

The Architecture of Achievement: Building Excellence with Intention

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“Each role I have taken on—nurse, educator, administrator, researcher, leader—has reinforced the same belief: that excellence is not a single act, but a system of choices made consistently over time.” (Dela Merced, 2026)



Dr. Joel John A. Dela Merced is a nurse, educator, and healthcare leader whose work bridges public health, higher education, curriculum design, research, and geriatric care. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Baguio in 2007 and passed the Nursing Licensure Examination the same year. Guided by a strong commitment to teaching, he later completed a Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English through the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program at All Nations College and became a licensed professional teacher in 2019. He obtained his Master of Science in Nursing major in

Administration, with thesis, from Concordia College, where he was recognized as Best in Thesis Writing in 2017. His academic training also includes a Certificate of Teaching from the Philippine Women’s University, a Diploma in Hospital Management from the Philippine College of Hospital Administrators, and a certificate course in Research Utilization in the Nursing Process from the University of the Philippines Open University. In 2018, he was conferred the degree of Doctor of Humanities, Honoris Causa, by the Anointed School of Theology.

In 2023, Dr. Dela Merced completed his Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing at the Philippine Women’s University. He is set to graduate with a Doctor of Philosophy in Education major in Educational Leadership and Management from the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Public Administration at Greenville College. His work has been recognized through numerous national and international distinctions. He is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Nurses, Educators, and Researchers conferred by the Royal Institution in Singapore, as well as a Diplomate and Fellow of the Philippine College of Hospital Administrators. He also holds fellowships with the Philippine Society for Quality Healthcare, the Scholars Academic and Scientific Society, and the International Organization for Academic and Scientific Development in India. Among his many honors are the Outstanding Professional Award from Superbrand Philippines, TESDA Idol for the Wage-Employed Category and Tagasanay Award National Champion, the Matalunggaring Award for Distinguished Achievement in Education, the Global Leaders and Educators Award for Excellence in Leadership, and the Luminary Excellence in Education and Research Awards as Outstanding Educator in Science and Outstanding Researcher.

Introduction

I did not arrive at where I am by following a single, carefully drawn blueprint. My path was shaped by movement: between public health and higher education, between service and scholarship, between practice and policy. I began my career on the ground, working as a community health nurse in a rural health unit, where healthcare was not abstract or idealized, but deeply human. Those early years taught me that systems, education, and leadership matter, especially when resources are limited and lives are directly affected.

Teaching entered my life not as a departure from nursing, but as its extension. I found myself drawn to classrooms, curriculum development, and the work of shaping future professionals with the same care I once gave patients. Along the way, I pursued education relentlessly, not for titles, but because every new role demanded deeper preparation. Nursing administration, hospital management, research utilization, educational leadership, and public administration each became another structural layer in how I understood service. Achievement, I learned, is not accidental; it is designed through discipline, study, and the willingness to begin again in unfamiliar spaces.

My journey has taken me through universities, training institutions, and national agencies, allowing me to contribute to healthcare education not only as an educator but also as a curriculum developer, assessor, and technical reviewer. Founding organizations focused on geriatric and dementia care grew from the same place: a recognition that emerging needs require intentional structures and long-term thinking. Writing, research, and policy work became ways of extending impact beyond the classroom or clinic.

What I have come to understand is that achievement is architectural in nature. It is built patiently, layer by layer, informed by lived experience and sustained by purpose. Each role I have taken on—nurse, educator,



administrator, researcher, leader—has reinforced the same belief: that excellence is not a single act, but a system of choices made consistently over time.

Laying the Foundation: Education as Groundwork

My earliest professional experiences were rooted in community health, where resources were limited and outcomes depended heavily on preparation and adaptability. These experiences shaped my understanding that strong foundations matter. In healthcare and education alike, weak groundwork leads to fragile systems.

Educational theorists emphasize that mastery is built incrementally. Learning that is scaffolded and reinforced over time allows professionals to perform with confidence and ethical clarity. This belief guided my pursuit of advanced studies in nursing administration, education, and research. Each academic milestone was not an ornament, but a structural necessity.

Credentials, when pursued responsibly, carry weight. They demand accountability. My graduate and doctoral studies required sustained inquiry, research discipline, and intellectual rigor. Being recognized for thesis writing was not about distinction alone, but about meeting scholarly standards that ensure credibility. Research on mastery suggests that excellence is achieved through deliberate practice and repeated validation. Recognition, fellowships, and diplomate status function as peer acknowledgment that one's work can bear responsibility. When institutions confer such distinctions, they reinforce standards that protect professional integrity and public trust.

Reinforcement Through Scholarship and Recognition

Awards and recognition felt like pauses, moments where I stopped and checked whether the work I was doing actually held up. When you've

spent years building curricula, reviewing programs, or writing research, you don't always get immediate feedback. Recognition simply told me that the systems I was helping shape were meeting the standards they were meant to meet.

What mattered more to me was what happened behind the scenes. Clear expectations, consistent standards, and honest evaluation create environments where people either grow or realize they need to step up. I've seen how quality improves when work is measured properly and when recognition is earned rather than handed out. It pushes you to go deeper, not wider, and to take responsibility for the long-term impact of what you build.

Expansion Beyond the Self: Building Systems, Not Silos

At some point, I realized that an achievement that stays personal doesn't go very far. Teaching a class is meaningful, but helping shape a curriculum affects generations of learners. The same goes for national training programs and policy work; once you step into those spaces, the focus shifts from individual success to collective capacity.

My involvement in curriculum development, training, and assessment came from a simple realization: healthcare education has to keep up with real needs. Aging populations, workforce gaps, and evolving roles demand systems that are thoughtful and practical. Building structures—rather than working in isolation—was the only way the work could outlast me.

I've also learned that no matter how solid something looks, it doesn't stay that way without upkeep. Continuing my studies wasn't about collecting degrees; it was about staying relevant. Fields change. Expectations change. If you stop learning, you eventually fall behind, sometimes without realizing it.

Lifelong learning, for me, is less about ambition and more about responsibility. Staying curious keeps the work honest. Staying humble keeps it grounded. Whatever excellence I've managed to reach only matters if I'm willing to protect it by continuing to learn, question, and adapt.

My Reflections

When I look back now, achievement feels less like a list of recognitions and more like something slowly built over time. It's shaped by repetition, by discipline, and by the quiet responsibility of knowing that other people rely on the work you leave behind. I've learned that foundations matter, that reinforcement matters, and that upkeep matters just as much. Nothing solid is ever truly finished. It needs to be revisited, tested, and strengthened over time.

What stays with me is the desire to build work that holds—work that remains useful even when I'm no longer the one standing at the center of it. Recognition may come or go, but what matters more is that the structures I help create continue to serve the people and systems that depend on them.

References

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