

Teaching Philosophy – Steven Hall

Developing and maintaining a teaching philosophy requires time in thought and continuous critical reflection. My teaching philosophy is far from a static entity, having begun writing it in 2020. I have an extensive clinical nursing background in academic, acute, and critical care settings and I have taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as in community and hospital settings. My personal life and learning experiences have aligned me with the philosophical perspective of progressivism, and I am a proud progressivist educator.

Lived Experience in Learning

As an adult with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), my journey in being a student was challenging, but extremely fulfilling. I believe that ADHD is truly a gift. ADHD gives me a unique experience in the world. I feel that because my attention becomes split amongst many things at once, I become more in tune with all of my surroundings. It allows me to empathize with others, particularly those most vulnerable and perhaps invisible. This ability to be tuned in benefits my clinical practice as a registered nurse, as I can recognize both the physiological and psychosocial needs of my patients and their families and implement actions to strive towards patient- and family-centred care. In the context of myself as an educator, I believe that ADHD gives me a unique perspective on the needs of students to be successful. As such, in my role as an educator, I recognize the learning needs of my students and implement actions to strive towards student-centred learning.

Reflecting on my own journey as a student, I recall struggling to complete readings due to difficulties with sustained focus. However, I thrived in classes where educators provided comprehensive PowerPoint slides and delivered lectures that were both engaging and facilitated notetaking. I recognized the importance of attending classes and labs for my success, and lectures that specifically prepared me for experiences were the most valuable during my time in undergraduate nursing studies. Therefore, these experiences have inspired me to take a progressivist approach to educating.

Philosophical Orientation: Progressivism

Progressivist education in nursing is a contemporary approach that seeks to revolutionize the traditional methods of teaching and learning in the field (Hogarth & Burkett, 2020; Mansor et al., 2018). Progressivism places strong emphasis on student-centred learning (Brady, 2019; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005), critical thinking (Brady, 2019), and active participation (DiCindio & Steinmann, 2019; Muhammad, 2023). In the progressivist model, students have the freedom to determine what they consider essential, and the role of the teacher is to facilitate their learning (Billings & Halstead, 2020; Theobald & Ramsbotham, 2019). One of the key principles of progressivist education in nursing is the recognition of the individuality and diversity of each learner (Day & Beard, 2019). This approach recognizes the inherent connection between education and experience. As a result, the focus of education should be on the learner's experiences and interests, rather than predefined bodies of knowledge (Gwele, 2005; Theobald & Ramsbotham, 2019).

In past teaching and mentoring experiences, I have implemented principles of progressivism. While I still understand the importance of textbook readings, my lectures on research methods, in-services on dementia, and seminars on family-centred care have always comprehensively covered the essential knowledge needed for practical implementation. I do not teach solely to exams or readings but instead aim to prepare students for potential real-life experiences in their nursing practice. Encouraging story-sharing in both my mentorship activities and lecture settings, I follow each story with empirical evidence to facilitate further understanding of a situation.

While nursing education requires necessary competencies within its curricula, I use the progressivist model to empowering students to take an active role in their learning process. I believe this action fosters their critical thinking abilities, which are crucial to the nursing profession (Shirazi & Heidari, 2019; Theobald & Ramsbotham, 2019). In my implementation of progressivism, I encourage students to critically reflect on their experiences in the clinical setting and their personal lives. Through this, areas for improvement can be identified. In the long-term, I empower my students to embrace lifelong learning, adaptability, and to contribute to advances in healthcare.

Overall, progressivist education in nursing recognizes the importance of preparing nurses who are not just competent professionals, but also compassionate advocates and leaders (Turale & Kunaviktikul, 2019). Through prioritizing student engagement, critical thinking, and practical application of knowledge, I seek to equip my students with the skills and mindset needed to address complex healthcare issues and drive positive change in the profession.

Personal Conception of Teaching and Learning

The conception of teaching and learning in my teaching philosophy can be summed up with two mantras: (1) “Health literacy is for everyone;” and (2) “Your best is all you can do.”

Health Literacy is for Everyone

Health literacy is the ability of individuals to effectively access, understand, and utilize health information and services for informed decision-making and improved health outcomes (Parnell et al., 2019). Limited skill in health literacy is a global issue (Nesari et al., 2019). Even though health literacy may be discussed in nursing education, nurses typically lack in-depth knowledge about the concept and are often not educated on effective strategies to improve patients’ health literacy levels (Nesari et al., 2019; Parnell et al., 2019). It is crucial to cultivate nursing students’ abilities to empower and engage their patients, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to become fully active participants and advocates for improved health outcomes (Parnell et al., 2019; Tamura-Lis, 2013).

