Teaching massage is a skill and a gift. Massage teachers display talents in many areas and must be adept at lecturing, demonstrations, and group facilitation. Teaching calls for a knowledge of adult learners, of the principles of massage practice, of the sciences related to the body, of curriculum content, and of specific methods. All of this knowledge is supported by a teacher’s self-knowledge and ability to explore strengths and weaknesses in her delivery of program materials. This chapter aims to identify different accepted teaching styles, support the development of a personal philosophy of education, provide tools for self-evaluation, and explore professional ethical and boundary issues related to teaching massage.

SECTION A What Is a Teaching Style?

Jill Stanard

If we want to develop and deepen the capacity for connectedness at the heart of good teaching, we must understand—and resist—the perverse but powerful draw of the disconnected life.

PARKER PALMER

(Continued)
The true soul of a teacher comes from the core of the individual. Who we are as teachers is who we are as individuals—unique human beings. As we teach in the classroom, we cannot let theories and techniques separate us from who we are as people. To better understand and be able to talk about teaching techniques, educational theorists have developed the concept of teaching styles, which correspond somewhat with student learning styles. Not only do students have a particular best way of learning and receiving information, but each individual teacher also has a best way of delivering the information. This teaching style comes from our personal experiences in life and in education, as well as from the core foundations of our personalities.

Teaching style is a system developed to define the preferred way an individual teacher has of conveying information to students. An instructor’s teaching style depends on many different criteria, including the type of material being taught, the age and education level of the students, what resources are available to the class, how the instructor learns best, and the instructor’s personality. There are different systems of naming and defining teaching styles. In fact, teaching styles are the subject of many educational PhDs. Some are in more common use than others. One authoritative center for the discussion of teaching styles is the Indiana State University Center for Teaching and Learning. This institution has defined four primary teaching styles and shared their definitions in a number of publications and arenas. The styles the State of Indiana has identified are defined as formal authority, demonstrator, facilitator, and delegator.

Your teaching style is a reflection of the way in which you manage the classroom, facilitate interactions between students, how you most often deliver content, the tools you use to teach, and what you teach:

- Classroom management: Are you the expert who takes complete control of the class, focused on meeting preplanned learning objectives, or are you less concerned that students learn specific details and more concerned that they enjoy the classroom experience? Do you emphasize lecture and demonstration or collaborative learning between students?
- Facilitation of student interaction: Do you feel most comfortable with whole class discussions or do you break the class into smaller groups? Do you believe in and foster individual reflection time after activities? Are you the arbiter of group discussions or do you let them flow freely? Is the quality of the interaction between students important to you or are you mainly focused on ensuring students know and understand the content?
- Delivery of content: Is your focus the learning process itself or is meeting learning objectives more important? Do you model and demonstrate tasks related to professional practice and focus on job skills needed for a professional massage practice, or are you an advocate of knowledge for the sake of knowledge? Is content or the personal growth of the students most important to you?
- Use of tools: What interactive tools do you use in the course? Do you use PowerPoint complete with audio and animation or do you illustrate on a black or white board? Are classes predominantly driven by lectures or do you let the students learn and discover on their own? Do you have the students move their desks around to set up the classroom the way they want it, or do you prefer a formal arrangement of desks in a row? Do you use models of anatomy, sample business plans, and lots of overheads for lectures, or do you have students refer to their textbooks for graphics and charts? Do you allow students to experiment with techniques in class?
- Subject of class: Are you teaching a first-term massage class or an upper level pathology class? Is your subject fact-filled or experiential? Are students learning what you say and present or are they learning how to react to what they discover?
Teaching styles might be described as being “content centered” if the subject is the most important thing (e.g., teaching pathology), “teacher centered” if the experience and wisdom of the teacher are seen as most important (e.g., teaching a specific technique), or “student centered” if the experience of the student overrides the importance of content or teacher wisdom (e.g., teaching clinic). In any well-taught classroom, the teacher, student, and subject matter each take the center role for a time. Thus the ideal teaching style is a hybrid that takes into account the level of the students, the content, and the type of course. Teaching styles are broken into formal authority, demonstrator, facilitator, and delegator.

