

# Meeting Students Where They Are: An Interview with Dr. Andrea Dozier

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*Bonsall, Lisa:* Hello, this is Lisa Bonsall, the senior clinical editor for Lippincott Nursing Center. Today, I'm speaking with Doctor Andrea Dozier, the interim chair of the Department of Nursing at Albany State University. Andrea is also a nursing education consultant for us here at Wolters Kluwer.

Hi, Andrea. Thank you so much for speaking with me today.

*Dozier, Andrea:* Hello Lisa, I am so delighted to be here.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Wonderful. Can you start out by describing your career journey for our listeners please?

*Dozier, Andrea:* Sure. So I graduated graduated back in 1995 with my associates of Science in Nursing. I went to nursing school right out of high school. So when I finished, I was about 20/21 and I entered into the world of bedside nursing.

I started out in med/surg area and I did that for a little bit. Then I did some I travel nurse assignment back before it was so popular and then I did agency nursing. I've worked in a lot of different areas within the hospital. In 2002 I started in education and I have never looked back.

I absolutely love being an educator. I am just very blessed. Each day I get to go in and I work to improve the quality of individual's lives.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Wonderful.

*Dozier, Andrea:* I went back and I got my RN to BSN back in 2006 and then I got my masters in 2012 and in nursing education. And then I got my doctorate in curriculum and instruction in 2018.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* So during the pandemic, we've heard a lot about switching gears to virtual instruction and the use of simulation in nursing education. But we really haven't discussed the impact of that on students. Can you please talk a little bit about the implications of that shift in learning on both student success in the classroom and after graduation?

*Dozier, Andrea:* Sure. So when we shift it on to online instruction, as you mentioned that required some innovation from our nurse educators, our faculty members, right, some use the simulation, some used case studies different activities, but the issue was not all students were tech savvy; not all students had access to the resources that they needed, for example, so we could assume that the students had laptops, right, or an iPad or tablet, however not all students have access to high speed Internet.

Our college has a lot of rural areas in our region, so it was really hard for us to have synchronous instruction when the person who lives a mile on the dirt road doesn't have Internet or high-speed Internet that could sustain 2,3,4, or even five hours of education. In addition, now keep in mind they had kids. I'll use me, for example. I was an instructor online, right? But I also had two kids at home who had instruction online also. So we have three people in this one house in a rural area in Georgia, and we needed a lot of gigabytes. But they were not available where we lived and I'm the instructor. OK, so, fortunately for me, I had a hot spot, but hot spots really didn't work so well if you got three people trying to use it at the same time with the cameras on because we required our students to have cameras on when we were in class.

So that was a challenge for us. And then some students just were not tech savvy enough to navigate the ins and outs of a virtual simulation or just basic Microsoft Office skills.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Well, you know, it's true. We make so many assumptions like well, you know, how many times we've heard, we're just gonna pivot to online learning and it's so much more than that. Like, there's so much to consider.

*Dozier, Andrea:* Right. And what we ended up doing in our area, we did have some grant money, right? So we offered hotspots to students in our area. Students would have, you would see them in the parking lots, for example at Starbucks, McDonald's.

They'd just drive up to where they knew it was Wi-Fi. Some people would, you know, use a room at work if they had access that way, we actually ended up loaning out laptops. We were very fortunate that we had laptops to loan out. But we just had other issues... childcare, you know, I want you to be in class with me online, but the daycare is closed so your kid is in the background. You know those types of things. The dog is barking, all this kind of stuff, but it was quite a challenge. We survived that part.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Well, the students are fortunate that you were able to offer the laptops and the hotspots. How about recognizing students at risk? What was your experience during the pandemic?

*Dozier, Andrea:* OK so. Students already experienced anxiety coming to college anyway. When we went on lockdown, it increased the anxiety level. Students had no social interaction or limited social interaction. Umm, we have on campus like we have dorm tours, right? So students were stuck in their dorms. When we were in class, we required the students to have their cameras on. So if we found that a student did not have their cameras on, you know, repeatedly, that was a red flag to us. And so that sent a message, hey, we need to reach out to the student. If the student is absent. You remember I said that the daycares were closed, people had kids at home with them that needed help. And so I was fortunate. I had teenagers and so they were able to log on. Here's another thing that happened. There was a shortage of laptop, so I couldn't just go to Walmart and buy a laptop because there was a limit. There was like 1 left and there were people in line to get it. So we had to rotate that out. But other people had little kids, kindergarteners and 1st graders and what have you. So they had to help them. So if a student repeatedly kept their camera off, or if they were not logging on, or if they just, if they're grades went down, if they just did not appear quite right. That was like a red flag to us.

