

## Chapter 3

# The Teaching Experience in Nursing

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### CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this chapter, the learner will be able to:

1. Describe the major tenets of at least three learning theories.
2. Explain how knowledge of the concept and utilization of *learning style/preference* can enhance teacher effectiveness.
3. Trace the evolution of the role of teacher from provider of information/facts (i.e., “sage on the stage”) to facilitator of learning (i.e., “guide on the side”).
4. Discuss ways in which external factors influence the role of the nurse educator.
5. Articulate one’s own philosophy of an approach to teaching and the values influencing that philosophy.
6. Propose strategies to develop one’s knowledge and skills related to implementation of the nurse educator role.

### KEY TERMS

- Adult learning principles
- Andragogy
- Behavioral learning theory
- Brain-based learning
- Cognitive learning theory
- Collaborative and cooperative learning
- Concept-based thinking
- Constructivist theory of learning
- Educator
- Humanistic
- Interprofessional education
- Learning style/preference
- Pedagogy

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- Problem-based learning
- Teacher
- Social learning theory

## INTRODUCTION

As noted in the chapter titled *The Role of the Academician*, educators practice in colleges and universities and are expected to be “good citizens of the academy.” Such “good citizenship” requires that educators be effective teachers and advisors. They also are responsible for participating in and contributing to the work of committees at the discipline (i.e., nursing) level and at the broader (i.e., department/college or university) level. Educators also are expected to design, implement, and evaluate the curricula in their discipline, taking into account the institution’s mission, goals, and degree requirements. In addition, they are responsible for developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising (as needed) policies and procedures related to a number of areas, such as student admission, progression, and graduation; peer review; and tenure and promotion.

Indeed, the responsibilities of an academician are complex and broad. More importantly, they are ever-evolving. This chapter provides an overview of how the role of the academic educator has changed over time, some of the issues that faculty currently face, factors that influence the educator’s role, and the uniqueness of the nurse educator role. It is intended to provide a broad context for discussions that follow—discussions related to classroom, online, and clinical teaching; program evaluation; competency assessment; and future directions for nursing education. Finally, it is intended to challenge the reader to “do philosophy” (Greene, 1973) and reflect on her or his values as a teacher and educator.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There have always been **teachers** in our world. Parents teach their children values, skills, and ways of interacting with others. Religious leaders teach us about religious practices and beliefs. Community leaders teach us how we can contribute to the health and viability of our communities. “School marms” teach students about the world in which they live.

**Educators**, however, are something else. They are the individuals whose professional responsibility and major contribution to society relate to enhancing the total development of learners—their minds, their values,

their skills—and to advancing knowledge and understanding in their field. These are individuals who have prepared for the role, who engage in a continual study of how to be most effective in that role, and who provide leadership within the educational community.

From the days of Socrates, educators have lived among us. Socrates, for example, spent his time talking with the youth of ancient Greek society using methods that stimulated them to think in new ways, to consider new possibilities, to contemplate deep issues, and to ponder the future and how they might influence it. There were no structured classrooms, there were no course syllabi, there were no rank or tenure systems, and there were few books from which to seek facts. Instead, knowledge and understanding were gained from deep thinking, and the role of the educator was to stimulate, guide, and challenge such thinking.

As societies evolved and there came to be a growing recognition of the need to educate more individuals who could lead those societies, educational systems became more structured. Tutors were employed to teach the children of aristocrats, and “public” schools were created to teach the children of less noble families. The responsibilities of such tutors or public school teachers were to help students learn to read, write, calculate, and understand the history of their world, which was being documented more carefully through textbooks, research reports, and presentations by experts. In some instances, individuals were prepared—often in an apprenticeship-type system, where they learned a specific role (e.g., physician, lawyer, clergyman) “at the elbow” of a master in the craft.

The focus of education was on the youth of society, assuming, perhaps, that adults were established in life and had no desire or need to learn. Because the number of children continued to grow, more efficient systems of education were needed. There seemed to be an assumption that all children needed to learn the same thing and in the same way, and that all should progress through this newly formed educational system at the same pace. No attention was paid to individualized learning, self-paced learning, or mastery learning; and those who could not “keep up” because of physical or mental disability, lack of commitment or interest, lack of aptitude to do the work, or inability or unwillingness to follow the rules of the system were “let go.”

Those involved in such practices who were true educators, however, began to question the systems that were in place. They reflected on the nature of learning, the conditions that encouraged or got in the way of learning, and the role of the teacher. Theories of learning began to emerge, the role of the teacher/educator began to be more carefully defined, and the larger purposes of schooling began to be articulated.

## LEARNING THEORIES AND APPROACHES

Theories of learning can be categorized, generally, into several areas—behavioral, cognitive, constructivist, social, humanistic, and brain-based. Each of these will be explained briefly, and the ways in which our thinking about learning has evolved will be noted.

**Behavioral learning theories**, espoused by scientists such as Skinner (1974), explained that learning was little more than a response to a stimulus. Learning was thought to be a form of operant conditioning (as articulated by Pavlov), and the role of the teacher was to manipulate the environment and be a “reinforcement machine” by providing rewards for “good” behavior or punishment for “bad” behavior. The basic premise was that a behavior would continue or be extinguished, depending on what was rewarded or punished.

