chapter 1

The Adult Learner: Hints to Succeed

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Objectives

On completing this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

1. Using your birth date, identify your generation and its characteristics.
2. Identify yourself as a traditional adult learner, returning adult learner, or recycled adult learner.
3. Identify personal areas of strength that will help you ensure success in the practical/vocational nursing program.
4. Identify personal areas that could interfere with your success in the practical/vocational nursing program.
5. Explain in your own words three rights of learners.
6. Discuss personal responsibility for learning and active participation in the learning process as learner responsibilities.
7. Identify the purpose of evaluation in the practical/vocational nursing program.
8. Discuss 10 learner responsibilities.

Key Terms

active learning (ĂK-tĭv LĔRN-eng, p. 7)
constructive evaluation (kŏn-STRŬ K-tĭvē ē-VĂL-ū-ā-shŭn, p. 8)
facilitator (fă-SĬL-ĭ-TĀ-tŏr, p. 6)
First Amendment (ă-MĔND-mĕnt, p. 6)
formal education (FŎR-măl, p. 3)
generalization (GĔN-ĕ r-ă-lĭ-ZĀ- shŭn, p. 3)
generational personality (GĔN-ĕr-Ā- shŭn -ăl, p. 1)
informal education (ĭn-FŎR-măl, p. 3)
learner (LĔR-nĕr p. 1)
paradigm (PĂR-ă-DĪM, p. 6)
performance evaluation (pĕr-FŎR-măntzĭ-văl-ū-Ā-shŭn, p. 7)
positive mental attitude (PŎS-ĭ-tĭv MĔN-tăl ĂT-ĭ-tood, p. 4)
recycled adult learner (rē-SĪ-kăld, p. 2)
referral (rĭ-FŬR-ăl, p. 9)
returning adult learner (rē-TŬRN-ĭng ă-DŬLT LĔRN-ĕr, p. 2)
self-directed learner (SĔLF-dĭ-RĔCT-ĕd LĔRN-ĕr, p. 3)
self-evaluation (SĔLF-ē-VĂL-yoo-ā-shŭn, p. 8)
teaching (TĒCH-ĭng, p. 6)
traditional adult learner (p. 2)

DIVERSITY OF THE ADULT LEARNER

The adult learner (one who acquires knowledge and skills) comes in all ages, and it is possible to have learners from four generations in your nursing class. Depending on birth year, generational groups can be characterized. Time frames and names for the four generations vary among authors, but each generation is separated by approximately 20 years (Box 1-1).

Try This

The Four Generations

Using Box 1-1, identify your generation.

People born around the same time generally develop a generational personality of how they think and what they value. This personality is shaped by a common history of cultural events, images, and experiences. Income, religion, education, and geography also enter the picture in forming your generational personality. When you understand the views of different generations, you will be better able to communicate and collaborate with the students in your class. In addition to your classmates, the people with whom you will be working as a licensed practical/vocational nurse quite possibly will also be of several generations.

Your goal is be aware of each generation's shared experiences. Avoid stereotyping individuals of a specific generation as their experiences may be viewed differently. A stereotype is a false assumption. It is an expectation that all individuals within a specific group will act exactly the same because they are members of that group. Stereotypes ignore the individual differences that occur within a specific group—for example, a generational group. See Box 1-2 for characteristics of each generation.

Box 1-1 The Four Generations

- Matures (The Silent Generation) born before 1946
- Baby Boomers (Boomers) born between 1946 and 1964
- Generation X (Gen X) born between 1965 and 1982
- Generation Y (Millennials/Net Generation) born after 1982

Data from Halfer D, Saver C: Bridging the generation gaps. *Nursing Spectrum/Nurse Week*, 2008.

Box 1-2 Characteristics of the Four Generations

MATURES (THE SILENT GENERATION)

- Depending on birth year, generational personalities may be shaped by the Great Depression, World War II, and/or the Korean War.
- Are more conservative, prefer formal titles, are more formal with intrapersonal interactions, seek conformity.
- Do not like ambiguity or change, prefer to learn in formal, structured ways, oriented to past but are adaptable.
- Digital immigrants. May be reluctant to use advanced technology; need more time and hands-on to learn modern technology devices and protocols.

BABY BOOMERS

- Depending on birth year, generational personalities may be shaped by Watergate, the Vietnam War, the space race, civil rights, women's liberation, and the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King.
- Dedicated, highly motivated and hard-working, idealistic.
- Prefer learning in a relaxed, organized, and respectful atmosphere; like group discussions.
- Digital immigrants and have varying technology skills.

