Philosophy of Teaching

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As a feminist and social activist, it is important to present my standpoint before describing my philosophy of teaching. I grew up in Charleswood, a suburb located in the southwest portion of the City of Winnipeg. After the Second World War, property in Charleswood was offered to veterans and their families so my newly married parents purchased land and built a home with their own hands. My family of origin could be classified as working class since my father, a veteran of the Second World War, worked in construction and considered himself to be a “pick and axe man” and my mother was a stay-at-home “Mom.” On my father’s side of the family, our ancestors were Irish and another unknown European country of origin (possibly German). My maternal grandparents immigrated to Canada from Scotland to run a general store in rural Manitoba. My father completed Grade 11 and my mother had a Grade 8 education and the value of an education (of all kinds) was instilled in me at an early age. As a child, I watched a lot of television and wanted to become a detective and investigate sensational events to discover truth.

Some people are surprised when I say that I did not speak until I was 25 years old but in reality, I am shy. What happened at 25 years of age to encourage me to start talking? I was diagnosed with malignant carcinoma of the thyroid and because of the connotations of the word, cancer, my parents misinterpreted that I was dying. Facing one’s mortality is challenging at any developmental phase but especially difficult as a young woman. I equated the problematic throat with “having no voice” and hence, became passionate about voicing my viewpoint. A voice was required to become an effective advocate for my patients and students. As a middle-aged woman, I became a nurse scientist to investigate the everyday lives (rather than sensational events) of marginalized peoples to promote social justice and health equity (many similarities to a detective but much safer).

How does one learn how to teach? Throughout my career, I have crossed paths with excellent mentors and positive role models. These caring scholars encouraged me to reflect upon my teaching practice and identify the underlying values and beliefs that guide my teaching. My background along with characteristics from these exemplary nurse educators (that I strive to emulate) provided a basis for the following description of my philosophy of teaching, a passion-centred philosophy of excellence in teaching.
Passion-centred Philosophy of Excellence in Teaching

A passion-centred philosophy of excellence in teaching evolved from 25 years of experience as a nurse educator and from the inspiration and foresight of various colleagues (Horsfall, Cleary & Hunt, 2012; Sawatzky et al., 2009; Spurr, Bally & Ferguson, 2010). The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2009) defines passion as a “strong emotion that has an intense, driving or overmastering feeling or conviction” (p. 1). I associate passion with enthusiasm and values. Passion is the driving force and central theme of my teaching philosophy. I am passionate about facilitating learning and value personal and professional growth. I am passionate about being a part of learning within the realm of self, students and colleagues.
My philosophy of teaching (see Figure 1) will be described starting with its foundation entitled, “Passion for Caring” followed by passion for excellence in teaching practice, leadership, scholarship, and reflexivity. Although the arrows indicate that one form of excellence leads to the other, the process is iterative; it flows back and forth and diagonally.

**Passion for Caring**

As depicted in Figure 1, the foundation for my philosophy of teaching is entitled, “Passion for Caring.” Similar to Sawatzky et al. (2009) in their explanation of ethic of caring, caring is a complex concept, central to nursing and nursing education. Because my goal as a nurse educator is to produce caring practitioners, I demonstrate caring behaviours to students and colleagues (Yuan, Williams & Fan, 2007). To emulate the concept of caring, I am well prepared for instruction, well rested and energized and consistently present myself as enthusiastic. I strive to pose meaningful and respectful questions that foster critical thinking (Schaefer & Zygmont, 2003; Yoder & Terhorst, 2012; Young & Paterson, 2007), actively listen to comments and questions in an astute manner, and seek constructive evaluation of my teaching. I communicate my value of lifelong learning by sharing that “the more I know about nursing, the more I realize all the things that I do not know about nursing.” I believe that it is crucial to transmit my passion for caring at times of achievement and especially when students and colleagues are struggling.

**Passion for Excellence in Teaching Practice**

My passion for excellence in teaching practice is fueled by a passion for relational, student-centred learning. I utilize stories about my clinical and community experiences as a backdrop to facilitate students’ understandings about the complexities of health and nursing. Within this context, I illuminate key concepts. I believe that the student and I take on teaching and learning roles at different times and that I learn as much from the students as they learn from me (Boyd, MacNeil, & Sullivan, 2006). I encourage active participation by students in designing, implementing, and evaluating instruction (Greer, et al., 2010). In my passion for excellence in teaching practice, I believe that the most fundamental teaching principle is that of effective communication, which begins with the development of a clear and concise course syllabus (Horsfall, Cleary & Hunt, 2012). In the first class or first encounter with an advisee, I set the stage for student-centred learning by having students introduce themselves and provide me with a memorable “tid-bit” to establish my genuine interest in them as persons and I share my beliefs and intentions that students have a key role in the learning process.

**Passion for Excellence in Teaching Leadership**

My passion for mentorships provides impetus to the passion for excellence in teaching leadership. I “pay it forward” because I have been a mentee with excellent mentors who have served as coaches, guides, and sounding boards but most of all, they have served as caring individuals who are concerned about their students’ learning and my growth as an educator. Because each mentor has provided me with a safe and confidential relationship to share my conundrums and problem solve in a manner that promotes students’ learning, I believe that it is important for me to guide “new” nurse educators (preceptors, CEFs, instructors, tenure-track)
and listen to experienced colleagues share their challenges so that we can problem-solve together.

**Passion for Excellence in Teaching Scholarship**

My passion for lifelong learning in every aspect of life (not solely academia) fuels my passion for excellence in teaching scholarship. I agree with this statement: “The scholarship of teaching is motivated by an ethic of inquiry in which faculty broadly frame and explore questions related to teaching and learning, either through research or through ongoing learning and professional growth” (Sawatzky et al., 2009, p. 262). I believe that my scholarship abilities produce knowledge to support the transfer of the science and the art of nursing from the expert to the novice. I consistently seek opportunities to engage in research that is needed to enhance nursing education (e.g. doctoral dissertation, collaborative versus traditional testing, promotion of EBP in clinical teaching). I also believe that scholarship relates to my abilities to transcend the concept of caring to my students and colleagues.

**Passion for Excellence in Reflexivity**

My passion for personal agency and achievement (high standards academically and high standards of nursing practice) are the foundation upon which my passion for excellence in reflexivity is built. I define reflexivity as an exploratory approach that questions how knowledge is generated and, further, how relations of power operate in this process. To me, to be reflexive means that I must be keenly self-aware and ponder how my beliefs, attitudes, verbal and non-verbal cues play a role in my teaching practice. I consistently seek feedback from students and colleagues about my instruction and reflect upon my interactions with students and colleagues. Sometimes, I have vivid dreams and these often help me explore how my notions of “self” and “power relations” intertwine with my ideals of learning. Reflexivity challenges me to interrogate (note: the detective emerges again) my taken-for-granted assumptions about the meaning of teaching, learning, and education (Horsfall, Cleary & Hunt, 2012).

**Summary**

I believe that teaching practice fueled by passion promotes the development of a positive and enthusiastic learning environment and lends itself to rewarding and successful learning experiences. With a passion for caring as the foundation, I believe that I am a component in the outcome of caring, confident, patient-centred graduate nurses. Through reflexive practice, I can effectively tailor my teaching to meet the diverse needs of students that could range anywhere from individuals with varied cultural backgrounds to Advanced Practice Nurses. My philosophy of passion-centred teaching assists me to readily respond to meet the expectations that I may encounter in my everyday and not so everyday teaching.
References