In contrast to this perspective that placed emphasis on external factors, **cognitive learning theories** posited that learning had to do with what went on inside the learner’s head. They argued that rewards and punishments were not necessary to facilitate learning, but one would stimulate learning through an environment that presented the learner with disequilibrium, imbalance, and tension. Indeed, scientists such as Gagne (1965) noted that past experiences, perceptions, and ways of incorporating and thinking about information created tension in the learner and affected learning.

Many of us are familiar with the work of Piaget (Atherton, 2009), who focused on cognitive processes and rational approaches to solving problems and how those processes and approaches evolved. Piaget studied children and outlined four stages of cognitive development, the highest of which was achieved by the mid-teen years. He noted that a child acquires knowledge by interacting with his or her physical and psychological environments.

The work of Piaget was challenged, in part, by Perry (1970), who asserted that cognitive/intellectual development is not achieved by the mid-teen years but continues into adulthood and, in fact, happens over and over again when individuals are placed in new situations that require knowledge and understanding they do not possess. Perry outlined a nine-stage model in which an individual moves from a dualistic, right/wrong perspective—where the world and problems in it are thought to have a single right answer known to some authority figure—to a more relativistic perspective, where one can appreciate and accept that different situations or circumstances lead one to hold views and make decisions that may be more varied, realizing that there may be more than one “right answer.” One moves along this continuum, Perry said, by being challenged with thinking that is one

stage higher than one's current position, while being supported through the cognitive struggles such challenges create.

Perhaps one of the best-known authorities on learning was John Dewey (1916), who proposed that knowledge is acquired through discovery and experimentation and whose work provided the basis for **constructivist theories of learning**. He asserted that if given enough time and guidance, almost anyone could learn anything. According to Dewey, then, the goal of education and educators was/is to actively involve learners in discovering processes and relationships, and giving them enough time and “freedom” to experiment, make mistakes, reflect on those mistakes, and eventually understand and comprehend the material under investigation.

Constructivism is based on experiential learning; that is, knowledge is constructed through real-life experience. It is problem-based, adaptive learning that challenges learners to integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge and allows for creation of original work or innovative procedures. Teachers guided by constructivist theory expect and help learners to be self-directed, creative, and innovative, and to draw upon *all* of the “intelligence” described by Gardner (1999) and explained later in this chapter. Such a theoretical base encourages discovery, hands-on, experiential, collaborative, project-based, and task-based learning, all of which are aligned with experiential learning as described by Kolb (1984).

The idea of active involvement and discovery was expanded by educational theorists such as Bandura (1977), who proposed that individuals learn from observing others and paying attention to what happens to them. Role modeling is important in **social learning theory**, and there is acknowledgement that individuals other than the assigned teacher could be the role models and the sources of learning. The environment for learning and all those in that environment were now identified as significant to learning.

Learning with and through others, as noted by Bandura, is congruent with the need to be more **humanistic**, rather than behavioristic, in our approaches to teaching and learning. As noted by Carl Rogers (1969), teachers need to attend to learners' feelings, draw on their life experiences, and strive to help them grow personally and be fulfilled as individuals. With this perspective in mind, educators construct learning environments in which learners participate completely and have control over what, how, when, and even where they learn. In essence, the educator transitions from being a “sage on the stage” to a “guide on the side,” trusting the learner to confront problems in thoughtful ways, be open to changing his or her way of thinking, and engage in critical reflection and self-evaluation. In essence, the learning process is thought to be more significant than the specifics of what is learned.

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A focus on the learning process is evident in current research that examines ways in which our brains work and how that influences how we learn, the environments that enhance our learning, the extent to which we retain or lose bits of information, and the ways in which we are able to make connections among what we know. Such **brain-based learning** theories (Jensen, 2008) build on the notions posited in the 1970s regarding left- and right-brain thinking:

Left-brain thinking was described as analytic, logical, linear, and rule-bound. It calls upon mathematical and verbal skills, focuses on parts more so than wholes, and allows us to discriminate and be explicit. This is the paradigm that has dominated our culture in general and our educational systems in particular.

Right-brain thinking was described as artistic, holistic, and integrative. It involves feelings, intuition, and insight, and does not necessarily require verbal or math skills. The right brain allows us to integrate ideas into wholes, which are seen as more important than individual parts, and to look for tacit understanding of situations. This paradigm is culturally suppressed and not particularly evident in our educational systems.

Later, scientists proposed that the brain evolved in three parts: the lower brain, where survival learning occurs; the mid-brain, where emotions reside; and the upper brain, where higher-order thinking takes place. Current brain-based education embraces a more holistic view of the brain—one that is more systems-based and *gestalt* in nature—where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Neuroscientists have done autopsies, experiments, and various types of scans (e.g., MRIs) to conduct research that has implications for improved teaching practices. We are coming to better understand how human learning actually occurs—how the brain processes and retains information. This research has led to the identification of the following core principles to guide brain-based education (Jensen, 2008):

- The brain is a parallel processor that can perform several activities at once.
- The brain perceives wholes and parts simultaneously.
- Information is stored in multiple areas of the brain and can be retrieved through multiple memory and neural pathways.
- Learning engages the whole body; thus, all learning is mind-body in nature.
- Humans' search for meaning is innate.

