Imogene King’s Theory of Goal Attainment and the Millennial Nurse: An Important Mentoring Tool for Nurse Educators

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Abstract

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The pioneer millennial generation of students and graduates is entering the profession of nursing. They are adeptly equipped with technological savvy, unabashed confidence, and self-directed goal achievement. Imogene King’s nursing theory of goal achievement and attainment provides a framework to guide and mentor the upcoming graduate nurse into practice. The future of nursing demands that nurse educators have the ability to support millennials and their goal attainment through different learning modalities and that they have the willingness to endorse and mentor students as the new pioneers in the practice of nursing.

Introduction

In the last years, nurse educators have been introduced to and provided information on strategic teaching methodologies for millennial students in nursing programs in the United States (Johanson, 2012). The majority of this information is emerging from their predecessors, the baby boomer nurse educators, who are working to understand and guide this next generation of nurses. Although it is important to have some basic knowledge of the characteristics and understanding of the millennial students to improve nursing education and practice, the future warrants the nurse educators’ ability to support the ideology of goal attainment and different learning modalities and have a willingness to endorse and mentor the new pioneers in the practice of nursing. It is hopeful that the confident and self-assured millennial generation will further pioneer nursing into a heard and valued profession in health care delivery.

Theoretical Application

Imogene King’s model of goal attainment, while developed as a conceptual framework in 1960s, is still a viable concept for nurse educators (King, 1981). King’s theory, developed in 1981, is an important tool for nurse educators to use to mentor the millennial generation, defined as individuals born 1980–2001 (Edge et al., 2011; Mangold, 2007; Pardue & Morgan, 2008). This theory posits that individuals are goal seeking within the framework of three interacting systems that include individual or personal systems, group or interpersonal systems, and society or social systems. The concepts for the personal system are perception, self, growth and development, body image, space, and time. The concepts for the interpersonal are interaction, communication, transaction, role, and stress. The concepts for the social system are organizational, authority, power, status, and decision-making (King, 1981).

King’s theory of goal achievement can be applicable and useful to millennial students and educators as it relates to the importance of communication, transaction, self, stress, growth and development, personal space, and time in both their work and personal lives.

There are many personal and professional characteristics that are associated with the millennial generation, but the frontrunners to consider when planning curricular and methodological changes in higher education are the millennial student’s technological savvy, confidence in what they have to offer, and their goal directness. It is feasible that nurse educators can work within the framework of King’s goal achievement to guide and strengthen these future colleagues and pioneers into practice.

Background

It could be said that baby boomer nurse educators, many of whom are parents of millennials, have readily and maybe even unwittingly
shaped this next generation of nurses. After all, these boomers are the 70’s women activists who strove to provide for their families while advancing their careers. Their goals centered on opening doors for women through hard work and education with the dream that they would ultimately receive recognition and fair compensation for their efforts. Most professional women of this generation mastered the new computer technology for advancement in their jobs, optimistically worked hard for recognition, and developed problem-solving skills to help them manage their work and home life. Their goals included achieving personal growth and success.

It may come as a surprise to baby boomer parents, but the millennial children were listening and watching. This generation followed the pathway that was socially embedded into their consciousness by family members, friends, teachers, and their self-appointed career expectations. They are technological savvy and confident in what they have to offer because they were told they should be self-assured, and they were told that they must work hard to make excellent grades in order to be accepted at their desired colleges and universities. They are also filled with aspirations for advanced educational degrees to better enable them to achieve their goals. The ultimate reward for this generation includes having advanced technology available, a job that gives them financial security and stability, and personal time off to enjoy various social activities that frequently includes their baby boomer parents. King’s theory on goal attainment can be seen in the aspirations and reward ideology of millennial students many of whom will be our future registered nurses (Mitchell, 2012).

Discussion

Technology has been cited as the greatest contributor to changes in nursing health care and the most recognizable difference in proficiency between baby boomers in practice and the current generation of students (LeRouge, Van Slyke, Seale, & Wright, 2014). Millennial students are both skilled and talented in various new and changing technologies. They are flexible learners and master technological advances quickly. They are comfortable with applying these skills and are willing to share and demonstrate their use of technology.