GENERATION X (GEN X)

- Depending on birth year, generational personality may be shaped by the *Challenger* explosion, the end of the Cold War, MTV, and AIDS.
- Accept diversity, less judgmental, pragmatic (practical), flexible, self-reliant (had Boomer parents), multitask well, used to change, informal.
- Intolerant of busywork, like small chunks of information, prefer self-study.
- Digital immigrants and are technically literate.

GENERATION Y (MILLENNIALS)

- Depending on birth year, generational personality may be shaped by Columbine, 9/11, and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.
- *Dynamic*, confident, straightforward, opinionated, optimistic, sociable, embrace change, multitask, like group discussion.
- More tolerant of people different from them—for example, race and sexual orientation.
- Digital natives (Net Generation); grew up using cell phones and computers.

Data from Halfer D, Saver C: Bridging the generation gaps. *Nursing Spectrum/Nurse Week*, 2008; Hartner K. Generational diversity. *ADVANCE Newsmagazines for LPNs*. February 20, 2007. Retrieved September 20, 2007, from http://lpn.advanceweb.com/Common/Editorial/PrintFriendly.aspx; Olson M: The millennials: first year in practice. *Nursing Outlook* 57:10-17, 2009; Billings D, Halstead J: Teaching in nursing: a guide for faculty, St. Louis, 2009, Elsevier/Saunders; Mehallow C: Generational conflict in nursing: how to relate to colleagues across generations. Retrieved July 14, 2011, from http://career-advice.monster.com/in-the-office/workplace-issues/generational-conflict-in-nursing/article.aspx.

Try This

Your Generational Personality

Using Box 1-2, Characteristics of the Four Generations, identify the characteristics of your generation that do/do not apply to you.

The **traditional adult learner** comes to an educational program directly from high school or from another program of study. They are in transition from late adolescence to young adulthood. In addition to their own developmental tasks, these students are being propelled into situations of responsibility for others. Traditional adult learners grew up in a digital, wireless world and are known as the Net Generation/Millennials.

The **returning adult learner** has been out of school for several years. Many of these learners have not taken any courses since high school. Returning adult learners include Generation Xers, Baby Boomers, and Matures. Returning adult students are experiencing many different life transitions. Perhaps an employer shut down a business, or a layoff occurred, resulting in a need for job training. Because of retirement, extra income and health insurance benefits may be needed. Although retired from one's job, "retirement" may provide time to pursue "I always wanted to be a nurse." Because of valued life and work experiences, returning adult learners have built a strong foundation for the personal commitment and transitions needed in nursing school and practical/vocational nursing.

Adult learners with prior education beyond high school are also an important part of practical/vocational nursing. This learner shares some of the characteristics of both traditional and returning adult learners. However, this adult learner might have technical school or college experience or an undergraduate or graduate degree in a discipline other than nursing. Because these adults are starting a new cycle in their lives, we call them **recycled adult learners**. Reasons for choosing to enroll in the practical/vocational nursing program include the following:

- Desire to change careers
- Attraction to nursing
- Desire to acquire new job skills
- Possible lack of jobs in area for which person has a degree
- Outlook for a full-time job with benefits is more promising in practical/vocational nursing

Regardless of the reason for enrolling in the 9-month to 1-year practical/vocational nursing program, recycled learners find that this program meets their needs in both time and cost. In addition to the characteristics of returning adult learners, the recycled learner brings experience in tackling a challenging educational program, including use of the learning resource center (library). Just as recycling is good for the environment, recycled

learners are good for practical/vocational nursing programs. Nursing in general, and practical/vocational nursing in particular, are benefiting from the maturity, focus, and experience of returning and recycled adult learners.

Critical Thinking

Which Type of Adult Learner Am I?

Which type of adult learner are you? Survey your classmates. Determine which ones consider themselves to be traditional, returning, or recycled adult learners.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Generalizations can be made about each type of learner. Keep in mind that generalizations are broad, sweeping statements. The characteristics of each type of adult learner are not found in every individual.

- Traditional adult learners are accustomed to **formal education**. The practical/vocational nursing program in a vocational-technical school, junior college, or private school is an example of a program of formal education.
- Returning adult learners might not have been in a classroom for some time, but they have been learning. They have had **informal education** experiences every day of their lives. Examples of their informal educational experiences include using a new cell phone, filling out a new income tax form, and handling a new family problem. These experiences can be helpful when learning new material.
- Recycled learners may have recently graduated from college. Some may have entered the practical/vocational nursing program after a career in another field of work. Recycled learners have many formal and informal educational experiences that help them in a practical/vocational nursing program.

Try This

Informal Educational Experiences

List at least five informal educational experiences you have had since high school.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

GEARED FOR SUCCESS

All adult learners have things going for them that allow them to succeed in the practical/vocational nursing program.