- The search for meaning comes through patterning.
- Emotions are critical to patterning, and they drive our attention, meaning, and memory.
- Meaning is more important than just information.
- Learning involves focused attention and peripheral perception.
- We have two types of memory: rote and spatial (i.e., knowing things in relation to other things).
- We understand best when facts are embedded in natural spatial memory.
- The brain is social and develops better in concert with other brains.
- Complex learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by stress.
- Every brain is uniquely organized.
- Learning is developmental.

A review of this list of core principles would seem to suggest that the theorists discussed earlier were all correct—to some extent. Meaning is important. We learn through focused attention as well as through exploration. Education must attend to the whole student, where learning with others is effective and each learner is unique. Indeed, findings from brain-based research and educational literature in general now embrace much of the work of the pioneers in educational theory.

Such insights from the field of brain-based learning are helping teachers understand the unique approaches to learning exhibited by digital natives (those who have grown up using digital technology) and how to effectively incorporate technology into the learning environments for these individuals (Prensky, 2010). In essence, in the 21st century, learning and technology must be considered together. Wise integration of our evolving and powerful technology demands that we rethink our curricula and our approaches to teaching.

Today, we hear increasing calls for **collaborative and cooperative learning**, and in professional fields like nursing, there are increasing expectations for **interprofessional education** where students in various health disciplines learn with and from one another. We are tasked with providing learners with problems that challenge them to construct new ideas or concepts—based on what they know and what they seek to find out—that allow them to manage those problems. And, among other things, we hear calls for more humanism in education, where learners' feelings and experiences are valued as important and acknowledged to lead to personal growth. The role of the educator who is guided by such perspectives, therefore, is to facilitate learning, rather than be the all-knowing authority who conveys information. So how do we do that as nurse educators?



## CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

Humanistic learning perspectives (Rogers, 1969) and brain-based learning theorists (Jensen, 2008) have led educators to see their central purpose as fostering curiosity, enthusiasm, initiative, and responsibility for one's own learning, rather than forcing the mastery of isolated facts. Knowles (1978), the “father” of adult learning, expanded these basic principles to identify characteristics of adult learners that must be attended to if learning is to be successful. Among those **adult learning principles** are the following:

- Allow adult learners to exercise autonomy and self-direction in the learning process.
- Help adult learners achieve the personal learning goals they have identified.
- Ensure that all learning experiences designed for adults are relevant.
- Encourage adult learners to solve practical problems.
- Develop learning experiences that build on the life experiences of adult learners.
- Help adult learners fulfill their potential.

As a result of his work with adult learners, Knowles introduced the concept of **andragogy**, which he defined as the education of adults. He asserted that the andragogical approach is learner-directed, focused on “the tasks of life,” immediately applicable, and focused on learning how to learn. This, he proposed, is in direct contrast with the concept of **pedagogy**, which he defined as the education of children. A pedagogical approach calls for the learner to be passive, the subject matter to be central, motivation to come from external rewards, and learning to be focused on the future (i.e., “You’ll need to know this someday”).

In recent years, the line between andragogy and pedagogy has become blurred, and the term *pedagogy* is now receiving increased attention and being used widely. Educators are realizing that the principles initially outlined for adult learners have significance for any learner, regardless of age. Additionally, the term *pedagogy* has come to refer more to the art and science of teaching than it does to the learners engaged in the teaching/learning process (i.e., children or adults). We also hear talk of *critical pedagogy*, which focuses on helping learners question and challenge the dominant ways of thinking in our society—the beliefs and practices that dominate and the “sacred cows” that are embedded in our educational systems. We acknowledge publicly that learning is not an automatic consequence



of teaching, but results from sound pedagogy that has been deliberately designed to promote learning and inspire critical inquisitiveness. Indeed, part of that deliberate design is to base one's educational approaches on research findings, thereby engaging in evidence-based teaching practices.

Today's students are increasingly diverse regarding culture, ethnic background, language ability, and past educational and life experiences. They are technologically savvy and want to be fully engaged with and see relevance in the material being studied. In other words, they want all learning experiences to have meaning for them. Additionally, the students of today have a wide variety of learning styles or preferences.

## LEARNING STYLES/PREFERENCES

**Learning styles/preferences** can be thought of as the unique ways in which individuals perceive, interact with, process, and respond to information and learning situations. They involve cognitive, affective, and physiological factors, and they are thought to be relatively stable over time. All individuals learn through all modalities, but each of us prefers one or several modalities over the others. Therefore, they can be considered "preferences" as well "styles," and the literature often uses these terms interchangeably.

Gardner (1999) labelled these approaches to learning as "intelligences." He originally outlined seven such intelligences:

- Verbal/linguistic: Individuals with this preference prefer to read, write, talk, and share, and they "think in words."
- Mathematical/logical: These learners prefer to work with numbers, solve problems, experiment, ask questions, and think "logically" about solutions to problems or answers to questions.
- Visual/spatial: Learners who have strength in this area of intelligence "think in pictures." They prefer to draw, view pictures, create designs or models, think through mazes, and read.
- Bodily/kinesthetic: Individuals who have strength here prefer to move around, feel or manipulate things, use tools, dance, and use many senses.
- Musical: Learners who have strength in this area of intelligence "think in rhythms," preferring to pick out patterns, make up songs to help them remember, and listen to music.
- Interpersonal: These learners have many friends and like to talk to people, join and work in groups, share material and knowledge, collaborate with others, and resolve conflicts.

