FAST FACTS FOR THE CLASSROOM
NURSING INSTRUCTOR
Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, EdD, RN-BC, NEA-BC, ANEF, FAAN, has taught in every type of nursing program from nursing assistant through doctoral programs and continuing education. Through The Wise Group, she and Dr. Kowalski provide consultation and development in teaching strategies, presentation and writing skills, coaching, storytelling, and leadership and management. Pat is a graduate of The Ohio State University, Wayne State University, and Texas Tech University. Currently, she teaches in the DNP program at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center and in the PhD program at Texas Woman's University–Houston. She is the writing coach for the University of Texas at Arlington and President of the Council on Graduate Education for Administration in Nursing. Her publications, including Leading and Managing in Nursing, focus mainly on leadership and management. She is the Editor-in-Chief of both The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing and Nursing Forum. In addition to being a Virginia Henderson and Billye Brown Fellow (Sigma Theta Tau International), she serves as the cochair of the Strategic Advisory Committee for the state of Texas in its implementation of the Institute of Medicine report, The Future of Nursing.

Karren E. Kowalski, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, has focused her career on the professional development of others, especially those on the front lines of care. Her work at Rush University, Centura Health Hospital, and Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital was geared to the primary role of leader in clinical areas. Throughout that time, and now through the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence, she focused on preparing nurses for leadership and for teaching. Karren is a graduate of Indiana University, the University of Colorado Health Science Center, and the University of Colorado. She currently teaches in the DNP and master's programs at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. Her publications focus mainly on leadership and management and include Beyond Leading and Managing in Nursing, which she coauthored with Dr. Yoder-Wise. She is an Associate Editor for The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, where she shares the Teaching Tips column with Dr. Diane Billings. Additionally, she serves on numerous editorial boards and review panels. She is the President and CEO of the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence, where she serves as the co-lead of the Colorado Action Coalition, which is responsible for the implementation of the Institute of Medicine report, The Future of Nursing.
FAST FACTS FOR THE CLASSROOM NURSING INSTRUCTOR

Classroom Teaching in a Nutshell

Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, EdD, RN-BC, NEA-BC, ANEF, FAAN
Karren E. Kowalski, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN

© Springer Publishing Company, LLC
Contents

Preface vii
Acknowledgments ix

Part I: The Nurse as Educator
1. Understanding Self 3
2. Role Modeling Being a Nurse 25

Part II: Setting the Environment and Expectations
3. Preparing for the Classroom 39
4. Creating and Using Agreements 49
5. Setting the Environment 63

Part III: Core Classroom Strategies
6. Engaging Learners 75
7. Coaching Learners 97
8. Asking Questions 111
9. Telling Stories 123
CONTENTS

Part IV: Dialogue Toward Improvement

10. Creating Standard Communication 139
11. Seeking Input 149
12. Providing Feedback 163

Part V: Synthesis

13. Integrating the Whole 175

References 191
Index 195
Being an educator of nurses is a combination of two roles: nurse and educator. Either one by itself is challenging; together they can be daunting—or synergistic. The purpose of this text is to help both novice and seasoned educators gain skills in managing classroom experiences. Some of the ideas presented here can be applied in online courses; others are distinctive to the physical classroom where educators and learners interact. Most ideas can be used, with modifications, in large and small classes. They are ideas that work to keep learners focused on learning and not just occupying a geographic space.

The type of program itself doesn’t matter in reading—and subsequently applying—the content of this text. The program can be a formal academic program resulting in a degree ranging from associate through doctoral. The content here also works in clinical conference discussions. It can work in formal programs such as ones of transition to the workplace (now more commonly thought of as residency programs) or ones of ongoing career development (commonly referred to as professional development or continuing education). These ideas work in any of those settings. The learners differ, the expectations differ, and the settings may differ; the techniques, however, are the same, even though they may be adjusted to more closely reflect the needs of a particular learner group.
For educators new to the field of teaching, this text can launch an opportunity for greater satisfaction and learner engagement. For educators established in the field, this text can provide some different strategies or ways of thinking about how the role of the educator facilitates or limits learners in their pursuit of new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For administrative educators, this text provides new ways of thinking about educator competencies and what educators must do to help transform how learners learn.

Many educators learned to teach by watching someone else teach. The old “see one, do one, teach one” adage cannot meet the needs of today’s learning environments and demands. Even without formal preparation as an educator, we must be able to employ sound strategies that keep learners engaged, move them toward success (however, that is defined within their educational pursuits), and help them use sound professional reasoning. The reason learners are engaged, move toward goals, and reason/think in a professional manner should be due to the educational interaction they experienced.

