

2004 Distinguished Teacher of the Year

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Thank you President Brogan, Provost Pritchitt, Dr. Jessell, podium guests and honorees, family, friends, colleagues and students. I am honored, flattered and a bit terrified to be here today. Having the opportunity to teach at a wonderful university and to be selected for this award is very special. I remember sitting in the audience my first year at FAU and listening to the description of the distinguished teaching award and the presentation of that year's recipient and thinking to myself – WOW...that must be a really special teacher. So when Jose Rodriguez came to tell me that I had been selected as the College of Nursing's candidate, I was thrilled just to be in the company of the distinguished nominees from the other colleges. Congratulations to each of you. It is as a result of working and collaborating with exceptional colleagues that we all grow.

That said, I am extremely honored and flattered to have been selected by the students of FAU as the Distinguished Teacher of the Year. The students are the core of the University, the focus of our educational mission and the reason for our existence. Given the fact that I have always learned as much from students as I hope I have taught them, I accept this award with gratitude to the students of FAU and especially the students in the College of Nursing, who remind me on a daily basis that teaching and learning are always a mutual enterprise, part of an incredible journey that I am privileged to share with you.

Before becoming a faculty member at academic institutions, I practiced as a perinatal clinical nurse specialist. I have shared in the births of thousands of children – some male, some female, some weighing 10 or 11 pounds and others as small as 14 or 15 ounces, many healthy, but some critically ill or with physical variations having life-long implications, many born to families waiting to welcome them into the world – others not so fortunate. But all were beginning an incredible journey, and, yes, I had the privilege to be there. Newborns are wonderful because among other things they represent the potential of the next generation. True, parents often have dreams and fantasies of what their child will be – but there are always surprises along the way. My mother (the very happy but nervous woman out in the audience) has said that when I was an infant she would tell me that I could be “whatever I wanted to be and do what ever I wanted to do” ... little did she know what the future would bring! I am fairly certain...this is not what she expected.

As part of the DTOY selection process, the candidate has to “teach” something to the student selection committee. Upon hearing this, I thought...“Oh what to do.” The audience would be a group of students representing FAU's eight colleges – individuals of mixed gender, ages, backgrounds and experiences. I have lectures on “test-taking strategies,” “the joy of statistics,”

“leadership and delegation skills” and “how to insert a nasogastric tube” – but given the composition of this group, these topics, I decided, would be too mundane or too gross. I thought I could do something useful like health promotion or stress management for the busy college student – but it just didn’t feel right. So I choose to do a presentation that I hoped would show the real teacher in me and provide a genuine learning opportunity for the committee. So off I went at the appointed time equipped with a knitted uterus, plastic pelvis and a fetus/newborn doll complete with umbilical cord and placenta – looking a bit more like a bag lady than a dignified professor as I entered the interview room. Together we experienced the process of human birth from the perspective of the fetus, the father and the mother. While the presentation condensed the nine-months of pregnancy and labor into a nine-minute audio-visual and sensory learning activity, everyone participated and engaged in the experience, and it was an incredible journey. Some members of the committee remembered the cherished moment of their own child’s birth and others developed a sense of anticipation of a future event in their lives. As the neonate at the end of our simulated birth journey proclaimed...“WOW I’m here...Thanks for a wonderful journey.” To the members of the selection committee – thank you for an incredible experience. Your professionalism and dedication to the selection process and interest in the candidates were admirable.

The definition of the teaching-learning enterprise is constantly changing. I would suggest that our experience as teachers and learners, students and guides cannot be limited to the minutes in the classroom, the days in the practice setting, the weeks in a semester or the years labeled a “college career.” Instead I would propose that it is all part of an incredible journey that began the day you were born. How that journey progresses is up to you, but is also influenced, shaped and guided by the people you meet, the situations you experience, the choices you make, and your attitude and approach to life. As faculty we have the opportunity to join in the student’s journey – not as the determiner of their fate, but as a guide, invigorator and, hopefully, an inspiration.

Today there seems to be a list for almost everything: a personal to do list, David Letterman’s top 10 list, *The New York Times* best sellers list, and a search of the Internet reveals lists of the top 10 reasons for not having a telephone and 10 ways to make use of your junk mail – among other things. So I would like to share with you my list of 10 attributes that I believe guide the incredible journey of the teaching-learning adventure.

