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# Reclaiming Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education

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## Reclaiming Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education

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## Presentation Overview

- Planning of Ceremony for year 1 students of the Western-Fanshawe Collaborative BScN Program
- Concept of “Ceremony” in Nursing
- *Nursing... A Light to the Future.*  
Inaugural Ceremony: January 14, 2008

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## Our Context

- Collaborative baccalaureate program
- 125 students admitted to University site, remain at this site for all 4 years
- 125 students admitted to College site, complete 2 years at this site and move to University site for final 2 years

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## Our Challenge

- Integrate student experience as members of one class across two sites
- Create a more seamless experience for students

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## Our Strategy

- Create a Dean's Task Force
  - Formal Welcome Convocation
- Collaborate with the Nursing Student Council
  - Informal Welcome BBQ in September,
  - Formal Ceremony in January
- Form an Organizing Committee of Coordinators, Faculty and Student Representatives

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## Our Planning

- Choosing a theme
- Developing a program
- Creating a meaningful ceremony → reclaiming our nursing heritage, ritual and ceremony

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## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education

- Ceremonies mark important psychological and sociological transitions for human beings
- Ceremonies for nursing students mark points of psychological transition, change in social and occupational role, as well as meet educational milestones in their education programs (Hawkins & Redding, 2004; Lee, Idczak, Moon & Brown-Schott, 2006)

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## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

- A ceremony that welcomes students into the profession can achieve a very important psychological purpose: students can begin to realize their transition from novice in nursing to a future professional nurse. Students are provided with support, reassurance and recognition (Hawkins & Redding, 2004)
- It is possible to transmit nurses' own respect for what they are and what they do, to support and communicate a sense of professionalism (Carlson-Catalano, 1993; Parker, Gardner & Wiltshire, 1992; Suominen, Kovasin & Ketola, 1997)

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## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

- Many aspects of nursing have evolved through time. The knowledge base in nursing has increased dramatically, changing how nurses are educated. A strong sense of professionalism is present, while the values of accountability and interdependence are being cultivated (Schmidt, 2002)

Nurses today have grown up in an environment that has led them to put a great deal of value on individual achievement, pleasure and self-actualization.... Nursing hasn't learned yet to speak as a profession in a unified way that is powerful.... Nursing doesn't speak with one voice because there is too much internal conflict....  
(Potempa, as cited in Schmidt, 2002, p. 4)

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## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

- Ceremonies have been a tradition in nursing. Such traditions strengthen ties to an institution and serve as connecting experiences for students and faculty. They can also help to enhance students' commitment to nursing as a career. The adaptation of traditions to contemporary nursing education can be meaningful (Elgie, 2007; Lee, Idczak, Moon & Brown-Schott, 2006; Philpin, 2002)

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## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

- Many nursing programs have no celebrations while students are completing their programs of study. Graduation ceremonies with academic attire are the only visible recognition of achievement of an educational milestone. There may be no reference to the student having made the psychological transition from nursing student to nursing professional (Ellis & Hartley, 2001; Hawkins & Redding, 2004; Holland, 1999; Walsh, 1991; Philpin, 2002)

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## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

....Rituals are how people have always passed on their value system to their young, the next generation. During the modern era, nursing became isolated from its rituals and values; yet it is through ritual that a community heals and enlightens itself. It is ritual that brings forth opportunities to celebrate and release-to let go of the modern sterility and disconnection. Light and ritual are used by individuals and groups to celebrate, heal, remember and reconnect with their members and their meanings. (Watson, 1999)

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## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

The beauty of the rite of passage helps solidify one's professional identity, giving a tone of seriousness and commitment. Nursing's traditionalism helps connect nurses with our history and shows us that our place in this profession is special and publicly recognized. Traditions help establish our identity.