This text represents some of our best thinking about what educators can do to help learners learn and retain what they need to know to be effective. The text wasn’t developed to be comprehensive. Rather, this text was developed to provide some key priorities on which educators need to focus in order to improve the learning experience. This text focuses on approaches designed to help learners grasp critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes; consider how learning develops clinical reasoning; and to value how learning will lead to better health care for the future.
We thank our husbands, who are always supportive of our endeavors and contribute to our richness of life. They make our work possible. They “fill in” when voids occur in simply managing life so that we can make this contribution to the profession. They see the humor in our silliness, they keep us laughing, and they are there for us during the tough times. We learn from them and then figure out how to translate that learning into meaningful experiences for those who are the recipients of our professional endeavors.

We would be remiss if we didn’t acknowledge the “pioneers” in creating nursing education. Those range from Florence Nightingale to Adelaide Nutting to Rheba de Tornyay. Those are but a few of the names many of us can recall as making a distinctive impression on nursing education and how teaching is to occur. Further, some of today’s great educators provided the quotes that begin each chapter. We are indebted to them for their thoughtful responses and timeliness. Thank you!

Over two careers, we have encountered many learners in many situations and have learned much from them. We too had role models of what a good educator could be and do, and we capitalized on all that we could learn from them. We learned what worked and what didn’t from our colleagues and learners, and retested approaches. We know many other strategies exist, most of which we have used and many of which
we still use. We figured out that good teaching is good teaching and it doesn't matter if the learner has zero prior knowledge about nursing or is a highly skilled clinical expert. Good teaching strategies engage learners, and that is the key to having a successful learning interaction.

Finally, we acknowledge that readers of this text have sought reinforcement for what they are doing or new ideas for what they could do. We appreciate your investment in making nursing education better. We invite your thoughts and feedback.

Patricia S. Yoder-Wise
Karren E. Kowalski
FAST FACTS FOR THE CLASSROOM
NURSING INSTRUCTOR

© Springer Publishing Company, LLC
The Nurse as Educator
Understanding Self

A commitment to expanding knowledge of one’s self is a commitment to personal freedom, the choice to take responsibility for the self one manifests to others. Learners may forget the content and practice provided by nurse educators; they will not forget the self the educator made manifest.

Phyllis B. Kritek, PhD, RN, FAAN

INTRODUCTION

The most powerful tool educators have in the classroom is what they bring of the self to the learning process. Thus, educators need to understand themselves—both their strengths and growth areas—through self-assessment tools and reflection. In effect, educators are leaders. When teaching in a classroom, for example, the educators must lead learners to discovery so that the knowledge is theirs. Understanding leadership and themselves enables an educator to actualize effective teaching. To understand teaching tools and the use of self enables educators to be effective in the classroom.
In this chapter, you will learn:

1. The use of self as a valuable teaching tool
2. Available tools and insights to facilitate understanding self
3. The importance of leadership behaviors in the classroom
4. Development of characteristics of successful educators
5. The value of reflective practice

USE OF SELF

The primary tool the educator has when teaching in a classroom is self. Perhaps the easiest way to conceptualize the importance of self is within the Emotional Intelligence framework (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).

In Exhibit 1.1, the quadrant focused on self-awareness is critical to the educator. Knowing and understanding one’s self,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibit 1.1</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four Quadrants of Emotional Intelligence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AWARENESS</strong></td>
<td>SELF (Emotional Intelligence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness: knowing one’s internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions</td>
<td>Social Awareness: awareness of others’ feelings, needs, and concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Self-management: managing one’s internal states, impulses, and resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

including the educator’s strongest attributes, maximizes the learning that occurs in the classroom. In addition, knowing what areas of teaching are not so strong, and knowing how compensatory mechanisms or strategies are activated to adjust for these areas are vital to being successful. How well do educators understand their own internal states, what their preferences are, and the rationale underlying their preference? Self-awareness is a matter of asking what the internal motivations for specific behaviors are. Self-assessment tools that increase understanding, discussed later, are also available.

Self-Management

Self-awareness can lead to understanding how one handles or manages one’s self in a variety of situations. Most of these situations, both the fun and the challenging, require both understanding and a willingness to practice whatever behaviors are needed to effect change. For example, being impulsive or cautious can serve different purposes and produce different outcomes. Asking what strategies might augment the positives and ameliorate or circumvent less desirable behaviors is valuable.