Number 10: Activities not Assignments: A teacher cannot assign knowledge acquisition. Good teaching is not as much about “covering” the subject matter as it is about uncovering it. Teaching is about opening the mind rather than filling the mind. It is about actively engaging the learner in the process of learning rather than just the preaching of information and facts. The introduction of web based and on-line teaching has been accompanied by a paradigm shift in the view of the teacher from – the sage on the stage to the guide on the side. I would propose that in any setting – the classroom, lab, practice or cyberspace – the teacher is not the sage and is more than a guide. It has been said that the mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher

demonstrates and the great teacher inspires. That inspirational teacher is part thinker, part truth-seeker, part mystic, part dreamer and, most importantly, the sensory stimulant that awakens the learner's hunger for knowledge, understanding, continued learning and thereby growth.

While core curriculum and general education requirements outline the fundamental knowledge necessary for a college graduate, this level of knowing is not sufficient for becoming a productive educated citizen in today's high paced and complex society. Construction of knowledge and the pursuit of life-long learning is an individualized journey.

Given that learning is a skill we need throughout our lives, a survival skill, so to speak – just providing a set of facts and figures to be known is not enough. The teaching-learning process needs to be active and not assigned. Personally, I no longer have assignments in my courses, and I no longer assign grades. In place of the “control” that traditionally resided with the sage teacher, in my course, we have learning activities and students earn points toward an end-of-course outcome or their grade. Yes, it sounds like semantics but it places the accountability for learning on the student. A teacher should not be not a person to lean on for knowledge, but a person to make the leaning unnecessary.

Good teaching is about fostering a searching frame of mind in the learners, not about providing them with the right answers. Teaching has more to do with encouraging certain habits of the mind rather than with the provision of facts. Facts evolve and context changes: only the knowledge-seeking mind can endure. It is more about living to ask the question than dying for the one right answer. *The lesson here: Learning is not compulsory but neither is success or survival.*

Number 9: Have a Burning Desire: There is a saying that a candle cannot light other candles unless it continues to burn its own flame. In other words, good teaching is a process – not a point, a time and definitely not an ending. It is continuous learning on the part of the teacher, of deepening and clarifying one's assumptions and of honing one's ability to learn continually. *Like the candle lighting the way, the good teacher serves as the catalyst to spark the fire in students to ignite the process of discovering their gifts, polishing them and giving them back to society.* Each teaching encounter brings unique context and circumstances; teaching is the process of continual learning and the desire to make the world – or at least a small segment of it – a better place.

Number 8: Coaching and Caring: Good teaching is about enabling the development of intentional and autonomous life-long learners. In the best of times, a teacher is only a facilitator in the process of learning. Patricia Cross, a world-renowned educator and scholar has said, “...while learning has many goals, teaching has only one goal...to enable learning.” In many of our disciplines, but especially nursing – given the pace of technologic advances in today's health care environment and the complexity of the person being cared for by the nurse – memorization of textbook knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for safe and effective nursing practice. The nurse needs to come to know the person being nursed. I often tell my students that women were giving birth

long before professional nurses were part of the process. Through coaching and caring, the nurse makes a physiologic human bodily process – childbirth – a cherished moment and a special event in the life of a family.

Ultimately teaching it is about caring – caring about students’ learning and ultimately the students’ impact on the world at large. Caring enough to spend a Sunday afternoon answering student’s questions before a major examination, giving the time and attention to reading and responding to a paper that the student put effort into writing and creating, or logging onto your online course at 2 a.m. to come to know those students who are in-class at that time (and, yes, they are very surprised to “see” you on-line at 2 a.m.). However, caring can also be about “tough love”. Caring includes providing honest and critical but constructive feedback to students indicating areas for improvement and opportunities for growth. Yes, it is easier to give an A and make the student happy, but it is more caring to give them the skills and feedback to grow and change and to make that student better!