(Miller, as cited in Schmidt, 2002, p. 1)

## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

- It is important to understand the purpose and meaning of symbols and rituals because in nursing practice our goal is to provide nursing care which is based on a culture (Elgie, 2007; Hawkins & Redding, 2004; Leininger, 1984, 1988; Philpin, 2002; Suominen, Kovasin & Ketola, 1997; Tagliareni, 2007)
  - ❖ Capping ceremonies (unique to each school), Pinning ceremonies (unique to each school), recitation of Nightingale Pledge, lighting of Lamp of Knowledge (to symbolize the intellect needed for nursing), Sigma Theta Tau Honor Cord (to denote the scholarly nature of nursing), reading of poetry (symbolic of the caring, nurturing qualities of the art of nursing)

## Our Heritage: Ritual and Ceremony in Nursing Education...

...I finally decided that the traditional capping ceremony was less about caps and more about a rite of passage, an acknowledgment of "becoming a nurse" and the beginning of all that being a nurse implied—the judgments, the skills, the caring, the planning, and the compassion. While the hard and soft skills in nursing have evolved through the ages of turmoil in health care, the core of nursing—the soul of nursing—has always been and always should be the stewardship of health. The capping ceremony marked the time when I became a steward of health, and it is no wonder that it was such an important event in my life. (Elgie, 2007, p. 345)

## The Ceremony *Nursing ... A Light to the Future*

- Traditional setting in "The Great Hall" at Western
- Students greeted by faculty as they arrived
- Classical music in the background
- Business casual attire
- Class of 2011 seated alphabetically
- Year 1 Coordinators from each site acted as emcees

The Ceremony  
*Nursing ... A Light to the Future ...*

- Dignitaries attended as platform guests
- Greetings given by University and College Presidents
- Short address from program coordinator about the meaning of caring in nursing
- Short address from undergraduate coordinators about light as a nursing symbol and the Nightingale Declaration written by the Nightingale Initiative for Global Health (NIGH)

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The Ceremony  
*Nursing ... A Light to the Future ...*

- Special “Collaborative Candle” lighting by Year 1 faculty, one representative from each site  
*“If any one image pervades nursing’s history, it is the light of Nightingale’s lamp: radiating the meaning of nursing’s light and energy to the world”*  
(Watson, 1999, p. 269)
- Special address by Graduate and Gold Medal Winner, Class of 2007

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The Ceremony  
*Nursing ... A Light to the Future ...*

- Presentation of a class pin to each student by dignitaries
- Recitation of the *Nightingale Declaration*  
The *Nightingale Declaration Campaign (NDC)* is a programme of the *Nightingale Initiative for Global Health (NIGH)* created to achieve support towards working for the achievement of the UN Resolution for a United Nations Decade for a Healthy World, 2011-2020.  
[www.nightingaledclaration.net](http://www.nightingaledclaration.net)
- Light buffet and conversation among dignitaries, faculty, and the Class of 2011

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Students’ Feedback

- “It was a great opportunity to meet students from the Western site”
- “I really enjoyed the guest speakers at this event, and would like to see more events to come.”
- “I liked how the event was formal and very organized ... .”

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## Students' Personal Meaning 1

"The pinning ceremony was an important experience for me because it reminded me that my decision to enter nursing was a decision to become part of a very important profession. The pin seemed to symbolize reaching the first step toward becoming that professional nurse that I had envisioned myself to be."

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## Students' Personal Meaning 2

"I found that the ceremony was extremely important in uniting both streams of the collaborative program. It certainly made me feel that I was an individual within a large group of individuals who share a common vision. The ceremony inspired me to feel more connected to my peers and colleagues."

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## Students' Personal Meaning 3

"I was proud wearing my pin during my clinical rotation in my first pair of scrubs! It added to my professional look. When my resident asked, I enjoyed explaining that the pin signified my journey towards becoming an RN."

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## Students' Personal Meaning 4

"... was also nice to get recognition from the faculty for our accomplishments from first semester. ... Entering into clinical is something that I will remember for my whole life, and hearing people share their experiences is much appreciated ... . However, if you get more funding for this and end up giving out gold pins, I want one ... just kidding."

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## Students' Personal Meaning 5

"It made us believe that we had a big part in health care. I believe that this should be a ritual/tradition that should be repeated yearly for new nursing students. It will give them a sense of recognition for their hard work and also make them feel very important in health care."

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## Looking Ahead

- Deans have approved funding for January 2009 Ceremony
- Anticipate that Representatives from Class of 2011 will assist Organizing Committee with planning of Ceremony for Class of 2012

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*"May you, too, walk in your own power, your own light and your own beauty, and pass it on... radiating caring, healing, and peace to greet the new world."*

*(Watson, 1999, p.276)*



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