If the Walls Could Talk: Student Perspectives on What Makes for a “Good” Teacher

Theresa M. “Terry” Valiga, EdD, RN, CNE, ANEF, FAAN

Ashley Munteanu, MSN, RN
Conflict of Interest & Affiliations

• There are no conflicts of interest for any of the researchers or presenters associated with this presentation or the work described

• Affiliations:
  – Terry Valiga ... Duke University School of Nursing
  – Ashley Munteanu ... University of San Francisco School of Nursing & Health Professions
Session Objectives

• Describe the major themes that emerged from a study of graduate students’ comments about characteristics of excellent teachers

• Discuss barriers to & ways to support faculty efforts to be excellent teachers
The Study
Purposes

- **Describe qualities of “good teachers”** as provided by students enrolled in a graduate-level nursing course focused on *Facilitating Student Learning*
- **Identify differences, if any,** in how students enrolled in the course describe “good nursing teachers” & “good teachers in general”
- **Compare descriptions** of “good nursing teachers” & “good teachers in general” provided by students enrolled in the course with descriptions of “good teachers” found in the literature
Course Foci

• Principles of adult learning

• Concepts of learning styles, student engagement, & domains of learning

• Teaching practices & strategies
Discussion Forum Topics

• Philosophy of Education
• Principles/Theories of Learning
• Learner Characteristics ... Generational Differences ... Learning Preferences
• Engagement of Learners ... Student/Teacher Relationships
• Creativity & Innovative Teaching Strategies
## Study Sample

**(N = 76)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th># MSN Students</th>
<th># DNP Students</th>
<th># Other Students</th>
<th>Total # Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2011</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# of Substantive Forum Posts

(Expected: 476; Received: 1,070)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Total # Students</th>
<th>Philosophy of Education</th>
<th>Principles &amp; Theories</th>
<th>Learner Characteristics</th>
<th>Engagement of Learners</th>
<th>Creativity &amp; Innovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2011</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>94 (19)</td>
<td>31 (19)</td>
<td>27 (12)</td>
<td>21 (12)</td>
<td>83 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39 (26)</td>
<td>22 (13)</td>
<td>35 (13)</td>
<td>42 (13)</td>
<td>46 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Unavailable</td>
<td>20 (16)</td>
<td>22 (16)</td>
<td>16 (16)</td>
<td>74 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48 (24)</td>
<td>73 (24)</td>
<td>25 (12)</td>
<td>32 (12)</td>
<td>42 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56 (32)</td>
<td>76 (32)</td>
<td>27 (16)</td>
<td>41 (16)</td>
<td>78 (32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Numbers in parentheses indicates the # of posts that were expected.
Emerging Themes

- Humanism
- Respect
- Relationships & Connections
- Create a Positive Environment for Learning
- Engagement
- Various Teaching Strategies & Creativity
- Passion & Enthusiasm
Humanism

• Tell personal stories

• Allow self to be vulnerable

• Let your personality show

• Admit to being imperfect
One of my favorite instructors, as well as the majority of my classmates’, was an instructor who shared her personal life with us, her insights, strengths/weaknesses, & just the simple fact of being human. ... [She] was not intimidating like the others, she was very genuine in her actions & teaching, & one could just sense her sincerity in wanting others to succeed.
Respect

• Don’t belittle
• Don’t intimidate
• Acknowledge students
• Use appropriate behavior
• Be professional
The ones that I valued the most were the instructors that treated me like an adult. More specifically, they respected me as an individual...
Relationships & Connections

• Get to know students

• Individualize learning

• Care about students

• Inspire students
Maybe we subconsciously work harder in classes where we feel the instructor is invested in us & our education.

I believe this is what teaching is all about: being able to spur students to accomplish what they feel is impossible or insurmountable. And, as a student, knowing that someone believes in you is **SO** important.
Create a Positive Environment for Learning

• Listen

• Ask questions

• Challenge

• Set high expectations

• Be supportive & ensure that the environment is safe
...an environment where every question is valued that even the most anxious student feels safe in asking a question or posing a theory.

Probably the most important part of [my best class] is that I came out feeling changed.
Engagement

- Give timely & focused feedback
- Be responsive
- Be available
- Be prepared & organized
- Give clear directions
- Be involved
He listened to our group discussions & offered information we were missing or praised us for solving a problem.

...the expectations were extremely clear & all assignments felt useful, no busy work.
Various Teaching Strategies & Creativity

• Tell stories
• Use humor
• Be flexible
• Allow & encourage students to be creative
• Teach in different ways
The best teacher “touches” the student in some “deep” way ... & uses many strategies to balance both support & freedom/challenge.

I think using a variety of teaching methods will prevent burnout (for both the teacher & the students), as it would be something new & exciting each class, & would not be repetitive. I think this would keep the students engaged & interested in the topic at hand.
Passion & Enthusiasm

• Be passionate about your subject

• Be energetic

• Be excited

• Let students know that you want to be there
I believe that an educator should be passionate about their profession... the teacher who gets up, has excitement, prepares interesting materials & lectures, & who has an apparent passion for teaching.
Your Thoughts & Insights

What **barriers** get in the way of teaching **EXCELLENCE**?

How can faculty be **supported** to achieve teaching **EXCELLENCE**?
Concluding Remarks

So what does it all mean?
Chickering & Gamson’s Principles (1987)

- Student-Faculty contact
- Cooperation among students
- Active learning
- Prompt feedback
- High expectations
- Respect for diversity
- Time on task
Powerful Student Comments

• If faculty never take risks, how do we expect our students do to that?

• Sometimes as students we need to remember to stay strong in our goals & dreams for our own future success.

• Sometimes I look at teachers & their interactions with students, & it seems like they absolutely hate teaching.
Powerful Comments (continued)

• I will never forget [my absolute worst learning experience], for I feel that it “scarred” me for life.

• It’s amazing the far-reaching legacy of a single teacher.

• It makes me wonder what, if anything, has changed in education over the last 20-25 years, other than the advent of more technology.
The Time is **NOW**

*Technology is NOT the only answer*

*Change needs to be within ourselves*