Traditional adult learners:

- Are at their prime physically, are filled with energy and stamina, and often have fewer out-of-school responsibilities to distract them from their studies.
- Are experts at educational routine and have been given the opportunity to develop reading, writing, studying, and test-taking skills.
- Are digital natives who have always had cell phones and computers in their lives. They know how to register for classes and take tests online. When they need information, they "Google," and when they want to contact a friend, they send a text message.

Returning adult learners:

- May feel they have used up their energy in finding a parking space, and once they do, they may be puzzled about how to find their way to their assigned classroom.
- Have had responsibilities and life experiences that help them relate well to new learning, make sense out of it, and get the point quickly. These serious learners are ready to work.
- Are digital immigrants who have had to learn to live in a digital world. Some find it easy to adapt, but others may find it more difficult to do so. When these learners need information, they go to the library or reach for the telephone directory. To stay connected with friends and family, they use their landline, cell phone, or email.
- Are mature, motivated, and **self-directed learners** who have set goals for themselves. Many have made economic, personal, and family sacrifices to go back to school.

Recycled learners:

- Are also experts in educational routine, and they too have had the opportunity to develop reading, writing, studying, and test-taking skills.
- Are digital immigrants, and because of prior formal learning experiences, they are skilled in searching the Internet for academic information.
- Are serious, motivated, and self-directed learners.

Critical Thinking

Reasons I Can Succeed

Identify and list three attributes you possess that *will help you* succeed in the practical/vocational nursing program.

1.
2.
3.

LIABILITIES AND HIDDEN DANGERS

All adult learners are geared for success, and each group has its own strong points. However, each group also has some liabilities—things that could stand in the way of success.

HIDDEN DANGER SHARED BY ALL ADULT LEARNERS

One of the greatest liabilities shared by all adult learners is the fear of failure. Fear of anything is a very strong motivator, but in a negative sense. Fear of failure in school is a feeling that usually develops as a result of past negative experiences with learning situations. Perhaps you did not do well in some high school or college classes. Maybe you did not study, studied the wrong way, or allowed yourself to be put down by teachers or professors in the past. Maybe you allowed yourself to underachieve because of peer pressure. Regardless of the cause, you may look at school in a negative, threatening way.

Your past is history. You have a clean slate ahead of you! Many adult learners with the same history and fears as you have succeeded in their educational programs. You are an adult in an adult educational experience. Begin to picture in your mind the rewards of succeeding in the practical/vocational nursing program. Forget the failures and setbacks you may have suffered in high school and other educational experiences. Replace your fear of failure with the desire for success. Keep your thoughts positive, and practice these positive thoughts continuously. Watch the content and tone of your thoughts and words. Negative thoughts and words can play like a tape. As surely as you learned this negative script, you can learn a positive script. However, it does take time. Replace your "I cannot" and "I never could" with "I want to," "I can," "I will," and "I am going to." Avoid dwelling on the past and look to the future. Go all the way with PMA—**positive mental attitude**. If you consistently expect to succeed, and combine this expectation with hard work in your studies, you *will* succeed. Did you know that your brain believes anything you tell it? If it learned to believe you could fail, it can also learn to believe you can succeed. Start today to engage in positive self-talk.

Sometimes students who have not succeeded in other nursing programs enroll during midterm in the practical/vocational nursing program. Reasons for not making it in prior nursing programs are varied, personal, and confidential. These students may feel the need to be on their guard. They may behave in a defensive manner, especially if there were teacher-student conflicts in the prior nursing program. It is good for these students to remember that the past is history. All that counts is their performance in the present. For them, it is possible to start over with a clean slate.

DANGERS FOR THE TRADITIONAL ADULT LEARNER

The following examples of dangers for traditional adult learners are examples of generalizations. They may or may not apply to the traditional adult learners you know.

Grade Inflation

A grade of C on a test or for a nursing course surprises some traditional adult students because, despite the effort put into studying in high school, they always received As. The same studying routine will not lead to success in your nursing program.

Traditional adult learners often have fewer outside responsibilities to distract them from their studies. Some traditional adult students lack time-management skills or motivation when it comes to studying. Some may still be in the same habits they became comfortable with in high school. Study time required to master content in a practical/vocational nursing program is personal to each student. However, if you are accustomed to receiving an A in high school for minimal effort, you will not experience this reward in the practical/vocational nursing program.

Social Activities

Some traditional adult learners may allow social activities and recreation to compete with school and study time. In a 24/7/365 wired/wireless world, they are accessible at all times to friends, family, and the Internet. Set limits by sharing your class and clinical schedules with family and friends, and restrict being contacted to emergencies only during those times. Develop awareness of the chance to get distracted when online and for valuable time to slip away.