Learning to improve is more important than just being good. *Remember, turn your wounds into wisdom. You will be wounded many times in your life, you will make mistakes...some people call them failures, but I have learned that failure is really a way of saying, “Excuse me...you are moving in the wrong direction.” It’s just an experience, just a turn in your incredible journey; learn from it...become better because of it!*

Number 7: Desire: Good teaching is about communicating your passion about your craft to your students. Like the picture advertising a tropical island luring you to its lush beaches, good teachers exude their passion infectiously to get their students excited about the joys of learning. It is about opening the floodgates of curiosity and inquiry.

The very first class I ever taught at FAU illustrated this principle for me. It was a maternal-child nursing course to a group of about 30 senior students. As a new faculty member I asked them to introduce themselves, and since, they were near the end of their program, to tell me what they were planning to do in their nursing practicum course the following semester and after graduation. As the students described what they wanted to do, I repeatedly heard “geriatric, rehabilitation, hospice, ER/trauma.” One brave soul even said, “I just don’t like kids.” I remember thinking to myself, “This is going to be a long semester.” But I proceeded to do my thing. I told my stories gathered from my days as a nurse at the bedside, showed the slides of real patients and asked them to participate in simulated contractions, effleurage and visualization and a neonatal sensory experience. Things seemed to be going okay until towards the end of the semester when I was approached by a faculty colleague who asked. “What are you doing in that course?” Being new, I timidly asked, “Is something wrong?” She went on to tell me that traditionally students did not request practicum placements in maternal-child setting, yet almost a third of the students in this course were listing maternal-child nursing practice settings as their priority choice for the

practicum course. Goal achieved. *Remember - If you don't have the desire to play, don't ruin it for those that do.*

Number 6: Engagement and Excitement: Good teaching is about creating a memorable learning environment that is attractive, meaningful and relevant to the learner and fosters free exchange of ideas and thoughts. It is modeled on a philosophy of "shared learning," where students and others are invited to be partners in an educational journey. Good teachers are able to co-create with their students a meaningful way to weave together the course concepts and the learner's personal goals. Good teaching is about creating learning communities where teachable moments happen and where students participate as "partners in learning." The creativity of the learner is limited only by the boundaries imposed by the teacher.

Today's high tech- audio visuals are not a substitute for a good teacher, but they can expand the options available to the teacher to make the learning environment invigorating and inviting. For example, in the maternal child nursing course we watch a video of the TV program "ER." The twist, I begin by telling the students, is that you are the nurse in this situation. Students become interactive players in the story as it unfolds on the video. The tape is stopped, lab values and data are provided to the students and they have to respond and address the consequences of their actions. They are asked to "talk" to the family in the video as the nurse would interact in this type of nursing situation. This experience facilitates a synthesis of the content covered in the course as well as an exploration of the nurse's scope of practice in caring for an acutely ill patient and family in a chaotic hospital ER setting, and an opportunity to analyze the image of nursing as portrayed in a popular TV series.

In the online course environment, the capacities of the worldwide web are just a key stroke away. I have sent students on virtual field trips to the National Institute of Nursing Research, to the gravesites of prominent nurses and to engage in conversations with nurse leaders and experts across the United States. Good teaching is about making learning a joy and fun as the learners identifies resources for their individual learning needs.

Last year in the online Nursing Leadership course, I commented to one of the students that he was identifying a number of wonderful online resources and commended him for the time and effort he was putting into the course. He responded that he had just returned from a doctor's visit because of pain in his wrist and hypertrophy of the metacarpal joint of the second and third digits on his left hand. After a thorough history, including a description of the onset of his symptoms and the aggravating factors of his chief complaint, the student reported to me that the physician diagnosed him with "Raines Syndrome" – a repetitive-use syndrome caused by repeated clicking of the computer mouse in Dr. Raines' online course!!