Social Awareness

How much are educators aware of the feelings, needs, and concerns of others? Becoming interested in others and curious about their specific behaviors and responses is the beginning of social awareness. This curiosity implies lack of negative judgment about the expressions and behavior of learners or even peers. Rather, a question is asked about what would make a learner do or say certain things or behave in specific ways. This action promotes understanding rather than criticism. Asking questions of the learner about specific behaviors creates understanding and can contribute to building meaningful relationships with learners.
Relationship Management

The relationship management aspects of emotional intelligence address the ability to work well with others and to utilize the understanding of self and others in subtle ways that induce desirable responses in others. For example, understanding upset as demonstrated by colleagues or learners in ways that do not make them “wrong” contributes to building successful relationships. In addition, this understanding allows educators to use tools to de-escalate difficult situations or upset responses.

FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL

- Use of self is the most powerful tool an educator has.
- Managing oneself provides the educator with more control.
- Being emotionally intelligent helps form positive relationships.

TOOLS TO FACILITATE SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Many tools exist to help individuals understand themselves better. The ones cited here are relatively inexpensive and readily accessible. They also have substantive data supporting their use.

EQ Map

The EQ Map (Essi Systems, n.d.) is an assessment of the major aspects of Emotional Intelligence. This tool can be completed in 15 minutes online (www.eqmaponline.com) at a nominal cost. The electronic report comes back via e-mail and informs
the user at which level the responses were scored: optimal, proficient, vulnerable, or caution. Twenty categories are evaluated and grouped into five performance zones: Current Environment, Emotional Literacy, Competencies, Values and Attitudes, and Outcomes. For example, the two response categories in the Current Environment Zone are Life Pressures and Life Satisfactions. These response categories (Life Pressures and Life Satisfactions) estimate the amount of stress the educator is experiencing. Thus the amount of positive and sustaining activity is also estimated. Both aspects help to determine levels of stress in this zone. Included in the report, after each of the five zones, is a section detailing the specific activities that could help move any of the scores higher into the proficient or optimal zones. In other words, this tool supports the educator in developing self-awareness by making suggestions for ways to increase any of the low scores in the zones. More information is available on the website.

**StrengthsFinder 2.0**

*StrengthsFinder 2.0* (Rath, 2007) discusses the importance of emphasizing people's strengths. This book, for a nominal cost, contains an envelope with an access code and a website address that allows the book owner to go online and complete the assessment tool. This tool can be completed in less than 15 minutes and the report is sent via e-mail. The most important aspect about the book is the case made to encourage us to spend time and energy on further development of areas of our lives in which we already excel rather than to expend extensive time and energy on our weaknesses. The research from the Gallup organization, on which the book is based, identifies that we will never excel at our weak areas; we will only be mediocre. Yet many cultures focus on correcting and emphasizing work on personal weaknesses. This tool also summarizes strengths and provides an activity exercise
with suggestions for how the educator could expand upon strengths. The report identifies the top five strengths.

Example:

Educator A receives this report: “Input, Activator, Positivity, Learner, and Arranger.” Each strength is discussed in depth and recommendations are made for how to enhance the strength.

Under “Input,” the following observations were made: “People who are especially talented in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.”

The individualized strengths insights include descriptions of how those strengths are exhibited. For example, for Input, Educator A received information including the following:

Instinctively, educators who have strong Input talent attempt to surround themselves with thinkers and place a special value on collegial conversations. Occasionally these conversations might supply the Input person with a new idea or a fresh perspective. Educators may not know at that moment how something that was discussed, read, or observed will lead to another discovery or insight but they like to ask questions and seek understanding. Perhaps the animated give-and-take that is enjoyed occurs when the “input person” is in the company of specific individuals. Because of these strengths these people may attempt to sharpen their methods for adding new words to everyday vocabulary as well as their academic or professional vocabulary.

Additionally, Educator A receives a list of ideas for action, including the following:

• Look for jobs in which you are charged with acquiring new information each day, such as teaching, research, or journalism.
CHAPTER 1 UNDERSTANDING SELF

- Partner with someone with dominant Focus or Discipline talents. This person will help you stay on track when your inquisitiveness leads you down intriguing but distracting avenues.

- Your mind is open and absorbent. You naturally soak up information in the same way that a sponge soaks up water.

