Academic institutions exist for many purposes—preparing future leaders, challenging ideas and practices, generating new knowledge, and preparing individuals for careers, among others—but their primary purpose is to educate, facilitate learning, and promote personal and professional development. To accomplish these goals, learners need to be challenged to reflect on (and perhaps reconsider) their values and beliefs, struggle with the notion that there are often more questions than answers, judge the value of ideas and information they encounter, and engage in the hard work of thinking and learning.

To help learners accomplish the goals noted above, educators need to have solid grounding in the science and art of teaching, knowing how to teach, as well as what to teach. However, at the post-secondary level, expectations related to the preparation of faculty as educators are rare. Indeed, it seems that what is required is an advanced degree and some level of expertise in one’s field, whether that be the history of World War II, art, languages, or nursing practice.

If one were to examine the Web sites of many institutions of higher learning, one is likely to find mention of excellence in teaching, a focus on student learning and development, and the importance of the teacher–student relationship. However, when one looks for indications—at the institutional, national, or societal level—of what is done to achieve excellence in teaching, the findings are limited. Consider the following:

- Do the requirements included in job postings say anything about formal preparation or documentation of expertise as an educator?
- Are candidates for faculty positions expected to teach a session as part of the interview process? Or are they only expected to present and discuss their research?
- How widely used are departmental or institutional resources devoted to advancing the pedagogical expertise of faculty? And how does that compare with the use of resources devoted to grant writing and research expertise?
- What measures—other than student evaluations of courses and teachers—are used to judge pedagogical expertise? And do faculty groups ever even discuss what pedagogical expertise means?
- How qualified are peer reviewers to judge whether a course or classroom session reflects scholarly (i.e., evidence-based) teaching, principles of teaching–learning, and an awareness of education-focused literature? Are these criteria even considered, or do peer reviewers merely focus on superficially at the classroom environment, online environment, or course material?
- Are faculty expected to outline specific plans to enhance their pedagogical expertise, engage in more scholarly teaching, or engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning in the coming year, as part of their annual reviews? Or are the goals related primarily to more measurable outcomes, such as publications, national presentations, or grant submissions?
- Why is the goal of so many faculty to “get out of teaching” and spend their time on research? Is the latter rewarded and the former merely expected?

These are but a few examples of ways in which the academy talks about excellence in teaching but fails to visibly demonstrate its commitment to achieving and sustaining that goal. Nursing education is not immune to this culture in many schools. Schools of nursing might want to consider the following actions to ensure that their actions related to teaching excellence align with their words on the topic:

- Include expectations related to teaching excellence in all job postings, and if candidates are hired who do not have such expertise at the outset, clearly identify a plan and a target date for them to develop their expertise as facilitators of learning, curriculum designers, and contributing members of the academic community.
- Set a certain percentage of faculty who will earn nurse educator certification (see http://www.nln.org/professional-development-programs/Certification-for-Nurse-Educators), provide support to help faculty achieve and maintain such certification, and increase the percentage annually.
- Set a certain percentage of faculty who will be Fellows in the National League for Nursing’s Academy of Nursing Education (see http://www.nln.org/recognition-programs/academy-of-nursing-education), implement initiatives where such Fellows guide and mentor more junior faculty regarding their pedagogical expertise and leadership in nursing education, and increase the percentage annually.
- Create a resource center (e.g., the Institute for Educational Excellence at the Duke University School of Nursing; https://...
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nursing.duke.edu/centers-and-institutes/iee/institute-educational-excellence) that provides on-site resources, programs, guidance, and mentoring related to excellence in teaching.

- Engage in serious discussions about what “excellence in teaching” truly means, and use or develop measures other than licensing or certification examination pass rates to document the degree to which the school is achieving such excellence.

- Consider rewards other than reduced teaching loads for faculty who receive grants or other opportunities that buy out part of their time. Why not excuse the individual from attending or participating in certain meetings? Or could that person be excused from participating in all special events (e.g., recruitment days, new student orientation) or have his or her student advisement responsibilities reduced or eliminated?

- Create awards with rigorous criteria to recognize excellence in teaching in various settings (e.g., classroom, online, laboratory, or clinical), with various types of students (e.g., second-degree students, students with disabilities or graduate students), or in relation to other ways faculty promote student learning and development (e.g., through advising roles, student leadership projects, student clubs, or organizations). A single teaching award each year does not begin to acknowledge the complexities and challenges of the faculty role, yet all those dimensions are to be valued.

- Pursue designation as a National League for Nursing Center of Excellence in Nursing Education, particularly in the category of “Promoting the Pedagogical Expertise of Faculty” (see http://www.nln.org/recognition-programs/centers-of-excellence-in-nursing-education).

- Assign faculty with pedagogical expertise to teach beginning students, rather than have them teach graduate students only, so that students, from the very start of their nursing studies, interact with and learn with faculty who are master teachers.

- Offer academic programs that are designed to prepare expert teachers, such as a nursing education major at the master’s level, an education-focused track at the Doctor of Nursing Practice level, or required education courses in the PhD program. Many graduates of Doctor of Nursing Practice and PhD programs assume faculty positions upon graduation, so why not prepare them for such roles to help them be most successful?

Finally, schools of nursing might consider ways to influence the criteria used to rank schools. In recent years, the U.S. News & World Report ranking of schools of nursing have been based not only on popularity contests of the past but also on more substantial and comprehensive criteria, and they are to be commended for this move. However, the new criteria related to selectivity, program size, percentage of faculty with doctoral degrees, percentage of faculty engaged in active practice, faculty membership in various academies or prestigious organizations (e.g., National Academy of Medicine, formerly the Institute of Medicine), or research productivity (see https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles/nursing-schools-methodology) do not speak to student learning or accomplishments, student influence on patient care, faculty contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning, or other measures of teaching excellence. Perhaps if they did, the academic community would know that teaching excellence is important and highly valued, and not merely something faculty have to do.

Likewise, the value of teaching excellence could be communicated through increased funding for pedagogical research or the establishment of programs designed to immerse faculty in professional development activities to build their teaching and pedagogical scholarship skills, much as was done many years ago with programs designed to develop nurse scientists who would advance research related to clinical practice. The nurse scientist program has demonstrated the effectiveness of dedicated training and preparation in the ways of science development, and its graduates have provided leadership in training and preparing future generations of clinical scientists. Is it not time to invest in similar initiatives to prepare master teachers and educational scholars so that the science of nursing education can be built and valued, just as the science of clinical nursing practice has been built and valued?

Indeed, there is much to be done. Although some aspects of teaching may come naturally to some individuals, there is a science to teaching and learning. Nursing faculty need to be prepared to draw on that science to design curricula, courses, and specific learning experiences that will most effectively prepare our graduates for the complex, uncertain, ambiguous, ever-changing future they will face. Future generations of nurses deserve nothing less.

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