Employment

The amount of time occupied by employment outside of school hours may be another interference for some traditional adult learners. Ask yourself, "How much of the time that I am employed outside of school is necessary for food, shelter, and other realistic expenses?" Many explanations can be given for the liabilities listed here for traditional adult learners. Some traditional adult learners may still be working at developing an awareness of who they are and what life is all about for them. Some may lack a sense of direction and have no clear goal or idea of what they really want to do in life. Some may lack inner motivation to be a practical/vocational nurse. These learners can succeed by taking responsibility for making decisions about priorities and personal use of time that will help them meet the goals they have established for themselves.

DANGERS FOR THE RETURNING ADULT LEARNER

Physical

Returning adult learners may experience difficulties with academic behavior. Their reading, writing, test-taking, and study skills may be rusty. Computer and other skills for an electronic information society may be lacking. Physical changes occur as adults age and can affect learning. The senses of vision and hearing are at their peak in the adolescent years and decline very gradually through the adult years.

As the decades go by, these adults may notice the need for more illumination when they read. They also may experience problems with reading small print. Some returning adults note that they are not as energetic as they once were.

Social and Family Responsibilities

Returning adult learners have many roles to play outside of school. They may be husbands, wives, significant others, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, grandparents, employees, and/or volunteers. Generally they are very busy people. Returning to school may result in feelings of guilt because they know it will affect their relationships and routines outside of school.

Because of their many roles, returning adult learners have more demands placed on them. Some families may not support their parent's choice to continue their formal education. Spouses/significant others may object to the extra demands placed on them. In many cases the returning adult learner must struggle with learning how to juggle the worlds of learner and head of the family.

Despite these demands, returning adult learners, like traditional and recycled adult learners, need to learn how to manage their time. They need to learn how to concentrate when time for concentration is made available. Sometimes, returning adult learners set unrealistic goals for themselves and have to readjust their game plan. Although past experience can be an asset, returning adult learners may have to rethink and possibly unlearn some things they have learned in the past. They might have allowed some of these things to become habits.

When faced with obstacles, some adults may decide to throw in the towel and write off school as a bad idea. This book can help you avoid this negative way of thinking and go on to succeed.

DANGERS FOR THE RECYCLED ADULT LEARNER

The recycled adult learner shares the same liabilities as do traditional and returning adult learners. Depending on their age and personal responsibilities, recycled adult learners may feel an energy crisis as they pursue their academic life.

Attitude

Some recycled adult learners may have a mindset that because they earned a degree or have some college experience, the practical/vocational nursing program will be a breeze to get through. Be aware of the difference between obtaining a college degree and obtaining a technical college education. In college a student might have no practical experience with his or her major subject until junior or senior year or after graduation, if fortunate enough to be hired for the first job applied for in the chosen field. In the practical/vocational nursing program in a technical college, the application of current learning is stressed continuously. Students need to apply theory continuously to the clinical area. What you learn on Monday will be used in the clinical area on Tuesday. And you will be expected to consistently apply learning from past nursing classes. Perhaps poor time management resulted in cramming for examinations. Cramming is an ineffective strategy for long-term learning. This measure will be useless in the practical/vocational nursing program because of the consistent expectation of application of theory to the clinical area.

? Critical Thinking

Personal Needs for Improvement

Identify and list three things that could stand in your way of success in the practical/vocational nursing program.

1.
2.
3.

SPECIAL CHALLENGES FOR PRACTICAL/VOCATIONAL NURSING STUDENTS

No matter what type of adult learner you are, some learners have special challenges to success in practical/vocational nursing. Learners with a spouse/significant other at home may be extremely busy with school and family affairs. Learners with aging parents may be involved with their needs for assistance. Single parents may feel overwhelmed when the learner role is assumed in addition to all their other roles. It may be good for learners with spouses/significant others to imagine what it would be like to be a learner without these individuals to offer support.

Practical/vocational nursing students who speak English as their first language sometimes indicate the difficulty of course work and the amount of time it takes to complete assignments. It may be insightful for these learners to imagine being responsible for the same amount of course work when English is their second language. Learners who speak English as a second or additional language need to strive continually to understand content presented in a language that is different from their native tongue. Reading assignments need to be translated by these students to their native language to be understood. Taking a test requires extra effort, as these students may need to translate test directions and items to their native language for understanding before answering an item. This is comparable to presenting English-speaking learners with textbooks and tests written in Spanish or Russian with the need to translate both to English.

We have met many learners facing the preceding challenges and commend them for the good job they have done, against great odds, in the practical/vocational nursing program. They are a testimonial that success is within your reach, even if you are faced with these special challenges.