- Identify your areas of specialization, and actively seek more information about them.

- Deliberately increase your vocabulary. Collect new words, and learn the meaning of each of them.

Because most educator evaluations follow a prescribed format, an educator might actively solicit additional feedback from learners on how to enhance strengths rather than “fix” weaknesses. Such a discussion could also lead to talking about what the learners’ strengths and weaknesses are and where their focus ought to be. Learners could also employ these tools to assess their strengths and how they can be expanded.

FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL

- Understanding self is the key to becoming an excellent educator.
- Understanding self allows the educator to focus on the learners.

LEADING IN THE CLASSROOM

Many leader behaviors can be observed in the classroom. Six of these behaviors are described here. The educator is the leader in front of the classroom with the learners. The educator is perceived as the expert, the one who either knows or knows
how to discover. The educator leads the learner through the process of discovery. This work is accomplished by adhering to basic leadership principles. First, however, educators must work on leader behaviors and characteristics in themselves.

Create a Vision

Leaders create a vision through imagination and dreaming. They most certainly have dreams about how learners will be successful. Subsequently educators, the leaders in the classroom, identify strategies to engage learners in the vision of being successful. For most nurse learners, this is not a difficult task. It does require three specific educator strategies:

*First strategy:* Create a “brightness of the future” vision with the learner to assist the learner in “seeing” what they can have if they enroll in this vision.

**Example:**

*Educator:* How many of you would like to be a mediocre nurse?

*Learners:* [Probably no hands will go up.]

*Educator:* How many of you would like to be the best nurse you can be?

*Learners:* [Most likely all learners raise their hands.]

*Educator:* I am here to support you in accomplishing that goal. Everything that happens in this classroom is designed to help you reach that goal.

*Second strategy:* Employ a frequency of interaction. In addition to class time, create other opportunities to interact with the learner, such as office hours with the expectation that each learner set up at least one appointment with the educator. For staff development classes, one suggested
opportunity is to foster conversations during breaks or after class. The focus is on creating relationships.

Third strategy: For learners to truly become enrolled, the third task is essential. It behooves the educator to identify any believable alternative to enrolling in the learning vision. In the example above, the believable alternative is to be a mediocre nurse—something almost no learner would want to be.

Build Trust

Effective educators build trust between themselves and the learners through the demonstration of specific behaviors. These behaviors include: accountability and responsibility, predictability, reliability, persistent behavior, and expertise.

1. The educator demonstrates **accountability and responsibility** with the learners.

   Accountability is the act of accepting ownership of the results or the lack thereof, while responsibility is defined as an obligation to accomplish a task or assignment. An activity that demonstrates this point might be a simple game of “Simon Says.”

   **Example:**

   *Educator:* “Do you remember the rules for the game ‘Simon Says’?”

   *Learner:* “You are to do what Simon Says. . . .”

   *Educator:* “Correct.”

   “Simon Says, ‘the game has begun.’”

   “Simon Says: ‘Everyone stand up.’”

   “Simon Says: ‘Clap your hands.’” (The educator claps hands overhead one time.)

   “and again.” (The educator claps hands again.)
“Everyone who clapped their hands a second time, sit down. I did not say Simon Says.” (This will probably be a major part of the class.)

“Simon Says: ‘hop on one foot.’” (The educator hops once. Many will hop once and stop because that is what the educator did.)

“If you only hopped once, sit down.” (Many more will sit down.)

“Simon Says: ‘turn around.’” (Many will turn only once.)

“If you are not still turning, sit down.” (A few learners will remain standing.)

“Simon Says: ‘come to the front of the room.’” (Those people come forward and the educator can walk up and down the line. If at any time any learner smiles or says something, that person will have to sit down because Simon didn’t say to do that.)

The educator does what he/she can to get as many to sit down as possible. And then acknowledges those who remain. Everyone claps . . .

The educator debriefs the game:

Educator: “How many of you in the first group to sit down thought to yourselves, ‘The educator certainly wasn’t very clear’?” (Some hands go up.)

“This is a demonstration of how we often think, which is ‘laying blame’ when the outcome isn’t what we might want.” (The educator leads a discussion of this behavior.)

“Did anyone think to themselves, ‘I was up very late last night studying, I’m very tired,’ and so forth? This constitutes justification.” (The educator facilitates a discussion about justification.)

