see some students with tears. I close my eyes, bow my head, and realize that “Yes,” the Magnificent Obsession of a compelling motivation to perform the professional nursing role is here in this room—today—and hopefully enhances during each student’s professional nursing lifetime!

### **IN CLOSING**

Each concept (Altruism and Egocentrism) are two ends of the professional nursing spectrum—wanting to meet the personal nurse’s need to be cared for by others (Egocentrism) and the actual act of professional nursing to meet the caring needs of others (Altruism). Both (Egocentrism and Altruism) must be understood and appreciated to experience the fullness of ultimate professional nursing success. Love, understanding, and appreciation for each concept must mutually abound. A nurturing of the personal spirit and soul in meeting the needs of humankind—both of the self and patient—helps to perfect the professional nursing spirit. Professional nurses must meet and recognize their personal needs to be served and cared for to effectively and professionally serve others. It is an all-encompassing cycle of mutual caring for all humankind—self and others. It is the professional nurse’s Magnificent Obsession—the compelling motivation that leads a student toward the role of professional nursing.

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