LEARNERS HAVE RIGHTS

As an American citizen, you need to start thinking about some fundamental rights that you have been granted through the U.S. Constitution that will affect you as a learner. The **First Amendment** gives you freedom of expression as long as what you want to express does not disrupt class or infringe on the rights of your peers. So when your instructor asks you to join in a discussion, do not be afraid to do so. Instructors want your input in a class session. They have no intention of holding your comments against you. The Fourteenth Amendment assures you due process. Due process means that if you are charged with a violation of policies or rules, you will be presented with evidence of your misconduct and will be entitled to state your position. So relax. The institution in which you are enrolled cannot terminate you at whim, nor does it want to. It exists to help you succeed. A more detailed account of these two rights can probably be found in your school's student handbook. If you do not have a copy of the student handbook, download an online copy or obtain one from the student services department. An important learner's right is the right to have an organized curriculum and a responsible instructor who is prepared to teach it. You have the right to know the requirements of each course and how you will be graded for each course. Although your tuition and fees do not pay for all the services you receive through your school, you are the most important person in the educational system. You are the reason the instructor was hired. You do not interfere with the instructor's work—you are the focus of it.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEARNERS

The first responsibility of learners is to learn. The authors of this book want you to test your knowledge about the process of learning before you read any further. Read the following four statements and decide if they are true or false. As the chapter continues, these statements will be discussed. You will be expected to check the accuracy of your responses. Remember, your answers are for your eyes only.

Critical Thinking

Responsibilities of Learners

Read the following four statements, and indicate whether each is "true" or "false."

1. The instructor has the responsibility for my learning.
2. If I fail, it is the responsibility of the instructor.
3. If I succeed, the credit for my success should go to the instructor.
4. My instructor has the responsibility to pass on to me all the information I will need to know in my career as a practical/vocational nurse.

TEACHING VERSUS LEARNING

Years ago, a wonderful thing happened in the area of adult education. Teachers were exposed to the difference between **teaching** and learning. Great emphasis was placed on the role of the learner. Changing emphasis from teaching to learning is called a **paradigm** (a way of thinking) shift. Learners need to be aware of the exciting world of learning and the roles of teaching and learning in that process. In doing so you will know what is expected of you as an adult learner.

Passive Learners

Many of us (and this includes the authors and some of your instructors) have had educational experiences in the past that encouraged dependency and passivity on the part of the learner. Think back to the educational experiences you have had. Did they involve sitting in classes in which the teacher did most of the talking and you just took notes? Did you view the teacher as someone who possessed knowledge and somehow was going to pass it on to you? And, if you did not pass, did you say, "The teacher flunked me"? When you think about it, these situations are characterized by the adjectives *dependent* and *passive*.

The last time you were dependent from necessity was when you were an infant. Even then you were far from passive. When you became a toddler, you became very independent and began to learn about the world in earnest. You very actively pursued your learning—that is, the acquiring of new knowledge and skills. And you did it with gusto! Now you are an adult learner. How unfair of an instructor to expect you to become dependent and passive in your learning. This is especially true because studies have proved that people learn best when they are actively involved in their own learning and have an interdependent relationship with the instructor.

Instructors—Facilitators of Learning

You have already learned that it is the instructor's responsibility to set up a curriculum. Your state's board of nursing dictates the content of the curriculum in a school of nursing. It is then up to the faculty of your school to decide how that content will be included in the nursing program. Some practical/vocational programs might use the general structure of the NCLEX-PN® examination in developing a curriculum. Instructors are **facilitators** because they are responsible for creating a learning environment in which learning can take place. They do this by arranging for a variety of activities and experiences. Part of that learning environment involves being available to you when you encounter questions and problems you cannot solve. Instructors also have the responsibility to evaluate learning. They do so by testing and observing learners.

As a student, you have not only the right but the responsibility to talk to an instructor when you have a concern about your relationship with him or her. Under rules of assertiveness, always go to the source. The same rule applies if you have a problem with a classmate. Approach the classmate, not another student.

Active Learning

To "learn" is to acquire knowledge and skills. The verb *acquire* means to obtain or gain by your own effort. As a learner in a practical/vocational nursing program, you need to be your own agent of knowledge and skill acquisition. You have the personal responsibility to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be a practical/vocational nurse. **Active learning** is not a passive activity. As a learner, you must open yourself up, reach out, and stretch to gain knowledge and skills. To be successful, you must be personally involved in your learning. It is impossible for instructors to pour knowledge and skills into your head. You need to become self-directed and curious in your learning. You need to use critical-thinking skills to help you comprehend what you read in texts and journals, what you see on PowerPoint presentations and DVDs, and what you hear in class discussions. Instructors will not hover over you and guide your every step. Instructors are there to help you along when you need it.