“Was there anyone who thought to themselves, ‘Simon Says is a listening game. I was watching the educator rather than listening to what Simon Said’?” (The educator leads more discussion, which leads to accountable/responsible behavior.)
“It is important to point out that most people spend time in all three places every day and we learn the most when we are accountable and responsible for both our thinking and our behavior, not from laying blame or justifying.”

A game like Simon Says is a demonstration of principles that the educator would like to instill in the learner—accountable, responsible behavior. Leaders simply spend more time in the accountable–responsible level, learning from their experiences.

2. Another aspect of building trust is to be predictable. In the uncertainty of learning a new role, that of a nurse, the learners need stability. One way to achieve a strong, stable foundation is for the educator to be predictable. Teaching is not a guessing game. The learners should not have to guess “who” will show up in class today. Even educators who are predictably “bad” or really “tough” have demonstrated what is required for the learner to be successful. The greatest problem is for the educator to be unpredictable. This leads to uncertainty and causes distress that can manifest in challenging learner behavior in the classroom.

3. The educator must also be reliable. Reliability can translate into educators doing what they say they will do. If papers are promised to be returned on a certain day, the promise must be kept. When office hours are advertised to be a specific time, the educator must be in the office. Whatever rules or guidelines are promulgated, these rules must be honored by the educator as well as learners. Educators must role model doing what they say they will do. For staff development, the educator must do what is promised. This includes, for example, returning e-mails and phone calls or responding to requests in a timely fashion.

4. The educator needs to be persistent. This trait can be demonstrated as being unwilling to give up in difficult
situations. When obstacles appear, the educator role models, for the learners, strategies for overcoming the problems and issues. If there are difficulties with an examination, experiment, or class assignment, the educator can use questions to lead to a process of discovery or to determine alternatives. The educator does not give up.

5. Lastly, the educator demonstrates expertise. Even novice educators know considerably more than the learners about the content of the course being taught. This includes learners who have experience in other fields, such as Emergency Medical Technicians. It is not uncommon for these learners to believe that because they are competent at specific tasks such as starting IVs, the educator doesn’t have anything to teach them. It can be valuable to demonstrate teaching expertise by asking questions about the foundation of the tasks, such as “What are the physiological underpinnings indicating the patient’s need for an IV?” and then explaining why “The physician said to” is an incorrect answer. In these instances, understanding such situations demonstrates analysis rather than simple identification of the patient’s situation.

Use of the above approaches to building trust with the learners demonstrates leadership in the classroom and the ability to create relationships.

Empower the Learner

Effective educators empower the learners to employ the necessary tools to become the best nurses they can be. They empower through encouraging the learners to stretch outside their comfort zones and practice new behaviors and thinking. They ask many questions to support learners in thinking through a situation or steps in a procedure. They encourage learners to take risks by doing things differently, but they are
present to support the learners in this process. This is particularly valuable in simulation exercises where patient safety is not at risk. Be a cheerleader. Encourage learners in their efforts and find positives in the outcomes or the behaviors exhibited. Be positive and demonstrate that the educator believes that the learner can be successful.

Coaching

Effective leaders, and thus educators, focus on how they can coach learners through the learning process. Coaching means to direct, instruct, or prompt. It also means training intensely. In both the classroom and the clinical area, directing or prompting (often with questions that lead a learner through the process of discovery) is critical to the learning process. Because this skill is discussed elsewhere (Chapter 7, Coaching Learners), further depth is not provided here.

Getting Results

Educators focus on the outcome/result of supporting learners’ processes. Often results are positive, especially when learners do well and respond to educators’ efforts. Sometimes the results are not so positive when a learner is not doing well. Yet, educators convey that some of the best experiences came as a result of helping a learner see that nursing was not the best choice and that their particular skill set was better suited for a different career choice.

Sometimes results are measured in test scores. Great emotion can circle the issue of test scores and grades. When tests are viewed as a learning tool—an opportunity to correct misperceptions—the tests ought to be reviewed in class. Some structure around this process is helpful. For example,
the educator could provide specific directions for how learners challenge any of the test questions:

Educator: If you have questions about the correct test response, email a reference/citation that disputes the designated correct answer. The reference must be more recent than the information used to substantiate the indicated “correct” answer. This reference/citation, from an approved source, must be received within 48 hours of the test discussion.

Educators may also choose not to review test questions. However, in reviewing the test statistics, the wise educator knows what information to correct through discussion or some form of feedback.

Guidelines such as these support a calm, reasoned discussion of differing opinions.