Most millennial students have spent countless hours using technological devices in the car, on athletic fields, preparing for standardized testing, delivering technological presentations for teachers, and engaging with family and friends. All are engaged in multitasking using these devices inside their homes and work settings and outside during physical and social activities. In the future, the current mobile device will be revised in shape, size, and wearability, but will most likely remain the constant companion of this generation and a standard devise used in nursing care delivery.

The readily available mobile phone device has had a tremendous impact on the lives of millennial nursing students and is the most widely used type of technology available (Keengwe, Schnellert, & Jonas, 2014). Currently, the student laptop can be found in proximity to the mobile phone, but for instant communication and connection, the mobile device is a constant companion and source of information.

The drive to master technology, deal with stressors in education and achievement and competition, and work toward goals and career aspirations has developed a new generation of college students. Many are stimulated overachievers who are trying to assure their place in an unknown future (Johanson, 2012). Although not seasoned in a craft or having extensive work experience, the new pioneers of the future have a high level of confidence in themselves to remain on their trajectory to achieve their desired goals.

Implications for the Future

Nurse educators will have to embrace technological changes to continually update their skills to use communication and other technological devices to engage and mentor students. In our everyday lives, we can now check on our status of a loved one, schedule a meeting, arrange transportation, get directions, look up medical information, learn about safety measures, and much more in real time on a technological device. Millennial students, once shown or given time to navigate, have a greater acceptance and mastery of this technology (Pardue & Morgan, 2008).

Although baby boomer educators appreciate these conveniences, many are ambivalent about using the devices in the work setting in deference to taking time for direct nursing care of patients. Many educators may have their own personal struggles to learn where to find or enter information in the changing landscape of computer technology in healthcare settings. In contrast, the millennial generation appreciates the value of the immediate availability of information from their mobile devices because it allows them to complete tasks quickly and efficiently for patient care needs.

The electronic health care record systems that have been adopted by hospitals and health care delivery systems have greatly impacted the education sites in nursing. For example, clinical nurse educators have become keenly aware of the hours that their students are required to attend for computer training at health care institutions. The students may have to attend computer training classes at different hospitals and other health care institutions learning site-specific electronic documentation systems. In response to the changing technology and millennial proficiency, the students can now attend remote site computer training. The students are learning at their own pace and attention rather than attending a 4 to 8-hour computer training class session (Gallo, 2011). Another example of how baby boomer educators and millennial student may differ with the time-consuming and fast-paced computer training sessions can be seen when the educators begin to look overwhelmed and blurred; however, students may appear to be bored and distracted and are multitasking with other technological devices.

When it comes to new technology, the baby boomer nurse educators may find the students ahead of their own learning curve with a computer program or device. When this situation occurs, there is an opportunity to build a cooperative, reflective, and shared learning experience (Bonaduce & Quigley, 2011). King’s theory identifies that the nurse and patient (student) relationship includes communicating information, setting goals together, and then taking appropriate action to achieve those goals (King, 1981).

Because it is likely that mobile devices will most likely remain the preferred method of communication for the millennial practitioner, this could provide many opportunities to have shared learning experiences between the students and educator. For example, nurse educators and practitioners in the clinical setting will have to learn how to integrate the use of mobile devices into practice as a positive methodology for finding information on medications, diseases, treatments, and as a communication device for the effective delivery of patient care. The new pioneers to nursing will need to share their knowledge of the device to help implement effective use of technology.

Phillips identifies that there are significant differences in educational experiences between baby boomers and millennial students (Phillips, 2016). The millennial students have a confidence and self-assurance in their technological and academic achievement, and they expect to be heard and acknowledged for what they know and can offer. Today’s baby boomer faculty may not have had the same confidence and self-assurance when they were college students because they did not expect their educators to listen to their ideas and value their input.

Another difference in educational experience is the millennial’s expectations for immediate instructor feedback on tests, written assignments, and skills assessment. Millennials expect grades to appear on-line quickly and get impatient when feedback is not delivered in what they perceive as timely manner (Edge et al., 2011; Stephens & Gunther, 2016). Baby boomers had to wait patiently to receive feedback from educators, often days or weeks.
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