Do not expect the instructor to assume your skill for you, be your medical dictionary, or reteach Chapter 2 in *Anatomy and Physiology* because you did not have time to study. Instead, expect your instructor to observe you while you are trying to work through a difficult skill. The instructor will make suggestions and demonstrate a point here and there to help you along. If you are having trouble, expect your instructor to help you put a definition of a medical term in your own words. Expect the instructor to answer specific questions you may have about Chapter 2 in *Anatomy and Physiology*. These are the roles of teacher and learner and examples of their interdependency. If you are to learn and succeed in practical/vocational nursing, you need to become actively involved in your own learning. You say you are too old to learn? You say you cannot teach an old dog new tricks? Much study has been done in this area. To date, studies of adult learning clearly indicate that the basic ability to learn remains essentially unimpaired throughout the life span. Now review the answers to your true/false questions from the Critical Thinking exercise on p. 6. Are there any answers you want to change before looking at the key?

1. *False.* You have the responsibility for your own learning. You must become actively involved in the learning process.
2. *False.* If you fail, it is your own fault. Adult educational programs are geared for success. You are geared for success. Although you could list many reasons why you might not succeed, the teacher flunking you is not one of them. Learners sometimes allow themselves to flunk.
3. *False.* When you succeed (and you are perfectly capable of doing so), only you can take credit for the success. You were the person who assumed responsibility for your own learning. You became actively involved in the learning process.
4. *False.* Instructors have had much experience in nursing. They do not know all the experiences you will have in your career as a practical/vocational nurse. Even if they did, there would be no time or way to transfer this knowledge to you. Instructors help learners learn how to learn. This is important in an ever-changing field such as nursing. Your instructors will encourage you to develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, which will enable you to handle new situations as they arise in your nursing career.

If you had no wrong answers, you should be an expert on learning. Now put your expertise to work for you. If you had one or more wrong answers, the authors suggest you reread the "Teaching versus Learning" section in this chapter. Chapters 3, 4, and 8 will help you to become an active learner and a critical thinker and be successful in the practical/vocational nursing program, on NCLEX-PN®, and as a candidate for an LPN/LVN nursing position.

ROLE OF EVALUATION

The second responsibility of learners is to receive and participate in evaluation. Evaluation plays an important role in your education in the practical/vocational nursing program and throughout your career. You have set a goal to become a practical/vocational nurse. As the year goes on, your instructors will evaluate you in several different ways to determine whether you are progressing in the achievement of that goal. When you graduate, you will be evaluated periodically while on the job, sometimes as a means of determining whether you are to receive a salary increase. At other times you will be evaluated to see if you are functioning well enough to keep your job. Evaluation in the practical/vocational nursing program generally occurs in two areas: written tests that measure your knowledge of theory and **performance evaluations** that measure your ability to apply your knowledge in the clinical area. Evaluation in these areas is a learning experience in itself.

Theory Tests

Learners and instructors look at test results very differently. Learners focus on the number of items they answered correctly. They need to identify what they did right on a test so they can apply the process of getting the right answer to future tests and apply this

information in the clinical area. Instructors focus on the specific items the learner got wrong. Wrong items indicate critical knowledge the learner does not have. Do not just ask for your grades. Try to arrange time with your instructors to review your tests. It is inaccurate to say that grades do not count. You must earn the minimum grade established by your nursing program. But consider this: If you got 80% on a test, it means you did not answer 20% of the questions correctly. Now place yourself in the patient's slippers. What about the 20% of the test questions your nurse got wrong? Was it something the nurse should have known to care for you safely? For this reason, try to look at tests as learning experiences. Be as interested in your wrong answers as you are in your correct answers. Take time to look at your tests with the goal of understanding why the correct answers are correct and why the wrong answers you gave are wrong.

Clinical Performance Evaluations

The most meaningful evaluations you will receive during the year will be the performance evaluations given while you are in the clinical area. Because these evaluations give you an opportunity for career and personal growth, it is important to understand this form of evaluation and the responsibilities you have with regard to it. Clinical performance evaluations also provide an example of how to evaluate others in your expanded role.

In the clinical area, instructors will be observing you as you care for patients. They are observing you to discover the positive things you are doing to reach your goal of becoming a practical/vocational nurse. These behaviors are to be encouraged. They indicate that learning has taken place, you are applying your knowledge, and you are growing and progressing toward your goal. Instructors are also observing you to discover behaviors that stand in the way of reaching your goal. These behaviors are to be discouraged. Your instructor will update you daily on your progress in a verbal or written manner. At the end of a clinical rotation, you will receive a written performance evaluation during a conference with your clinical instructor.