I believe that health literacy is for everyone. This mantra shapes my approach to education and underscores the importance of promoting health literacy as an essential skill for all individuals, regardless of their history, abilities, or circumstances. Health literacy extends far beyond the mere understanding of medical jargon or the ability to navigate healthcare systems (Nesari et al., 2019; Parnell et al., 2019). It encompasses a broad range of skills, including critical

thinking, communication, problem-solving, and self-advocacy (Tavousi et al., 2022). By creating a learning environment that values diversity and inclusivity, I strive to ensure that every student understands that all individuals – irrespective of their socioeconomic status, cultural background, or educational level – can actively participate in health-related discussions and take charge of their own health.

To promote health literacy, I use my philosophical orientation of progressivism to employ a learner-centred approach in my teaching methodologies. I recognize that each student has unique learning styles, preferences, and prior knowledge, which I use as a foundation for designing engaging and interactive learning activities. By incorporating a variety of instructional strategies, I seek to cater to diverse learning needs and facilitate a deep understanding of health concepts. I am committed to creating a safe and supportive learning environment, where students feel encouraged to ask questions, express their opinions, and engage in open dialogue. I aim to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and active listening, where all perspectives are valued and considered.

By embracing diversity and encouraging collaboration between peers, I believe that students can enhance their health literacy skills through the exchange of ideas and experiences. I also emphasize the importance of promoting health equity. I strive to address health disparities and reflect frequently on the social determinants of health and cultural competency and humility. By doing so, I aim to be aware of the barriers that certain populations face in accessing healthcare and share with my students the knowledge and empathy needed to advocate for equitable health outcomes.

I recognize that health literacy is a lifelong journey. As an educator, I have a responsibility to instill a passion for continuous learning and self-improvement in students. By fostering a love for exploration of knowledge and critical thinking, I encourage my students to stay informed about emerging health issues, evaluate health information and best practice guidelines, and adapt their own knowledge to an ever-changing landscape of healthcare practices and technologies. By fostering inclusivity and cultivating a lifelong love for learning, I believe my students can empower individuals to make informed decisions, lead healthier lives, and contribute to a more health-literate society.

Your Best is All You Can Do

Approachability is a key aspect of my demeanour as an educator. I seek to empower my students and mentees through constant affirmation and provide constructive feedback in a positive manner. I believe this is critical to instilling self-confidence in learners. When we lack self-confidence and allow our self-esteem to waiver, self-doubt permeates all areas of our lives. Embracing opportunities for self-improvement, reflecting on both failures and successes, and having the strength and perseverance to carry on is critical to achieving success. I always share that this takes much courage, but the rewards are priceless. I remind my students and colleagues constantly, “just do your best, because your best is all you can do.”

Through the lens of my progressivist approach to education, coupled with my lived experience of having ADHD, I recognize that every student possesses unique talents, strengths, and challenges. I encourage my students to recognize their own potential and to consistently put forth their best effort, understanding that success should be measured by personal progress rather than arbitrary standards. By emphasizing the process of learning, rather than solely focusing on the outcome, I aim to foster a growth mindset among my students, helping them develop the skills needed to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity. Moreover, I firmly believe that a supportive and inclusive learning environment is essential for students to flourish. As a preceptor, I create spaces for learning where students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and getting back on their feet in spite of error. I am passionate about nurturing individuality, collaboration, and empathy.

I am committed to providing differentiated instruction that meets the diverse needs of my students. I recognize that everyone learns in their own way and at their own pace, and I am dedicated to implementing various teaching strategies and approaches to accommodate different learning styles. By honouring and respecting the individuality of each student, I aim to foster a love for both learning and nursing and inspire a lifelong pursuit of knowledge. By embracing the mantra “your best is all you can do,” I empower my students to believe in themselves, embrace their unique abilities, and develop the necessary skills and mindset to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I see my role as an educator not only as a facilitator of knowledge acquisition but also as a guide and mentor who helps students to unlock their full potential. My overall goal is to equip students with the skills and mindset needed to address complex healthcare issues, become leaders in the nursing profession, and make a positive impact on the lives of individuals and communities they engage with. Together, we embark on a journey of growth, resilience, and self-discovery, where every student is encouraged to give their best and celebrate their progress along the way.

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