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- Intrapersonal: Individuals who have strength in this area of intelligence prefer to work alone. They think deeply, are reflective, are comfortable with independent or self-paced activities, are aware of their own values, recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and work diligently to pursue their personal interests and goals.

Recently, Gardner also noted that some learners are naturalistic (i.e., preferring to engage with nature to enhance learning), and some are existential (i.e., learning best from explorations of the lived experiences of human beings).

Many others have described learning styles. Gregorc (1984) described four types of learners:

- *Concrete/sequential learners* prefer structure and quiet environments.
- *Abstract/sequential learners* are global thinkers and need many facts.
- *Abstract/random learners* anchor their thinking processes in feelings and ask questions randomly, preferring a busy environment.
- *Concrete/random learners* are inquisitive, make intuitive leaps, and are more concerned with “why” than with “how.”

Perhaps the most widely used framework is that outlined by Kolb (1984), who identified four learning styles that combine with one another to create a “gestalt” for each individual:

- *Convergent learners* prefer problem solving and practical application; they are the thinkers and doers.
- *Divergent learners* prefer to organize specific relationships into a meaningful whole and generate alternative ideas; they are the feelers and watchers.
- *Assimilative learners* prefer to reason, create models, and “play” with ideas; they are the watchers and thinkers.
- *Accommodative learners* prefer to do things, take risks, and rely on others for specific information; they are the doers and feelers.

Kolb noted that learning is a continuous process that is grounded in experience and is, by its very nature, full of tension.

Despite all of this work related to defining and measuring learning styles, questions and misconceptions remain. First of all, research does not support many of the claims and assumptions underlying learning style constructs. Second, attempting to match teaching strategies with specific learning styles or preferences is very difficult and does not often result in improved learning. Third, most learners are multimodal and learn in a

variety of ways. Finally, as education moves toward more cooperative and collaborative learning environments, it may be more important to think about group dynamics and group interaction than the learning styles of individuals within those groups.

As educators, it may be valuable to help learners identify their own preferences for learning so that they can use that information most effectively. However, both we and they must be careful not to “pigeonhole” individuals into a single style and fail to challenge learners through a variety of experiences. We must realize as teachers that we, too, have our own preferences for how we learn. Those preferences influence how we teach. Therefore, it is essential that educators be attuned to designing learning experiences and evaluation methods that “tap into” many senses, are varied and do not result in an advantage or disadvantage for any particular group of students, and reflect the insights gained from pedagogical research efforts.

One thing that does evolve from all of these theories and all of the research on learning is a set of guiding principles that was formulated more than 25 years ago, but still has relevance today. In 1987—in response to criticisms of higher education (e.g., apathetic students, illiterate graduates, incompetent teaching, impersonal campuses)—Chickering and Gamson led a group of educators on a journey to define how students and faculty members could improve undergraduate education. They reviewed 50 years of research on “the way teachers teach and students learn, how students work and play with one another, and how students and faculty talk to each other” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 1).

The result of this careful and thorough analysis was the formulation of seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. Though the focus of this work was on the undergraduate experience, the principles also apply to graduate education. In addition, the principles have been supported through research that has been done since the 1987 publication, which attests to their timelessness and significance. Those seven principles for good practice in education are as follows:

- Encourage student–faculty contact: Interaction between teachers and students is the most important factor in engaging students with the material to be studied and facilitating their learning.
- Encourage cooperation among students: Learning is enhanced when it feels like a team effort rather than a solo race. Good learning is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated.
- Encourage active learning: Learning is not a spectator sport! Students must make what they learn part of themselves, and they do so by being actively engaged.

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- Give prompt feedback: Knowing what you know and do not know focuses learning. Learning is dependent on frequent feedback if it is to be sustained, practice if it is to be nourished, and opportunities to use what has been learned if it is to have meaning.
- Emphasize time on task: Learning to use one's time well is critical to effective learning, and students may need help in learning effective time management skills.
- Communicate high expectations: Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, so teachers must “set the bar high” and then work with students to help them achieve that goal.
- Respect students' diverse talents and ways of learning: Students bring different talents and styles of learning to the learning experience. They need opportunities to show their talents and their intelligences (Gardner, 1999), and to learn in ways that work best for them.

The individual who routinely and thoughtfully employs these principles of good education in combination with insights gained from a study of various learning theories is well positioned to evolve as an effective educator.

## COMPETENCIES OF NURSE EDUCATORS

Educators, particularly in nursing, are influenced by many factors, and those factors, in turn, influence curriculum design and our approaches to teaching and learning. Among other factors, accreditation standards and Board of Nursing regulations specify expectations of nursing programs, technological innovations challenge educators to “think outside the box,” the power of social media offers new ways to “connect” with students, and policy changes like the Affordable Care Act direct reconceptualization of the role and expectations of nurses. As a result, educators must consider curricula and teaching/learning strategies that provide for interprofessional experiences, **concept-based thinking**, **problem-based learning**, team-based learning, “flipped classrooms,” and other emerging phenomena.

Ultimately, educators need to strive to create learning systems that are learner-centered (Weimer, 2013), focus on inquiry, attend to the total development of the learner, actively involve learners, call upon many senses, and challenge learners to think about their thinking. Learning together, educators and learners need to allow for individualized learning, encourage expression and exploration of personal feelings and values, provide opportunities to work and learn in teams, and constantly raise questions about the world around us.