From the start you need to look at performance evaluations as a two-sided coin. The instructor is on one side, and you are on the other. As part of their job, instructors have the responsibility of evaluating your performance. As a learner, you have the responsibility of being aware of your clinical behaviors. You are responsible for **self-evaluation**. Practical/vocational nursing students, at the time of graduation, should be able to look at their nursing actions and be aware of their strong behaviors and behaviors that need improvement. Developing the ability to be aware of one's behaviors begins with day one in the practical/vocational nursing program, including the skills laboratory. A learner does not automatically have this skill. Learners must consistently work at viewing themselves objectively. Instructors will help in this area. For example, when learning how to make a bed, ask yourself, "Is the finished product as good as I had intended it to be when I started?" Do not wait for the instructor to identify areas of success or areas that need improvement.

Professional Pointer

Objective awareness of one's own behaviors is an important skill to have as an employee.

Think back to when you received comments from your teachers and parents about your behavior in grade school and high school. How did you feel when you received these comments? Many people grow up with bad feelings about these episodes of criticism and even about the word itself. Criticism means evaluation. Some people attach a negative meaning to criticism and view it as a put-down.

The phrase "constructive criticism" may evoke negative feelings. The phrase "**constructive evaluation**" is frequently used instead. This choice of words may help you look at evaluation of your behaviors in a positive way. It is important to distinguish what is being evaluated. You must separate your behaviors or actions from yourself, the person.

Constructive evaluation directed toward your behaviors has no bearing on your value as a person. Look at your behaviors either as being positive and helping you to reach your goal or as needing improvement. Behaviors that need improvement need to be modified so that you can reach your goal of being a practical/vocational nurse.

As you progress in the nursing program, you will learn about a systematic way of conducting patient care called the "nursing process" (see Chapter 8). An important part of the nursing process is evaluation of patient goals while giving patient care. If your actions are not helping patients reach their goals, they need to be modified. Knowledge of the nursing process will help you develop your ability to look at your actions and evaluate them. Comments from instructors will help your self-awareness.

A good way to start learning self-evaluation is to look at yourself in everyday life. Ask yourself how you look through the eyes of others:

- How would you like to be your own spouse?
- How would you like to have yourself as a learner?
- How would you like to be your own mother or father?
- How would you like to be your own nurse?

If you would not like to be any of these people, identify the reasons why.

Another good exercise is to make two lists: a list of your assets or strong points and a list of your liabilities or areas that need improvement. When asked to

evaluate themselves, learners traditionally rate themselves more negatively. They tend to neglect their strong points. Identifying strong points is not proud or vain behavior. It is dealing with yourself honestly and openly. After you have identified assets and liabilities, review your assets periodically. Make an effort to continue these strong points while modifying your liabilities. Work on one liability at a time. If you do so, your assets list will grow and your liabilities list will shrink.

A good place to start self-evaluation in nursing is in the skills lab of your basic nursing course. Observe the results of your actions. Are you using a drape during procedures to avoid chilling and invading the patient's privacy? Are you aware of the effect of the tone of your voice on your instructors and peers?

Evaluation is an ever-present reality in any career. Getting into the practice of self-evaluation early in your program of study will help you to develop a skill you will use daily in your career and personal life.

Critical Thinking

Self-Evaluation

List one of your strong areas that you have identified as a new practical/vocational nursing learner. (Review your answers to Critical Thinking: Reasons I Can Succeed on p. 3.)

List one area needing improvement that you have identified as a practical/vocational nursing student. (Review your answers to Critical Thinking: Personal Liabilities on p. 5.)

Critical Thinking

Plan to Eliminate My Areas That Need Improvement

Write a plan that will help you eliminate one of your areas that need improvement. How can you convert this area to a strong area?

DEALING WITH REFERRALS

If you are evaluated by your instructor as having areas that need improvement, the instructor might refer you to a counselor at school. Examples of areas that require a **referral** are a grade below passing in a major test and frequent absences from class. Counselors at technical colleges and junior colleges are academic counselors who have expertise in helping students identify reasons for academic problem areas. A referral to a counselor is an attempt to help you succeed. These counselors can help students set up a plan of action to remedy the problem. We have seen some students resist going to the counselor because they think it is a waste of time.

Critical Thinking

Referral to Counselor

What could be one reason for thinking that an appointment with the counselor is a waste of time? How could keeping an appointment with the counselor be helpful to a student?