According to Albert Einstein, "It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." It starts with the belief that every subject can be made interesting and

meaningful for the learner with a little imagination and creativity. *There are no uninspired learners, only uninspiring teachers.*

Number 5: FUN: Good teaching is FUN, it is about humor. It is about not taking oneself too seriously, at least not all the time. It is about not trying to be right all the time so that one can be right some of the time. It has to do with the ability to laugh at our own inconsistencies and contradictions. *Science tells us that it takes only 13 facial muscles to smile, but when we frown we use 33 muscles – why waste that extra muscle effort?*

Number 4: GRADES: We have all encountered the student who states, “I took this course to get an A!” My response to that statement is, “I’m sorry, I thought students took this course to learn something new!” Teaching is about expecting and nurturing excellence in students. While we do not know exactly what motivates student learning, we do know that the perfect way to kill motivation in learning is to expect mediocre performance. I often ask my students what is the value of your A if everyone else has an A as well! Does that make the A just average as opposed to something special? If we place the hoops of academic achievement higher, we motivate students to jump higher, and try harder. Good teachers encourage students to climb the highest mountain. One of my favorite quotes is:

There are two ways to get to the other side of a mountain:

Climb it or

Go around it.

The second is easier

But you miss the view from the top.

Number 3: Have a Heart and Honey Bees: Good teaching is integral, transformational and holistic. It aims to inform the whole person in the learning process. It is about inspiring the development of reflective minds and caring hearts. Good teaching encompasses empirical, ethical, aesthetic and personal ways of knowing. It is about enabling the learner to “experience the big picture.” It accords learners the opportunity to explore a deeper understanding of life, its values, its meaning and responsibilities. It is about modeling moral responsibility, including self-awareness, self-discipline and patience.

A good teacher is similar to a honey bee who goes to different flowers to gather the nectar, transforms it and then gives it back to the world in the form of honey – oh so sweet!

Number 2: Involvement. Teaching is not an individual endeavor. There is a saying that “there is no I in Team.” Similarly, there is no I in Teacher. The mutuality of the process of coming to know the learner as a unique person who brings individual gifts and talents to the learning situation is critical to developing an inquisitive sense of inquiry and is the essential ingredient of success.

I wrote the following about five years ago as my “Best Advice” to aspiring nurse educators as part of a career profile on the Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society website. While it is specific to nursing, I believe it holds true today and could be adapted to many disciplines. It said:

*The student of today,
Is your colleague tomorrow and
May be your nurse in the future.
Teach excellence,
Seek new knowledge and
Always care about those you are teaching and what they are learning.
Together we can all learn something new.*

And Number 1: A Joyful Journey: Teaching is joyful, wonderful and celebratory. I teach because I love learning. I teach because I want my students to enjoy learning and to appreciate the rich rewards of knowledge. *I teach because I enjoy seeing students succeed, seeing them achieve their goals and reach their potential.* I rejoice in their success as much as the students do. Teaching is what keeps me from running away to become something else.

So there you have it my list of teaching attributes. As you can see, teaching is a fascinating challenge because it really isn't about teaching at all...it is about learning. If you ever watched Peter Pan you got to see it when Peter tried to teach Wendy and the other children to fly. Flying is so completely second nature to Peter that describing the process step by step is impossible. Fortunately, in storyland there is pixie dust, which fixes everything. But in the real world of teaching and learning we are always searching for the pixie dust. But until Tinkerbell floats into my classroom, I am left to my own resources. I think really hard trying to understand something so completely that I can re-create a story that translates and explains this understanding to someone else. And then I get to tell stories, show things, ask questions and play with toys, dolls, and equipment to make the students' think, reason and, yes, play with the toys, too. Teaching is an art in which the teacher tries to re-create Tinkerbell and sprinkle that pixie dust. It is mentally exhausting and invigorating – I love this incredible journey, the continual invention of a means toward understanding.

In closing, I would like to thank my faculty colleagues, with a special thanks to Dr. Keller and Dr. Jenkins – my friends, confidantes and, sometimes, great sounding boards.

To my mother, who has been there since the beginning and has experienced the highs and lows, the excitement and challenges of my career.

And to the students, who are my inspiration on a daily basis. I thank you for the privilege of your presence in class, the gift of sleepless nights preparing class materials, the opportunity to write tough examination items and to read and critique your work, the challenge of your questions and

the sharing of your knowledge and success. You do not make it easy – but it certainly is fun! The opportunity to learn with you remains an experience that enriches my life.

In conclusion, to be honored for something that I truly love to do is incredibly meaningful to me and special. Thank you for this wonderful award and best wishes to each of you as you continue your incredible journey of life-long learning. Thank you.