(Note: A teaching style assessment may be found at http://www.longleaf.net/teachingstyle.html.)

**TEACHING STYLE**

- **Formal authority:** Content focused. Teacher delivers material in a formal setting and students absorb and recall facts and information.
- **Demonstrator:** Teacher focused. Teacher demonstrates skills and knowledge and coaches students to develop and apply the skills and knowledge.
- **Facilitator:** Student experience focused. Teacher uses a predominance of group activities and individual projects to ensure student participation in learning.
- **Delegator:** Student responsibility focused. Students play an active role in defining and planning their own learning experiences; student maturity is necessary.

**FORMAL AUTHORITY**

Teachers who have a formal authority teaching style tend to focus on content. The subject, not the student or the teacher, is the most important aspect. This is generally a content-centered situation, where the teacher feels responsible for providing and controlling the flow of the content and the student is expected to receive the content. Science-based classes taught in massage schools tend to be content driven, and therefore the teacher is best served using a formal authority style. Often, there is so much information to be given in a short amount of time (we want to leave enough credit hours for the massage classes!) that the content must be at the forefront, and the teacher must maintain a formal, lecture type of delivery to ensure that all students understand and retain the information. Using formal authority, the instructor gives information and sets boundaries for the community that is being created. The sharing of this information gives the students safety in their new setting. They now can make decisions about how to act without fear of doing the wrong thing. Licensing examinations rely heavily on the school’s ability to teach content to students. A statement that might be made by an instructor with this teaching style is “I am the flashlight for my students; I illuminate the content and materials so that my students can see the importance of the material and appreciate the discipline.”

Teachers with this teaching style are not as concerned with building relationships with their students. It is not as important that their students form relationships with other students. This type of teacher does not usually require much student participation before class. Formal authority is the classic style of teaching in this country—“chalk talk,” “sage on the stage,” with students as receptive audience to an abundance of facts and information.

The core of our training in massage is in the hands-on classroom. This is the perfect classroom, the perfect subject to demonstrate all four teaching styles. Yet it is valuable to
begin any class using formal authority. This style of formal presentation, with the teacher as expert and giver of information, can be used successfully to set the framework for the class. You know things that the students simply do not. What are the criteria for grading? When will breaks be taken? Where are the bathrooms? How will the class be run each time? Setting the framework for a class, as in a bodywork session, serves to remove a great deal of social fear from the classroom. Students know what is expected, where to find things, and the basics of how to interact with each one another and the instructor.

In addition, the formal authority can be used to begin to relay instructional information to the students. You can decide, based on your dominant teaching style and on the makeup of your class, how much information is best shared in this way. Students who are at an earlier stage in their studies are more in need of this formal relay of information. If you have a class of students who have never studied the human body, you will need to teach them in a more formal way the information they are looking for and where to find it. The classroom community is centered on the teacher at this point, holding most of the information and safety for the group.

**THE DEMONSTRATOR**

Teachers who have a demonstrator style tend to run teacher-centered classes with an emphasis on demonstration and modeling. This type of teacher acts as a role model by demonstrating behavior, skills, and the process, and then he or she acts as a coach in helping students develop and apply these skills and knowledge. The teacher and his or her experience is still of utmost importance with this teaching style, yet it is the teacher’s knowledge and experience that are at the forefront, not scientific facts. The teacher is the one in the classroom with the legitimate experience and information that is conveyed to the students with a sense of what is the correct way.

With a demonstrator type of teacher, students are encouraged to participate in the classroom and try their new skills with the teacher acting as a coach. Students are expected to ask questions and seek guidance from the teacher. This style is acutely present when teaching mid to upper level bodywork classes. The bodywork profession has a great number of specialized techniques that require years of training and practice to master. The experience of the teacher by necessity plays an important role in conveying to new practitioners the details and nuances of these techniques.