The role of the educator is to facilitate learning, encourage collaboration, help students learn how to learn, empower learners, challenge students to take responsibility for their own learning, and encourage and support a spirit of inquiry. Of course, the educator also gives information, helps learners know where and how to find information on their own, and helps them develop skills to critique and judge the information they find. Educators assess learning needs, create positive and empowering learning environments, provide feedback, coach, inspire, challenge, and genuinely care about the learners and their success. The way in which each of us implements the many dimensions of this role is influenced in large part by our philosophy; thus, it is important for educators to “do philosophy” so that we can be most effective in the role.

What does it mean to “do philosophy,” and why is it important? Greene (1973), an educational philosopher, challenged educators to “do philosophy” by taking the risk of thinking about what we do when we teach, and what we mean when we talk of enabling others to learn. She also challenged educators to look, if we can, at our presuppositions and to examine critically the principles underlying what we think and what we say as educators. Although Green laid out these challenges more than 40 years ago, they are still relevant today. In fact, they have been presented over and over again—though with different words or changing emphases—by educational scholars, including Palmer (2007).

In his personal account of his journey as a teacher, Palmer (2007) concluded that “good teachers must live examined lives and try to understand what animates their actions for better and for worse” (p. ix). He talked about the importance of knowing those whom we teach and being connected to them, knowing ourselves because “we teach who we are” (p. xi), and trusting ourselves and all those engaged in the educational enterprise. Palmer’s basic premise is that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). Thus, one’s personal philosophy and self-understanding are critical to effective teaching.

Although we often have to ask and answer painful questions to “do philosophy,” we must think about what we are doing in order to be most effective at what we are doing. Do we not ask our students to reflect on their values, what drives them, and how the assumptions they make about themselves and others affect the care they provide? We can do no less. Such a “heightened self-consciousness and greater clarity” (Greene, 1973, p. 11) about our philosophy of education and our conceptualizations about teaching and learning will enhance the teaching experience in nursing and help us achieve and continually improve our competence in the role.

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The educator competencies we need to develop and continually refine were articulated by the National League for Nursing (2005) and further explicated by Halstead (2007). They include the following:

- *Facilitate learning.* Nurse educators are responsible for creating an environment in classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings that facilitates student learning and the achievement of desired cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outcomes.
- *Facilitate learner development and socialization.* Nurse educators recognize their responsibility for helping students develop a nursing identity and integrate the values and behaviors expected of those who fulfill that role.
- *Use assessment and evaluation strategies.* Nurse educators use a variety of strategies to assess and evaluate student learning in classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings, as well as in all domains of learning.
- *Participate in curriculum design and evaluation of program outcomes.* Nurse educators are responsible for formulating program outcomes, designing curricula that reflect contemporary healthcare trends and prepare graduates to function effectively in the healthcare environment, and designing relevant methods to assess student achievement of program outcomes.
- *Function as a change agent and leader.* Nurse educators function as change agents and leaders to create a preferred future for nursing education and nursing practice.
- *Pursue continuous quality improvement in the nurse educator role.* Nurse educators recognize that their role is multidimensional and that an ongoing commitment to develop and maintain competence in the role is essential.
- *Engage in scholarship.* Nurse educators acknowledge that scholarship is an integral component of the faculty role and that teaching itself is a scholarly activity.
- *Function within the educational environment.* Nurse educators are knowledgeable about the educational environment within which they practice and recognize how political, institutional, social, and economic forces impact their role.

As educators, we must have a sound knowledge base about teaching and learning so that we can most effectively help our increasingly diverse students learn the complexities of what it means to be a nurse and to engage in the practice of nursing. We must continually refine our teaching skills so that we can develop effective case studies, games, simulations, discussions,

online resources, lectures, visuals, group projects, and values clarification exercises, as well as lab and clinical learning experiences. We must also continually reflect on how the practice of nursing is changing and ensure that our curricula and learning activities prepare students for those ever-changing roles. For example, with increasing expectations of team practice in clinical settings, educators would do well to integrate more interprofessional learning activities and possibly develop courses in which students from a variety of disciplines learn and grow together.

It also is critical—in this age of “where’s the evidence?”—to emphasize the increasing need for all nursing educators to engage in scholarly teaching through the design of evidence-based curricula and the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices. We teach our students the value of evidence-based practice and expect them to integrate that perspective into what they do as nurses. Can we expect less of ourselves? Additionally, more of us need to engage in the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990), which involves studying the effect of our curricula and the learning experiences we create with students and then sharing with the broader nursing education community what we have learned from such study.

Such ongoing development and improvement as educators will occur through deliberate efforts. Just as clinicians continually keep current and advance their knowledge and skills related to practice and the care of the patients for whom they provide care, so, too, must educators keep current and advance their knowledge and skills related to the practice of teaching and the ways they interact with and guide the total development of their students. How can such ongoing development occur?

One route to continued growth as an educator is to enroll in academic courses that are relevant. Courses in innovative teaching practices, the integration of technology into nursing education, building the science of nursing education, new advances in clinical education, the history of and current issues facing higher education, or other relevant topics are all areas that need to be considered.

Additionally, there are many professional conferences offered for educators. Examples of educational activities that can be used to support and prepare the educator include conferences and webinars offered by the National League for Nursing (NLN) and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), as well as those offered by the Association for Research in Higher Education, American Association of Higher Education, other national organizations, and individual colleges/universities. At such conferences, educators are introduced to the latest innovative practices and research efforts, and they have opportunities to engage in dialogue with others in that same role.



