

Learning Without Borders: A Life Shaped by Service, Education, and Purpose

Dr. Patrick Benj Santos Bernabe

Licensed Nurse • Educator • Community Health Advocate • Naval Reservist

Full-time Faculty, Our Lady of Fatima University–Quezon City (Lagro)

Graduate School Professor, St. Bernadette Lourdes College

patrickbenjbernabe@yahoo.com

“Lifelong learning is not an academic slogan; it is a survival skill in professions that shape lives.” (Bernabe, 2026)



Dr. Patrick Benj Santos Bernabe is a licensed nurse whose work spans education, community health, and national service. He completed his Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2012 and later earned a Master of Science in Nursing, majoring in Adult Health, in 2021, with a specialization in Community Health Nursing, graduating Magna Cum Laude. His master's thesis on nurses' awareness of the health beliefs and practices of religious minorities in Metro Manila was recognized with the Benemeritus Award, the second-highest distinction for thesis writing at La Concordia College. His professional journey began in clinical practice as an aesthetic nurse at The Medical City, after which he transitioned early into leadership roles in education. He became one of the youngest team leaders in a major ESL institution in the Philippines, a role that led to his selection as a pioneer instructor for

a Medical English program for Japanese nurses in Tokyo. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he founded his own ESL school, providing instruction to learners from Japan, China, and Korea.

Dr. Bernabe later served as USRN Director at USRN Academy under Crawford and Company and worked as a trainer in utilization management. In 2024, he earned a Doctor of Humanities in Health and Science and completed both TESOL certification and a Teaching as a Foreign Language diploma from De La Salle University–Taft. He is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing at Philippine Women’s University. He is a full-time faculty member at Our Lady of Fatima University–Quezon City (Lagro) and a graduate school professor at St. Bernadette Lourdes College. Alongside his academic work, he serves as a Staff Sergeant in the Philippine Navy under the Armed Forces of the Philippines and is an active member of the Help Other People Everywhere (HOPE) Foundation. His contributions have been recognized through multiple awards for teaching and leadership excellence, and he has published internationally in the field of nursing education. Beyond his professional life, he is internationally experienced and well-traveled, having visited eighteen countries by the age of thirty-six.

Introduction

I have learned that professional identity is not a fixed role adopted once and carried comfortably through time. It is an evolving commitment, shaped by accountability, moments of disruption, service to others, and a sustained curiosity that refuses stagnation. I have always been drawn to multiplicity—to the challenge of mastering more than one discipline, of allowing knowledge to intersect rather than remain confined. My work across nursing practice, education, community health, and national service reflects this inclination toward multidimensionality rather than singularity. These paths did not unfold in a linear manner, yet each contributed to a clearer sense of purpose: to pursue excellence across fields, to place knowledge in the service of people, and to approach leadership not as status, but as a moral responsibility grounded in care, competence, and lifelong learning.

Life Experiences as the Foundation of Achievement

My career began in clinical practice, where nursing was first introduced to me not as a title, but as proximity to human vulnerability. Early bedside experiences taught me that competence alone is insufficient without



cultural sensitivity, empathy, and understanding. Over time, these encounters shaped my growing interest in community health nursing, particularly in how cultural and religious beliefs influence individuals' experiences of illness and healing.

Thinkers in transcultural nursing have long echoed these observations. Scholars such as Madeleine Leininger have emphasized that culture is not something added to care after the fact, but something that sits at its very core. This perspective deeply resonated with my own experiences and eventually guided my master's work on religious minority groups. That research grew not only from theory, but from real conversations with patients whose voices were often overlooked within formal healthcare spaces.

Philosophy and Practice: Education as Agency

Teaching entered my life early, not as an alternative career, but as a parallel calling. Becoming a team leader at a young age in an ESL institution challenged me to lead people older and more experienced than myself. That experience taught me that authority must be earned through competence and trust, not position.

My involvement in medical English education, particularly in Japan, revealed how communication directly affects patient safety, professional confidence, and system efficiency. During the pandemic, founding my own ESL school became less about entrepreneurship and more about continuity—ensuring that learning did not stop when the world did.

Educational scholars argue that learning should empower individuals to act meaningfully within their environments. Freire emphasized that education must enable critical engagement rather than passive absorption. This belief has guided my approach to teaching nursing students and international learners alike, where education is not about compliance but confidence and agency.

Recognition came along the way, but it was never what drove me. Honors for teaching and leadership simply confirmed that steady effort, care for others, and discipline have value—while also reinforcing the weight of responsibility that comes with leading. In roles ranging from guiding USRN programs to preparing professionals in utilization management to mentoring emerging nurses, I came to understand that effective leadership depends on holding standards firmly while remaining fair and humane.

It is apparent that combining compassion with competence is a good idea. Organizations with leaders who embody both tend to foster trust, innovation, and resilience. When people feel valued and understood, they are more willing to take calculated risks and adapt to change. This sense of belonging and shared purpose has become increasingly essential in diverse and evolving workplaces (Yuen et al., 2003).

Advocacy Through Service and Nation-Building

My service in the Philippine Navy reflects another dimension of my passions—discipline in the service of something larger than oneself. Military training reinforced the importance of accountability, readiness, and ethical responsibility, values that parallel healthcare leadership more than many realize.

Similarly, my involvement with the HOPE Foundation strengthened my conviction that public health is inseparable from social responsibility. Community outreach, disaster response, and health education reaffirmed that healthcare is not only clinical—it is moral. Scholars of servant leadership argue that leadership begins with service and that influence is strongest when rooted in genuine concern for others. This philosophy continues to guide my professional decisions.

A Global Lens, A Continuing Journey

Exposure to different cultures, systems, and perspectives deepened my understanding of adaptability and humility. Travel has become another form of education for me. In an interconnected world, professionals must learn beyond borders — geographical, cultural, and intellectual. In this day and age, I have visited 36 countries, and I am blessed with more.

My pursuit of advanced studies, including my ongoing doctoral work in nursing, reflects a belief that learning is never complete. Lifelong learning is not an academic slogan; it is a survival skill in professions that shape lives.

My Reflections

Looking back, I see my achievements not as separate milestones, but as natural results of showing up through uncertainty, responsibility, and service. Over time, I've learned that we are far less limited than we're often told. When you decide to fully commit, it becomes possible to grow across different fields, take on multiple roles, and succeed in many ways simply because you allowed yourself to try. We are, at our core, built in multitudes.

Leadership, for me, has never been about reaching a final point. It's a practice, shaped by a constant hunger for excellence and a genuine desire to serve. It calls for humility, decisiveness, and care in equal measure. My goal remains simple: to contribute meaningfully, to teach with responsibility, and to lead in ways that value both skill and compassion. The journey continues, along with the responsibility to make sure that learning always turns into service.

References

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