Moving from formal authority to demonstrator is natural in the massage classroom and not so natural in the health science classroom. The demonstrator relates not only to the material being studied but to the framework of the class as well. For example, it is the teacher’s job to start class and come back from breaks on time, to avoid talking about personal issues in the classroom, and to model good boundaries. In this way, each teacher is a demonstrator who sets a model for student classroom behavior. More importantly, the demonstrator shows the students what and how to learn. In the first massage class, the instructor may show the students proper body mechanics for the application of massage strokes or the instructor may demonstrate how to draw a muscle on the outline of a skeleton. The demonstrator teacher performs the action and then guides the students as they try their new skills. Demonstrating and then coaching are the primary elements of this style.

**FACILITATOR**

The facilitator teaching style focuses on the experience of the student rather than the teacher. The teacher facilitates or creates a situation in which the students learn material on their own. There is more independent learning, and the teacher must be comfortable with students discovering their own truths and experiences about the material. Facilitator teachers use group activities, individual study, and collaboration between students to solve
problems presented to students. In this way, students learn by applying the material in the classroom setting. The facilitator style flows easily from the demonstrator style. Massage classrooms are typically designed to have the teacher demonstrate a technique and then to have the students try to implement the technique working in pairs or other small groups. The transformation from demonstrator to facilitator comes when the teacher is able to solicit from students what their experience is. The teacher helps the students recognize their own inner experience of doing the work. Bodywork classes often move easily into the teacher being a facilitator.

Massage is a vocation and a learned skill, yet the human body is not built like a computer or an automobile. The techniques that we use are modified with each client for that client’s specific needs and condition. Each and every massage or bodywork session is new and unique. So the classroom becomes a laboratory for students to experience this uniqueness. The classroom shifts from being teacher centered (formal authority, demonstrator) to being student centered and concentrating on the experience of the student (facilitator). Each practice session is a new individual study session that the facilitator teacher can use to teach students new techniques and new responses. Difficulties can develop in facilitator classrooms that are less visible with the formal authority or demonstrator styles. At the point of using facilitation, we begin asking students to step up and begin evaluating their own learning process. Feedback from the teacher becomes more difficult to give when we are taking the step of further legitimizing the student experience as a learning technique. 

**DELEGATOR**

Teachers who have a delegator teaching style place much more responsibility for learning on the students. Students are given the goals of the class and allowed freedom to create their own learning experiences. A result of delegator-led classrooms is that students learn much more than the material being presented; they also learn organization, self-motivation, project management, and group dynamics. The students learn to give and accept feedback from peers rather than from the teacher. The teacher acts as a consultant to the students as they design ways to learn the material put before them.

This fourth teaching style requires a mature classroom for success. The students must have some grasp of the profession and the details of the subject matter. The instructor who uses the delegator style teaches students more than the subject matter at hand. In the delegator style, students design learning experiences for themselves. The instructor must be skillful at discerning whether the activities are offering the students good learning opportunities. Things students can learn beyond the material include organizational skills, communication (verbal and written) skills, and professional collaboration techniques as they work in cooperative groups.

Massage and bodywork classrooms may be the ultimate opportunity for perfection in education. The massage instructor, whether teaching hands-on techniques, patient relations, or urinary physiology, is teaching students who are there to be involved in the intimate world of health care. Each student is at a different point in his or her path. One student may be a 38-year-old successful financial planner who has come to your school seeking closer connections to herself and her spirit. The student next to her may be a 19-year-old who is looking for a fast way to get a decent job where he does not have to cook burgers. No matter who you are teaching, you and the students are drawn deeper into community through the study of touch and are drawn deeper into your and their inner lives. This can be done using any and all of the teaching styles discussed earlier, supported by your educational philosophy.
SECTION B  Your Personal Education Philosophy

Jill Stanard

Vocation is the place where deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.

FREDERICK BUECHNER

Teachers in massage education typically come to the classroom from experience in the field and are not trained teachers. This presents the teacher, students, and school managers with a challenge to understand how to get the best out of an excellent massage therapist as educator. This section will define and discuss the importance of a personal educational philosophy for articulating goals and values for the teacher.