Now another issue that we had that posed a problem...or was a very concerning area for us... Is some of our students got sick. You know, some of our students actually got COVID and ended up in the hospital. So that was an issue. Some of the students' family members got sick and died. Now where I am in

Albany, GA, I don't know if you're familiar with this, but we were like the hot spot. Unfortunately, we made like CNN because of the number of people that were impacted and that we lost from COVID. And then you had the students that were already struggling before the pandemic. And so if you have a student that is struggling beforehand, right, and they're seeing you face to face a few times a week and you're able to work with them and they're able to come to tutoring, they're able to meet with other students face to face, but you put them online, then that really puts them at a huge disadvantage. And so they did not get what they really needed to get, but we were doing the best that we could as were other educators all across the world actually. So I don't know if I really answered your question.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* No, absolutely because you know I know same. I have teenagers and college age kids and the expectation was to have their cameras on when they were in class. But, I think just from seeing my own family, put their camera on and then seeing their classmates either, you know, have it facing the ceiling or, you know, and you just like, ohh, these kids, you know, again making assumptions. But what's really going on? You know what don't they want you to see or know about them? And that's, you know, those are the red flags, like you said.

*Dozier, Andrea:* And also and also if you had students with that had special accommodations, right? That was a challenge for us. During the testing aspects, we had to be really creative with that to make sure that we were in compliance and did all that we were supposed to do.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Right, while meeting their needs. Wow.

*Dozier, Andrea:* Correct.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* So what did students need, and what do they still need outside of the classroom to help them be successful?

*Dozier, Andrea:* OK, so one of my coworkers is always saying the 3Cs: care, compassion and concern.

Since the pandemic, and we know that the pandemic is not over and it's really important that we understand as educators, we cannot go back to the way we were. We are headed towards a new normal, but we have not reached what the new normal will be. Does that make sense?

We're trying to find a ground, but the ground is still moving, you know, and where we are, the numbers, the COVID numbers are increasing again. So students need faculty need to be aware that, we cannot go back. Students have issues. When I was in school we had issues, but we didn't have these type of issues, you know, so faculty need to be aware that the students are going through a whole lot and they need us to demonstrate care, compassion and concern. The students need to know that we are concerned about them, that we care about them. If you're in my class and you have, let's say you have a social issue or a personal issue and I can pick up on that, then that lets me know, he, she may need some help from our student services. She may need counseling from our counseling services. She may need me to reach out to her outside of class because the reality is...I can teach all day long, but if you have something that's blocking your ability to receive what I am trying to give you, then we need to deal with whatever that is. And students... you don't have to tell me all of your business. I don't need to know that. But I just want you to know, as your teacher that I recognize that that something is going on or something maybe going on. And I just want you to know that we are here to help you. Tell me how I can help you be the best that you can be. Because I need to make sure that you understand that I am here for you because the reality is without the students, we don't have a job.

You know, and I know that's like, faculty was like here she goes again. Like I'm just supposed to teach it. I need to do the objectives. Da. Da. Yeah, you do. But the student is a person, just like we are. And we were once students. I think sometimes faculty forget. Hey, that was you in that chair. Now when we were coming up we, you know, it was just different. You know, we had a different demeanor. We had a different disposition. We had different types of teachers and everything. But it's just different now. Students don't come into college with what we think they did, so they may not have gotten all that you think they did in high school. And so I think that they need to get to where we want them to be, but it still boils down to "Am I doing what I need to do to reach them where they are? Am I ready to reach them where they are?"

And then you gotta realize that students, they may need tutoring now... you could have had a student that never needed any help. But now pandemic came...they're back...they're just not getting it right now because they missed that time that they would have been in the clinical setting so that they could see the dots connect. OK.

The basic needs, we know what the economy is like now, so we cannot assume that just because the student is here in school, that they have their basic physiological needs met - food, clothing, shelter, transportation. You know, do they have these things? And if they don't, we need to be able to refer them to the right places so that they can get what they need to be successful.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Well, your students are certainly lucky to have you. It goes so far beyond just, you know, teaching the nursing basics and clinicals and all that. It's almost like you're applying the nursing process and those social determinants of health to your students, right. You're doing that assessment and it's probably way more than faculty ever expected. You're right. Times are so different now than when we were in school.

*Dozier, Andrea:* And so one of the things that I do is, I try so like I'm the the interim chair now. So when I was the even when I was the ASN director, I would have the class schedule and I would purposefully go into the classrooms before class started before the teachers did so that I could talk with the students and I wanted to build a culture of trust and I wanted the students to know that hey, although I am the director or I am the interim chair, I still care about you and I want you to trust me. If you got an issue, I want you to come to me so that I can see about pointing you in the right direction and I think that made a big difference because a lot of times people in leadership positions, we are busy when we have a gazillion meetings all the time, you know, but I try not to ever get too busy for the students and so I purposefully come when we have an 8:00 o'clock class on Mondays. I purposefully get up out of my bed and I come early so that I can greet them when they come in the door or I can be there before the class starts and I rotate out the classes. I listen out for when I hear students in the hallways. So like if they're on break so I can go down and talk to them. I keep snacks in my office. Everybody knows that I have snacks in my office and I just talk to them.

And I think that makes a big difference because they see you, hey, maybe I can tell her about this. Maybe she knows who can help me with this dosage calculations. Maybe she can help me in the Skills lab or something or point me in the right direction. I think that makes a big difference. And it doesn't take that long. You know, just they just want to know that you're there and that you're concerned.