Acknowledgment

In most instances human beings, both educators and learners, are hardest on themselves. Both groups seem to have a little voice in their heads delivering messages such as “You certainly messed that up!” “You didn’t do very well on that response!” or “Notice the class laughed at you!” Focusing on acknowledgments helps to shift that little voice. It is valuable for educators to demonstrate being gentler with themselves so that the learners have a role model for being gentler with themselves. Educators can practice this skill set on themselves as well as using it with learners.

Likewise, educators who consistently use acknowledgment of learners support them in gaining confidence and demonstrate the power of positivity. When the educator consistently identifies what a learner does well, the learner’s confidence in the ability to perform skills and tools and to think critically about specific situations or issues grows steadily. Some would say that people come to work to be acknowledged. Yet,
in nurse satisfaction surveys, acknowledgment by the supervisor consistently receives the lowest scores on the entire survey. Most educators believe they acknowledge learners “all the time.” Somewhere a “disconnect” is evident. It may be how the acknowledgment is given. Guidelines for how to provide acknowledgment have been helpful for nursing leaders and may also be useful for educators. Exhibit 1.2 identifies some guidelines for consideration.

**Exhibit 1.2  Guidelines for Acknowledgment**

1. **Person to person.** Acknowledgments must be said to the person to whom you are grateful. Look the person directly in the eye. Take a moment, stop, look directly at them, and clearly state the acknowledgment. It also can be written. These can be kept, reviewed, and brought out whenever the person wants to remember the wonderful acknowledgment.

2. **Specific.** State exactly what the person has done that you appreciate. Do not just say, “Good job.” Say specifically what he, she, or they did that was appreciated: “Thank you very much for completing the schedule for the next cycle. It looks fair, requests have been honored and all the shifts are covered.”

3. **From the heart.** Acknowledgments must be “real.” If it is a mere formality, do not waste your time because people know when the gratitude is not sincere. When this is the case, it is almost insulting. To continue, “Had you not helped

(continued)
Exhibit 1.2  (continued)

to finish the schedule, it would have been late coming out and staff would have been distraught. Your help was invaluable.”

4. **Timing.** It is important to deliver the acknowledgment as close to the event as possible. The more time lapses between the event and the acknowledgment, the less sincere and heart-felt it seems.

5. **Public when possible.** Public acknowledgment has more power. It also lets everyone on the unit, for example, know what behaviors are valued by the leader.


Educators can use these guidelines with their colleagues as well, by creating a gentle little voice inside their heads that acknowledges them.

---

**FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL**

- Be generous with acknowledgments.
- Use the six basic leader behaviors when demonstrating leadership in the classroom.

**DEVELOPING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENT EDUCATORS**

The characteristics of excellent educators constitute a role model for the profession. The really good news is that adults develop their characters and these characteristics each and
every day. An educator/leader in front of a class demonstrates leader characteristics in several ways.

Character

The first of these characteristics is character development. Key work focused on what constitutes character was done by Guinness (1999). Character can be defined as what you think or what you do when no one else will know or find out. Factors that contribute to character begin with societal influences, including family, school systems, friends, and the work place, that have formed the educator’s values and beliefs. Each human being is influenced by these factors. In addition, educators who are focused on character development have the capacity for deep and lasting change. When presented with the evidence that substantiates different thoughts, ideas, or behaviors, they are willing to shift their paradigm, to do things differently, or to incorporate a new “ah-ha” or realization that something has changed significantly.

Educators focused on character development demonstrate moral accountability to their stated standards, values, and beliefs. In other words, they are clear about when they violate their values. For example, if someone believes in honesty but does not hold learners accountable for violating the plagiarism contract established by the school, the educator is in violation of the espoused values. This doesn’t build character; instead, it detracts from character development.

Those who are working on building character recognize their own destructive behaviors and just say “no.” Many behaviors are simply “bad habits.” For example, failure to meet deadlines for returning learner papers or in posting the grades does not model appropriate behavior and detracts from character development.

Those working on positive development are able to forgive themselves and others. Educators who hold grudges against colleagues are caught in a negative cycle rather than being able to
forgive and let go of issues or problems. When a person feels hurt by something someone else has said or done, it is important to respond without resentment. When that same cruel, thoughtless person experiences something bad, the educator should not be gleeful or smug about the other person’s misfortune. It is even more important to be able to forgive self. Although educators may think they need to be perfect, it is really important to let go of self-condemnation. Consistently, human beings are very hard on themselves, particularly if they tend toward perfectionism. Give it up, no one is perfect! Teaching is about the journey and doing the best one can. Even more, it is about humility and giving others credit. While educators facilitate learning, the process is not about the educator—it is about the learner. The learners deserve the credit.