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The number of books about education, teaching strategies, evaluation of learning, brain-based research, and so on is ever-increasing. Nurse educators would do well to engage with this literature outside our own field. In medicine, for example, there is a fair amount of research being done about new curriculum designs, the use of simulation, and collaborative learning. In addition, we can learn a great deal from educators in businesses that have extensive experience with problem-based education, where students work in groups to complete projects that have real-world relevance and use. And literature related to broad education goals—such as those often associated with the arts and humanities—keep educators “grounded” in the fact that our purpose is more than to prepare students for a job or a specific career.

In addition to books, educators can continue to learn and grow in that role through reading a wide variety of journals and/or staying connected with listservs, blogs, websites, or social networking pages that specifically address education issues. **Table 3–1** presents a list of such resources that is by no means all-encompassing, but does point out the variety of resources available to us as educators to learn more about our “craft.”

Teachers can further challenge themselves to develop expertise in the educator role by seeking certification in that specialty through the NLN’s program ([www.nln.org/certification/index.htm](http://www.nln.org/certification/index.htm)). Sitting for the nurse educator certification exam requires reading education-focused literature,

**Table 3–1** Selected Education-Focused Journals and Other Resources

<i>Academic Leader</i>	<i>International Journal of Nursing</i>
<i>Action Learning: Research and Practice</i>	<i>Journal of Curriculum Studies</i>
<i>American Educational Research Journal</i>	<i>Journal of Further and Higher Education</i>
<i>Biomedical Education</i>	<i>Journal of Multicultural Education</i>
<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	<i>Journal of Nursing Education</i>
<i>Change</i> (publication of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching)	<i>National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal</i>
<i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i>	<i>Nurse Educator</i>
<i>Community College Journal of Research and Practice</i>	<i>Nursing Education Perspectives</i> (National League for Nursing journal)
<i>Comparative and International Education</i>	<i>Phi Delta Kappan</i> (journal of Phi Delta Kappa)
<i>Education Media, Technology and Science</i>	<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>
<i>Education Policy</i>	<i>Teacher Education</i>
<i>Education Scholarship</i> (online)	<i>Teachers &amp; Teaching</i>
<i>Educational Action Research</i>	<i>Teaching in Higher Education</i>
<i>Educational Researcher</i>	<i>The Internet and Higher Education</i>

engaging in dialogue with colleagues about teaching and learning, and thinking deeply about our role as educators. Receiving such certification attests to one's evolving expertise as an educator. With certification comes the expectation that the educator be a change agent, seeking out ways to improve programs, curricula, and teaching methodologies. This is a dynamic certification; it is not one that is accomplished and set aside, but one that inspires further seeking of best practices, challenging the status quo in the profession for the betterment of nursing education and ultimately patient care.

Certainly, another way to continue to develop one's mastery as a teacher is to seek out a mentor or seek help from and dialogue with colleagues who have expertise in education. Think about contacting one of the Fellows in the Academy of Nursing Education, or one of the individuals who participated in the NLN/Johnson & Johnson Faculty Leadership and Mentoring Program, or someone who has been inducted into the American Academy of Nursing because of her or his sustained and significant contributions to nursing education. You might also consider contacting an author whose ideas truly "resonate" with your own passions about a mentor relationship or collaboration. You might consider applying to participate in programs sponsored by the NLN's Leadership Institute ([www.nln.org/facultyprograms/leadershipinstitute.htm](http://www.nln.org/facultyprograms/leadershipinstitute.htm)), Sigma Theta Tau International's Nurse Faculty Leadership Academy ([www.nursingsociety.org/LeadershipInstitute/nursefaculty/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.nursingsociety.org/LeadershipInstitute/nursefaculty/Pages/default.aspx)), or any number of other such initiatives, to receive personalized and individualized guidance on your journey toward excellence in nursing education. Finally, you will want to continue to challenge yourself, always remain open to change, and be enthusiastic about the opportunities before you as an educator.

As educators, we must continually pursue excellence as teachers, facilitators of learning, pedagogical scholars, educational leaders, and citizens of the academy. This lifelong journey will take us to new places, and we will continue to be energized and grow. After all, we are adult learners ourselves!

## SUMMARY THOUGHTS

In this chapter, we have explored various theories of learning and examined how an understanding of the concept of "learning style or preference" can enhance our effectiveness as teachers. We have followed the evolution of the educator role from that of a "sage on the stage" (who provides a great deal of information, focuses on the content more so than on the student, and assumes that if something was taught, it also was learned) to that of a

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“guide on the side.” The guide challenges students to think deeply, engenders in them a spirit of inquiry, helps them understand who they are as human beings and evolving nurses, and allows them to have more control over the educational experience.

We hope you have been challenged to “do philosophy” and reflect deeply on the insights to which such self-exploration leads. Knowing who we are as human beings and what we value will strengthen our ability to guide students on their journey to reach personal and professional goals. It serves to ensure that we do not attempt to “create students in our own image.”

Finally, this discussion has outlined the complexity of the educator role and the multiple competencies associated with that role. It is hoped that you have been stimulated to outline a plan for the ongoing development of the knowledge and skills you need as an educator, as well as to consider a scholarly path you might pursue that will enable you to contribute to the evolving science of nursing education.

