

Brittany Butts
Philosophy of Education

It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.
-Albert Einstein

My philosophy of education stems from my desire to seek knowledge and understanding of the world around me so that I can make it a better place. For many nursing students, the end goal of their educational path is to pass a board exam and get a job. Nursing, however, is more than a job. Nursing is more than a career. Nursing is an art. Nursing is a science. Nursing is a journey with an unknown destination. Nursing can be almost anything you want it to be. My job as a nurse educator is not just to teach nursing students what it is to be a nurse and how excel at a job, but also to peak their curiosities, instill in them a drive to know more and to give them the tools to uncover life's mysteries.

Creating the Next Generation of Nurse Scholars

The part I play in nursing education is more than just creating nurses. I believe that as an educator, my job is to create nurse leaders, nurse scholars and socially responsible health providers. Leadership, scholarship and service are the essential components of my view of nursing. The heart of nursing is to provide those around us with the tools and opportunity for well-being. As an educator, I strive to instill these core values, leadership, scholarship and service, into the nursing process at all levels. Furthermore, these values should be reflected in my interactions with students.

I believe that nursing research should be a major focus of nursing education. Research is an essential component of nursing. Nursing knowledge should be imparted as evidenced based practice, which provides students with not just the what but also the why. I believe that all students can become interested in research if approached in a manner appropriate for the students. It is my job as an educator to find that approach and present nursing knowledge in a manner that not only teaches the student the subject but also process and reasoning. To introduce students to evidence-based practice, I incorporate primary nursing research articles into my course structure so that students can evaluate and understand how research advances nursing care.

My goal is to one day introduce nursing students of all levels to laboratory science. I believe that schools of nursing should follow the lead of the National Institute of Nursing Research by having nurse-run research laboratories. I would like to create courses for nursing students at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral level that provide hands-on laboratory training and research.

Student Centered Learning

Every truth has four corners: as a teacher, I give you one corner, and it is for you to find the other three.
-Confucius

Nursing education is best approached as student centered learning. Nursing is a unique discipline that must provide students with a large base of facts while also developing critical thinking skills. The rote memorization part of nursing education is necessary to instill the basic science and nursing knowledge in the minds of future nurses. However, the traditional teacher centered learning, with its emphasis on facts and instructor-imparted knowledge, can be diluted with student centered learning methods that engage the student and provide cognitive pathways in which the student not only remembers the information, but also can also critically apply the knowledge gained.

I incorporate active learning into my traditional lectures through the use of in-lecture clicker questions that enhance and solidify student knowledge. I also utilize worksheets, case studies, and group projects as active learning opportunities in order to activate their prior knowledge, create more robust knowledge organization, provide iterative practice and feedback, and foster community among students.

Nursing education requires an active participative student-teacher relationship. Thus, my role as an educator is to engage students and create an environment in which the student can learn and actively participate in the learning process.

Facilitating Critical Thinking Skills

I incorporate active learning into my teaching to foster the critical thinking skills vital to nursing practice. Students must not simply learn the answer to a question, but also must be able to explain the rationale for the answer. Integrating computer response questions into my lectures provide students with real-time feedback on their learning and allow for class or small group discussions on the rationale for the answer. This method also allows me to assess student learning, identify content weakness, and track class progress. With this knowledge, I can immediately adjust my approach to teaching a particular topic to meet the needs of the students.

I utilize in-depth case studies that provide optional active learning activities for students to check their learning. These case studies address multiple domains of learning so that students may check their understanding and synthesize material into a holistic approach to health and disease. Students generally work in groups, and answer sheets are subsequently provided for students to check their understanding. Students who successfully complete the case studies develop a better grasp of the material and more confidence in their ability to perform well in the course.

Fostering an Inclusive Learning Environment

My goals for diversity in nursing education are two-fold: 1. To create a community of nurse leaders and scholars who are as diverse as the communities in which we live and serve and 2. To foster a learning environment such that these nurse leaders and scholars are able to promote optimal health for all by creating, changing, and leading through innovative teaching, discovery, nursing practice, and social action.

As an instructor, I find it important to include topics on diversity, culture, and society into the course content. These topics should not just provide students with information on topics such as gender identity and cultural norms, but also require students to reflect on an individual might feel within today's society. For example, students are often instructed to respect a patient's gender identity, but better instruction could include an exercise requiring reflection on how a patient who identifies as gender neutral might feel when filling out a form or getting a driver's license. Nursing education should include teaching students to try to look at each situation from the patient's perspective and never from their own.

Diversity comes in many forms, and as an instructor and researcher I have a duty to promote and celebrate the diversity within our communities. I have a responsibility to guide students in considering the resources available to those they encounter and care for and to set an example by demonstrating that each person is deserving of the same respect and care no matter what their background, beliefs, or situation.

Education is a Two-Way Street

It is by teaching that we teach ourselves, by relating that we observe, by affirming that we examine, by showing that we look, by writing that we think, by pumping that we draw water into the well.

Swiss philosopher Henri Frederic Amiel's words demonstrate that instructors also must be active learners. While many instructors will agree that they must continue to learn to keep current with new knowledge, I believe that teachers have a lot to learn from their students. There is an amazing diversity among nursing students today, and many of these students bring a unique expertise into the field of nursing. Instructors can learn so much from their students. Students provide teachers with unique perspectives of the world and teach us something new about the world, about nursing, or about ourselves.