Commitment

Commitment is about passion, a fire in the heart, a willingness to do whatever it takes to accomplish the goal. One cannot be totally committed sometimes. Passion, the foundation of commitment, is more valuable than talent or intelligence. When educators are truly passionate about nursing, the passion for patient care and for understanding healing and health care is conveyed spontaneously and consequently engages and excites the learners. To determine commitment and the corresponding passion, complete the following exercise:

**Exercise:** The question is: If you won $25,000,000, tax free, what would you do with the rest of your life?

**Debrief:** Keep in mind: You could build your dream house, provide college scholarships for family members and friends, give to charities, buy your dream car, take a trip around the world, and accomplish all of these adventures within 2 years. . . . So after this, what would you do for the rest of your life?
What have you always dreamed of doing? What would make your heart sing? What would challenge you to get up every day and work to accomplish a goal?

(For some people, this may not be nursing. That’s OK. It is critical to NOT be on one’s deathbed saying “if only I . . .” or “I wish I had. . . .”)

Remember: Commitment is the will of the mind to finish what the heart has begun long after the emotion in which that promise was made has passed. Educators must ask themselves, “Am I committed to teach?” And learners must be asked, “Are you committed to nursing?”

Caring and Compassion

Leaders, and thus educators, simply care about more people. Educators have to care about their learners, each and every one. A part of this caring for the learners is remembering what it was like to be in their shoes. That might translate into making only reasonable assignments rather than assigning 6 chapters in the text and 10 additional articles per week. Caring can be interpreted as taking the risk of “being” with someone and sharing the complementary rhythm of suffering and joy. Learners have high moments experiencing the exultation of success and the low moments when the patient has a serious setback or even dies. They may question everything they did for the patient or hypothesize they could have done something better. The educator needs to ask appropriate questions and actively listen to the feelings of the learner.

Caring is giving of one’s self and giving of one’s time and focus. It is actively listening without other interruptions. It is being 100% focused on the learner and being completely present. Caring is about honoring the other person—seeing their wholeness, possibilities, hopes, and fears. Healing can emerge from caring.
Confidence

Belief in self and in what is being accomplished constitutes confidence. As a novice educator, confidence can be an issue. What stops confidence is FEAR.

Fear can cause the educator to “play it safe” so as not to lose or make an error rather than going for the “win,” stretching outside the comfort zone, and attempting new behaviors. Additionally, fear distorts reality and makes things seem more dangerous; fear makes teaching seem harder or more difficult. Finally, fear can create a sense of desperation in which overcompensation looks like forced performance or delivery. Fear in the educator manifests in talking too fast, cramming too much information into a class, or filling the class with PowerPoint presentations rather than having discussions with the learners and discovering what they know. Confidence can translate into understanding clearly that even the novice educator knows more than what the learners know.

THE VALUE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice is a powerful tool that supports the educator in continuing on a critical learning curve while teaching. It is a process of exposing contradictions in the practice of teaching. In exposing contradictions, the educator must first come to understand his or her own definition of the ideal educator. Then, the educator must examine the multiplicity of factors within the classroom interaction that either hindered or enhanced the educator’s ability to achieve that ideal. While some educators can easily reflect on what happened in the classroom and on what they would do differently, one of the most useful methods of reflection for most educators is writing thoughts down, either in a journal or in a computer file. It can be quite valuable to be able to look back at the educator’s
daily or weekly observations when the course is completed. Those tools and strategies that worked, as well as those that didn't work so well, will be noted in the journal, which can lead to significant changes in educator behavior. The learning curve is enhanced by these discoveries.

**FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL**

- Focus on understanding yourself.
- Identify those areas in which you can grow.
- Use tools such as reflection to track growth and change in teaching.

**SYNTHESIS**

Teaching effectively in the classroom demands that the educator have a clear understanding of self, a confidence that knowing oneself promotes creative and productive interactions with learners, and an ongoing reflection on how each class evolves using self-assessment that promotes a positive and effective learning process for the educator. Understanding self includes learning and growing every day, both in what the educator does in the classroom and in how the educator grows in character, commitment, caring, and confidence.