The nurse educator role and the teaching experience in nursing are both challenging and incredibly rewarding. Do not hesitate to allow your passion for teaching to be evident to students, and do not hesitate to continually question how we can improve the nursing education experience for students and faculty.

## SUMMARY POINTS

1. “Good citizenship” requires that educators be effective teachers and advisors.
2. Educators are expected to design, implement and evaluate the curricula in their discipline, taking into account the institution’s mission, goals, and degree requirements.
3. Faculty members are responsible for developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising (as needed) policies and procedures related to a number of areas, such as student admission, progression, and graduation; peer review; and tenure and promotion.
4. Educators are different from teachers. They are the individuals whose professional responsibility and major contribution to society relate to enhancing the total development of learners—their minds, their values, their skills—and to advancing knowledge and understanding in their field.
5. Faculty members must provide learners with problems that challenge them to construct new ideas or concepts—based on what they know and what they seek to find out—that allow them to manage those problems.

6. Learning styles/preferences can be thought of as unique ways in which individuals perceive, interact with, process, and respond to information and learning situations.
7. Educators need to strive to create learner-centered systems that focus on inquiry, attend to the total development of the learner, actively involve learners, call upon many senses, and challenge learners to think about their thinking.
8. The role of the educator is to facilitate learning, encourage collaboration, help students learn how to learn, empower learners, challenge students to take responsibility for their own learning, and encourage and support a spirit of inquiry.

## TIPS FOR NURSE EDUCATORS

1. Use a variety of teaching strategies in order to “connect” with the diversity of students and the array of learning styles/preferences and intelligences they present.
2. Question the assumptions you make about students and teachers that influence what you do as a teacher.
3. Read extensively about teaching/learning and incorporate new ideas into what you do as a teacher.
4. Ensure that your teaching practices are based on evidence, rather than solely on tradition and past practice.
5. Use a variety of evaluation methods that attend to affective-domain learning, as well as the cognitive and psychomotor domains.
6. Reflect carefully and often on what you do as a teacher and how it can be improved to best serve students.
7. Seek out colleagues or mentors with whom you can engage in serious dialogue about teaching, learning, curriculum development, implementing the educator role, and issues in higher education.
8. Allow your passion for teaching to shine for students and faculty colleagues.

## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

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1. Which of the following learning activities would most likely appeal to a student whose strength is Gardner’s visual/spatial intelligence?
  - A. Study groups, discussion boards, and group projects.
  - B. Independent work and self-paced activities.
  - C. **Drawing, working with colors, pictures, and puzzles.**
  - D. Reading, writing, and debating.

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**Rationale:**

Visual/spatial intelligence refers to an individual's strength in using visual materials to learn (e.g., maps, charts, pictures).

2. Which of the following principles related to learning styles is a correct statement?
  - A. Learning styles cannot be determined through any form of measurement.
  - B. **We teach how we learn.**
  - C. Knowing one's own learning style interferes with effective learning.
  - D. Teachers should use strategies that best match the learning style that is preferred by most students in the class.

**Rationale:**

Learning styles can be measured, and when learners know their own learning style, they can use their strengths to enhance learning. Teachers should use a variety of strategies in order to meet the needs of all learners and to ensure that the strategies used are not overly influenced by our own preferences, because we do tend to teach how we learn.

3. Which of the following sets of characteristics best describes left-brain thinking?
  - A. **Sequential, rule-bound, logical.**
  - B. Analytic, tacit, linear.
  - C. Nonverbal, integrative, emotional.
  - D. Artistic, parts more important than the whole, synthesis.

**Rationale:**

Characteristics such as artistic, emotional, tacit, and synthesis are characteristics of right-brain thinking.

4. The concrete/random learner described by Gregorc prefers a trial-and-error approach, with breakthroughs through intuitive insights. Which of the following learning activities would be *least* likely to be preferred by this kind of learner?
  - A. Independent study.
  - B. Computer games and simulations.
  - C. Model development.
  - D. **Lecture.**

**Rationale:**

The concrete/random learner likes a stimulus-rich environment and thrives on competition. A lecture would not engage this learner to the extent the other activities would.

5. Which of the following is the most significant “driving force” when deciding what learning activities to design to facilitate student learning?
- A. Students’ learning styles.
  - B. Teacher’s learning style.
  - C. **Learning objectives.**
  - D. Experience with using a particular activity.

**Rationale:**

The goals or objectives of a learning experience are the most important factors that guide the development or selection of teaching strategies. Many other factors (such as those noted in the options above) can and should be taken into consideration, but the goals of learning must take priority.

6. Which of the following statements is most closely aligned with the perspectives on teaching and learning expressed by John Dewey?
- A. **Learners are motivated by intrinsic goals and the opportunity to learn through discovery.**
  - B. Learners are motivated by rewards, reinforcement, and punishment.
  - C. Advancement in one’s cognitive development occurs through being challenged with thinking that is one stage higher than one’s current position.
  - D. Individuals learn through observing others and what they do.

**Rationale:**

Rewards and punishment reflect Skinner’s perspectives, one-plus stage challenging reflects Perry’s model, and social learning is congruent with Bandura’s theory. Dewey’s perspective promotes intrinsic goal motivation and discovery.