Massage training is vocational and hands-on in nature, so our schools have been set up to utilize the skills of workers in the industry. The criteria for teaching, set by schools, massage licensing boards, and departments of education across the country ask for years of experience in the field, not training and experience in teaching. Teachers with 2, 5, or even 20 years of professional experience often walk into the classroom with no training in how to approach a class of adult learners. It is in that moment that a conscious acknowledgement of that very fact is necessary. The development of a personal philosophy of teaching can help the new instructor weather many a storm in the classroom.

In fact, many “professional” teachers have never written a statement of their philosophy. Frederick J. Stephenson, editor of Extraordinary Teachers: The Essence of Excellent Teaching, says that, “What I knew was that for twenty-nine years I have been going to work with a strong desire to make a difference. I was engaged in a journey, but to an unknown destination. The most direct benefit of this philosophy development process was that it helped me re-direct my career.” When asked what he teaches, Stephenson replies, “People.” For him, this became the core of his teaching philosophy.

A teaching philosophy is the formulation and articulation of an instructor’s goals, vision, and actions in the classroom. The act of taking time to consider one’s goals, vision, and actions on becoming a teacher provides an opportunity for development that can be personally and professionally enriching. It gives the teacher focus on entering the classroom and a grounding philosophy to fall back on when facing challenges. This is the why of your teaching. For many bodyworkers who value the concept of mindfulness—the ability to respond directly to what is happening in the present moment—approaching teaching with a defined philosophy may be a challenge. Often the massage therapist who has become a teacher is drawn to treating the classroom as he or she would a client, assessing the temperature of the skin, the tightness of the muscles, and the reaction of the client in the present moment. There is a good deal of this...
in teaching, You cannot keep barreling through origins and insertions of wrist extensors when your students are angry or sleepy or just not paying attention. Although being mindful has its place in all human interactions, each situation in which we find ourselves warrants a framework and set of goals. This guidance toward goals and a framework of safety and expectations is the responsibility of the teacher and is founded in the teacher’s philosophy of education. The following sections explore the components of a teaching philosophy.

**HOW DO YOU BELIEVE PEOPLE LEARN?**

Most teachers agree that the main job of an instructor is to facilitate student learning. But do we know how this learning occurs? For vocational teachers who have not studied teaching, beliefs about education stem from their own personal experiences with learning. Their ideas about learning are intuitive and based on experiential learning in classrooms, rather than on a consciously articulated theory. Most have neither studied the literature on adult learning and development nor learned a vocabulary to describe what they are thinking and feeling. The idea of writing down a concept of learning might be difficult and daunting.

For teachers experienced in bodywork, a place to start is to think about what happens to them when they work with a client. What happens when massage therapists are doing the work they love, which is essentially learning about the client, physically, emotionally, and spiritually through many avenues of communication? Massage therapists interview clients and verbally hear their stories. As human beings they sense vitality, or lack of it, in each other. When massage therapists touch a client, there is a physical assessment in which the therapist learns about the state of the client, temperature, tension, reports of pain, and movement. Using this experience, the massage therapist can describe the experience of learning through metaphor.

Teachers might also describe what they think occurs during a learning episode, based on their observation and experience, or based on current literature on teaching and learning. Teachers might summarize what they have observed in their own classrooms about the different learning styles that students display, the different tempos they exhibit, the ways they react to failure, and the ways they react to successes. Such descriptions can display the richness of experience and the teacher’s sensitivity to student learning.

**HOW DO YOU BELIEVE TEACHING FACILITATES LEARNING?**

Ideas on how teachers can facilitate the learning process follow from the model of student learning that has been described. If metaphors have been used, the teacher role can be an extension of the metaphor. For example, if student learning has been described as the information processing done by a computer, is the teacher the computer technician, the software, or the database? If more direct descriptions of student learning have been articulated, what is the role of the teacher with respect to motivation? To content? To feedback and assessment? To challenge and support? How can the teacher respond to different learning styles, help students who are frustrated, and accommodate different academic abilities?