Now from a faculty standpoint, one of the things that happened is I think faculty were already burned out before the pandemic. And so when the pandemic happened it had it on to that and as a result I think

that faculty may be experiencing a bit of compassion fatigue now. And burnout is a part - a component of compassion fatigue. I think we may be experiencing it and not know that we are experiencing it. I did a presentation on a few weeks ago, but the pandemic reportedly impacted female educators more so than male educators because we had the domestic responsibilities added on.

And so I thought that was very interesting. But so what we have to do is figure out how to get us as faculty the help that we need. We have all these resources for the students. But what do we have for us? Did we put us on our To Do List? Is that making sense what I'm saying?

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Absolutely. And that's that was my next question is what stresses have you seen among your colleagues and how do you support one another?

*Dozier, Andrea:* So one of the things that happened, you know that the hospitals are, you know, needing nurses. We've lost some to the hospital setting. We cannot compete, you know, from an economic standpoint, the realities we you don't do instruction/nursing education for the money you know. But at the same time if there's if every if inflation is hitting hard, right and everything's going up and I can go to the hospital and make this amount of money then that may be the right move for me; so we experienced some of that.

What we have here, where I am, our university system offers a lot of resources free for faculty. Here at Albany State University, we have wellness days; and those days are focused on the well-being of ourselves and our students, students primarily, but we get to participate also. And we have different activities for that and so those occur a few times a semester.

As far as supporting each other, we try and maintain open lines of communication. We try and encourage each other. We find laughter in things that normally would frustrate us. You know? It's like, OK, it's not that serious. Let's just, you know, tomorrow it won't be that seriously, but let's just find the humor in it today. So we are making it happen.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Wonderful. I imagine...just like in a nursing unit that your faculty becomes your family, right, you're collaborating and working together for the good of the students. So yeah, I like that... using the humor.

*Dozier, Andrea:* One of the things that we did here, and this may be an idea for other places, so we lost a family member - I was gonna say we lost a family member... We lost a colleague, right. She was like a family member... during the time we were unlocked down. She had a white board on her door or in her office. So when we were cleaning out her office, we took the board and we posted it in our break room. You saw the rule is that somebody as you feel led, will write an encouraging message on the board. So when you're having a bad day or you're having a bad moment, you come to the blessing board. That's the name we gave it -the blessing board. And you either write something or you read what's up there and hopefully you'll feel better.

And so you'll find things like you matter that you know, you imagine having a bad day, and then you go in to get a cup of coffee, and then you see this, you know, as you leave out of the break room, you see this, this, this reminder, you matter, or I am glad that you are here. And so it's little things like that. We have one faculty member, she secretly purchases little gifts for others. And she comes to work early and she puts them on the doorknob. And they don't know that she does it. So it's a lot of little things like that. And some of us have been working together for a long time. So we get to know each other and

what each other likes and what they don't like, you know, they know I love chocolate. So it's not uncommon for me to come and I have chocolate by my door or another person likes flowers. And so one coworker came to work and there were flowers on her door. We just do a lot of that kind of stuff.

We team teaching so I have two that they buy each other gifts at the end semester like hey we made it and we celebrate birthdays and we just celebrate more often now. You know it's kind of like our kids grew up with each other. So if your kid is graduating I'm so happy for you. Let's go and celebrate you know. So we worked really hard to create a sense of belonging and family here. I'm very blessed to be able to do that here.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Ohh, I love that. I read something one time. It was a study on gratitude and how I can't remember the statistics, but it was, you know, how the day-to-day is so much more valuable than like celebrating nurses month or nurses week like you really need to, you know, just a thank you in whatever form regularly is so much more effective and mean so much more. So I love that you guys do that for each other.

*Dozier, Andrea:* And we keep a blank cards in our offices and it's not uncommon for us to write, you know, a note and send it to somebody. Hey, I hope you feel better, or I'm sorry about such and such and such. And we just send it, you know, we do that for our students also, our current and former students when we find out something has happened to them.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* So you've given us a lot of good information and insight. Do you have any other advice for students and faculty as we move into that next normal post pandemic?

*Dozier, Andrea:* I think that for faculty, we just need to remember that we were once students. The students now are different type of student and that's OK. The students that entered into the workplace. We call them COVID students because they missed out on, you know, a lot of the clinical experience. They need a little bit more patience exhibited towards them when they're working. And faculty, we need to remember to take care of ourselves, because if we don't take care of ourselves, we can't take care of others. And so that is going to impact our instruction.

Some teachers may have experienced a drop in their teacher efficacy since the pandemic. You know, nobody talks about how the teachers felt going to online instruction and so they learned a lot, but they may also not feel as confident post pandemic or you know in this time then they did before and so that's OK. But we don't need to stay there, OK? We need to always be evolving towards the next new normal.

And whenever the ground settles, whenever that is, we need to cut ourselves some slack and allow grace and exhibit some patience with ourselves and with the students.

*Bonsall, Lisa:* Wonderful advice. This was a great conversation, Andrea. I thank you so much for your time today.

*Dozier, Andrea:* You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

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