7. Currently, the term *pedagogy* is most closely aligned with which of the following statements?
- A. Teaching should be learner-directed and focus on “the tasks of life.”
  - B. Learners are passive and subject matter is central.
  - C. **Teaching is both an art and a science.**
  - D. Teachers should encourage cooperation among students.

**Rationale:**

*Pedagogy* no longer refers to the teaching of children, but to the art and science of teaching.

8. Which of the following *Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) is identified as the most

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important factor in engaging students with the material to be studied and facilitate their learning?

- A. Give prompt feedback.
- B. Communicate high expectations.
- C. Encourage cooperation among students.
- D. **Encourage student–faculty contact.**

**Rationale:**

Though the first three responses are among the *Principles*, the authors note that research indicates that student–faculty contact is the most significant factor in engaging students.

- 9. When an educator “does philosophy” (Greene, 1973), he or she takes the risk of doing which of the following?
  - A. Receiving less-than-positive feedback from peers.
  - B. **Discovering that what we say we value as teachers is not always congruent with what we do in that role.**
  - C. Failing when a new teaching approach is used.
  - D. Preparing students who are unable to pass the licensing examination.

**Rationale:**

“Doing philosophy” is an introspective process that leads us to think carefully about who we are, what “drives” us, and whether our actions/behaviors match our words or expressed values.

- 10. Which of the following is *not* a nurse educator competency articulated by the National League for Nursing (2005)?
  - A. Function as a change agent and leader.
  - B. **Maintain certification in a clinical specialization.**
  - C. Engage in scholarship.
  - D. Use assessment and evaluation strategies.

**Rationale:**

The NLN’s list of nurse educator competencies notes that the individual pursues continuous quality improvement in the nurse educator role, which may include maintaining some level of expertise and/or certification in a clinical specialty area, but the NLN does not specify that such certification is essential for all nurse educators.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Who is the “adult learner”? How do approaches to teaching need to be modified when dealing with an adult learner population?



**Considerations:**

Adult learners are self-directed, goal oriented, and problem oriented, and they want learning to be relevant. Learning experiences designed by the teacher should encourage students to draw on their past experiences to solve new problems, and the problems presented should be “real-life” challenges so they have relevance.

2. Which theories of learning are most congruent with your own philosophy of education? Which are most incongruent? Which of those theories do you think have (or would have) the greatest influence on you as a teacher?

**Considerations:**

Highlight major themes of various learning theories. Thoughtfully reflect on their meaning and which are most closely aligned with your own philosophy. Discuss how a learning theory influences the role of the learner, the role of the teacher, the teaching strategies used, learner/teacher relationships, the nature of the learning environment, and the evaluation methods used.

3. Given that a teacher may know individual students’ learning styles/preferences, is it possible to accommodate those individual preferences when that teacher is involved with many students during the course of a semester or program? If so, how can you avoid teacher “burnout”? If not, what’s all the “fuss” about learning styles/preferences, and why bother to find out what they are?

**Considerations:**

Summarize the major learning styles. Discuss identification of learning styles/preferences through self-assessment, completion of tools/instruments, or dialogue and reflection with others (e.g., the teacher). Discuss the usefulness of knowing one’s style to “play to one’s strengths.” Consider the need to match teaching strategies and learning experiences with learning goals, more so than with learning styles.

4. Some assert that nursing faculty want students to be humanistic with patients, yet they themselves are behavioristic with students. What do the two perspectives mean in the context of education, and why might this phenomenon occur in nursing?

**Considerations:**

Reflect on the meaning of humanism and behaviorism in the context of education. Develop insights regarding the realities of nursing education (e.g., licensure examination, accreditation standards).

## TEACHING SCENARIO

Judy Mack is a new faculty member who has been assigned to teach a lower-division (i.e., freshman or sophomore) course on health assessment at a nearby baccalaureate nursing program. She must teach the theory/lab course within the framework of the approved course objectives, but otherwise she has the freedom to develop the course in any way she sees fit. Judy is excited about the possibilities this course presents and wants to implement all of what she learned in graduate school about teaching and learning.

The sophomore students who will be enrolling in the course have completed a one-credit “Introduction to Nursing as Profession” course as freshmen as well as foundational courses in the biological and social sciences. Judy realizes that each of the 30 students in her class has developed her or his own approach to learning, and she is hopeful that she can satisfy everyone’s needs, including her own.

- How can Judy identify each student’s learning style/preference without using large amounts of class time?
- What learning styles/preferences should Judy expect to find among this student group that ranges in age from 19 to 52 years and includes males and females, several students whose basic education was completed outside the United States, and students who have transferred to this school from another nursing program?

Judy decides to structure the course as follows: lecture on one aspect of assessment on Monday, demonstrate it in lab on Wednesday, remind students of the hours the lab will be open for them to practice the assessment, and test them on that aspect of assessment the following Wednesday in lab. She is careful to correlate the class session with the “Anatomy and Physiology” content the students are learning simultaneously and is patient in answering individual students’ questions about how this assessment knowledge will help their nursing practice.

- What learning principles has Judy applied appropriately?
- What learning principles has Judy violated?
- How could Judy better structure this course to fulfill more principles of learning and meet a wider array of learning styles/preferences?

Judy has now been asked to teach a similar course for registered nurses through the school’s continuing education department.

- What modifications should Judy make in the course, given this particular learner population?
- What principles of adult learning are evidenced by these modifications?

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