**BOX 1-1**

**Teacher Feature: Effective Teacher = Curious Student**

My sister Jennifer, a high school English and speech teacher, told me something that made a lasting impression: “The moment you believe that you have nothing to learn from your students, you’re finished as a teacher. And your lack of curiosity about them as individuals, their ideas and experiences, will become immediately evident to them. The learning process is best when it’s an exchange between both parties. So be an effective teacher by being a curious student.”

Anonymous
WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR STUDENTS?

Describing the teacher role entails detailing how the teacher can help students learn not only a given body of content but also process skills, such as critical thinking, writing, and problem solving. It also includes one’s thoughts on lifelong learning and how teachers can help students value and nurture their intellectual curiosity, live ethical lives, and have productive careers. For most teachers, it is easier to begin with content goals, such as wanting students to understand certain aerodynamic design principles or the treatment of hypertension. The related process goals, such as engineering problem solving or medical diagnostic skills, might be described next. Finally, career and lifelong goals, such as teamwork, ethics, and social commitment, can be detailed.

HOW DO YOU IMPLEMENT YOUR PHILOSOPHY?

An extremely important part of a philosophy of teaching is describing and understanding how your beliefs about teaching and learning and your goals for students are translated into activities in the classroom. Your Director of Education and fellow teachers often find this a very interesting part of your philosophy. “How is she going to compel her students to be curious about the body?” You may return to this section of your philosophy to review your ideas when you get stuck in a classroom situation. In this section of the statement, envision how you want to communicate the class material. You have the opportunity to describe how you like to conduct classes, mentor students, develop resources, or grade performance. This is where you can provide details on what instructional strategies you use on a day-to-day basis. It is in this section that teachers can display their creativity, enthusiasm, and wisdom. They can describe how the blinded full-body massage improves student’s assessment skills or how yoga positions help students learn actions of muscles and differentiate types of muscle contractions. The implementation of your philosophy should tie in to your stated goals for learning. You can describe your own energy level, the qualities you try to exhibit as a model and coach, and the environment you try to establish in the classroom.

YOUR STRATEGIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

Any profession a person chooses involves personal growth. Massage therapists are often required to take continuing education classes to maintain their licenses. But beyond that, there is an innate drive as human beings to strive to be more and to become better at what we do. This sense of growth feeds both the spiritual and mental parts of ourselves. Students can feel stymied at times—like the instructor is just rehashing the same old stuff. Students as individuals or in a group can sense when a teacher is stuck in a rut and is not working to improve. If you have found a system that works, work to make it better. This improvement can come in the form of training in teaching, in professional techniques, or in personal counseling and training. If a teacher finds a way to deepen his or her own sense of personal value and integrity, it will be reflected in his or her teaching and relationships to students and learning.

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY

Your personal educational philosophy is something that you will want to be able to refer to from time to time. It is useful to have handy to share with your Director of Education or school owner. It may help you if you look to teach at another institution. It can be invaluable to you when times get rough. Teaching is not an easy profession. Teachers, and this may be especially true of teachers in the healing arts, are caught between the public and
the personal. To be a good teacher, you must bring your true and integrated self into the classroom. Teaching can be scary. Students demand authenticity. Only by standing and speaking from a place that is true to yourself can you meet them and create the community of a classroom together. Parker Palmer wrote, “The teacher within is not the voice of conscience but of identity and integrity. It speaks not of what ought to be but of what is real for us, what is true . . . . The teacher within stands guard at the gate of selfhood, warding off whatever insults our integrity and welcoming whatever affirms it.” Your philosophy of teaching is a tool for understanding your inner teacher; here are some tips for getting started:

- Keep it short: Remember that this statement is a sort of journal, a reflection of your thoughts and feelings about teaching. The goal is to be specific and vivid enough to say something important about your teaching, something that will be inspirational to you, yet clear to a colleague who might be reading it.
- Be concrete: Using fancy language or adopting abstractions only makes the statement more distant. In developing your ideas and connecting with your thoughts, use your own experiences. Be concrete in using details about your life.