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEARNERS

In addition to assuming responsibility for your own learning, becoming actively involved in the learning process, and receiving and participating in evaluation, it is necessary to be aware of some other responsibilities you have as a learner:

1. Be aware of the rules and policies of your school and the practical/vocational nursing program. Abide by them.
2. When problems do develop, follow the recognized channels of communication both at school and in the clinical area. The rule is: Go to the source. Avoid "saving up" gripes. Instead, pursue them as they come up. Deal with them in an assertive manner (see Chapter 14).
3. Be prepared in advance for classes and clinical experiences. You expect teachers to be prepared, and they expect the same of you. When you are unprepared for classes, you waste the time of the instructor, your peers, and yourself. When you are unprepared for clinical experiences, you are violating an important safety factor in patient care. When you are scheduled for the clinical area, your state board of nursing expects you to function as a licensed practical/vocational nurse would function under your state's Nurse Practice Act.
4. Prepare your own assignments. In postconference use your peers and the experiences and knowledge they have and learn from one another.
5. Seek out learning experiences at school and in the clinical area. Set your goals higher than the minimum.
6. Seek out resources beyond the required readings. Examples of these resources can be the learning resource center, information from past classes, and the Internet.
7. Assume responsibility for your own thoughts, communication, and behavior. Avoid giving in to pressure from your peers. BYOB—be your own boss.
8. Be present and on time for classes and clinical experiences. Follow school and program policies for reporting absences. Getting into this habit will prepare you to be a favored employee.
9. Enter into discussion when asked to do so in class.
10. Treat those with whom you come into daily contact with respect. Be mindful of their rights as individuals.

11. Seek out your instructor when you are having difficulties in class or the clinical area. Often instructors can tell when students are having problems. More important are the times when they cannot tell, and only the student knows a problem exists. Do not be afraid to approach your instructors. They are there to help you.
12. Keep a record of your grades as a course proceeds. At the beginning of a course the instructor and/or your course syllabus will explain the method of calculating your final grade. You are responsible for knowing how you stand grade-wise in a course at any point in time.

Get Ready for the NCLEX-PN® Examination!

Key Points

- Adult learners have diversity in age resulting in differing ways of thinking and valuing.
- The adults in your class could be Matures (The Silent Generation), Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Ys (Millennials).
- Adult learners can be classified as traditional adult learners, returning adult learners, or recycled adult learners.
- Each category of adult learner possesses characteristics that can help the learner succeed in the practical/vocational nursing program.
- Each group of adult learners also possesses characteristics that can prevent success.
- Liabilities occur in areas in which learners have control over their solutions. They do not stand in the way of success.
- Although learners have rights, they also have responsibilities. The most important of their responsibilities are the personal responsibilities for learning, taking an active part in the learning process, and participating in the evaluation of their learning and growth.

Additional Learning Resources

evolve Go to your Evolve website (http://evolve.elsevier.com/Hill/Success) for the following FREE learning resources:

- Answers to Critical Thinking Scenarios
- Additional learning activities
- Additional Review Questions for the NCLEX-PN® exam
- Helpful phrases for communicating in Spanish and more!

Review Questions for the NCLEX-PN® Examination

1. Select the appropriate behavior for the student practical/vocational nurse.
   1. To accept responsibility for personal success, including grades, in the nursing program.
   2. To be as passive a learner as you can possibly be both in classes and in the clinical area.
   3. To learn everything from the nursing instructors that is needed to function as a PN/VN.
   4. To blame the nursing instructor for any failures that occur in class or the clinical area.
2. A practical/vocational nursing learner has been referred to the counselor because of a failing grade on the last test in Nursing Fundamentals. Which of the following learner responses indicates the student understands the purpose of the referral?
   1. "The instructor does not like me and wants me to quit the program."
   2. "This is a warning that I will be asked to withdraw from the program."
   3. "The purpose of a referral is to help me identify problems to avoid failure."
   4. "A psychologist will evaluate me for psychological problems that may be interfering with success."
3. A practical/vocational nursing student has just received the end-of-course clinical evaluation. Which of the following attitudes is most appropriate regarding the role of evaluation of students in the clinical area?
   1. Instructors and SPN/SVN students have the responsibility to identify positive behaviors and those that need improvement.
   2. It is the job of the instructor only to identify positive clinical behaviors and behaviors that need improvement.
   3. When SPN/SVN students identify positive behaviors, it indicates that they are proud and vain individuals.
   4. When behaviors that need improvement are identified, clinical evaluation may destroy self-esteem in the SPN/SVN student.
4. Four practical/vocational nursing students were absent the day tests were returned and reviewed in a pediatric course. Which of the following students has a plan that will benefit the student in future testing and clinical situations?
   1. The student who on the next class day will ask the instructor for the grade on the test for personal records.
   2. The student who on the next clinical day asks the instructor to schedule time to go over test items that were correct.
   3. The student who thinks that because the test is history, it is unnecessary to review test items, since the grade is final.
   4. The student who asks when there is time to go over all the test items so the reasons for wrong answers can be identified.