**BOX 1-2**

**Sample Personal Educational Philosophy**

I have always seen myself as a teacher. Teaching has not always been my job, certainly not my job title, but I have always felt it to be part of who I am. I have taught others at work as well as in the classroom. I have often been called on to take the lead in explaining a new system or procedure. What helps me be a good teacher is that I understand and am conscious of how I learn something new. This is a great tool for me to use in explaining complex new concepts to others. In fact-based subjects such as anatomy, I believe that people learn not through memorizing names but by understanding concepts and processes. Until I was called on to explain the anatomy of the nervous system to others, I never really understood it. Then I was able to recall terms as well as predict outcomes.

Teaching helps people learn if the teaching can demonstrate how to go from A to B and then elicit from the student what it means to go from A to B. Obviously a student cannot make it up. I am there to explain what it is we are touching, reading, and seeing. Then good teaching has to stand back and let the student follow the process. This lines up with how I like to learn and how I learn best. I see and hear the material, then I can put the material together again on my own. This can take the form of applying the concepts to a new situation, so explaining the process to a person new to the material. My favorite teachers have been those who have allowed me to create with the raw material that they presented.

I feel that students will have achieved in my class when they talk with confidence about the subject and when they can take the subject and apply it elsewhere. With anatomy and physiology, I want my students to take the concepts and be engaging them in their bodywork, or I want them to take the concepts and create a way to explain it to others.

I use my teaching philosophy in the classroom by asking the students to be teachers in small and large groups. I will often ask the students to present review material to the class. Also, I use a technique where I stop class and ask the students to talk to one another about what we have just learned. Can they put it into their own words? Can they have a dialogue and come to an agreement about the material?

My own personal growth involves pushing myself to be more creative in the classroom. It is sometimes difficult to engage students in a didactic class when they are expecting to be passive recipients. It stretches me to ask them to step out of their usual role. It makes me step out of mine. I use reflective, quiet meditative practices to come up with new exercises and activities for engaging students in class.
Teaching Massage

■ Be discipline specific: Many teachers in bodywork have the challenge of teaching more than one subject. This may lead to differences in teaching philosophy from class to class. Is your intent and philosophy for teaching massage the same as for teaching the anatomy of the nervous system? Depending on the discipline, some elements of your philosophy may change. Be specific about this.

■ Reflect: Reflect carefully on your experience as a student and instructor. Think about your values and about those teachers who influenced you the most, whom you most admire, and use those thoughts and feelings. Be sure to be speaking with your own voice, which comes from contemplation of your values and motivations.

■ Make it unique to you: Your statement of teaching philosophy is a rare opportunity to express something about who you are for yourself, first and foremost, and for others. The uniqueness comes from you connecting with and sharing your truth based on your experience with teaching and learning.

■ Consider whether others will see it: Ultimately, your educational philosophy is a reflective tool for you to use. You might also use it when looking for a position. Sometimes teacher training systems require a written statement of education philosophy, or you may show it to your supervisor at a performance review. The work should be professional yet simple. It should be profound in that it contains elements of your true self, yet it should be accessible to those who do not know you.

ASK YOURSELF:

What Is My Personal Education Philosophy?

Ask yourself the set of questions below and jot down your responses in a journal. Use these initial notes to refine your personal educational philosophy.

■ How do you believe people learn?
■ What do you believe about teaching?
■ What do you believe about learning? Why?
■ How is that played out in your classroom?
■ How do you believe teaching facilitates learning?
■ How does student identity and background influence your teaching?
■ What is your favorite way of learning the subject?
■ Who was your favorite teacher? Growing up? In massage school?
■ What are the goals you have for your students?
■ What constitutes success in your classroom?
■ How do you know when a student “gets it”?
■ What specific things do you do in your classroom to facilitate learning?
■ When are you most comfortable in your classroom?
■ When are you most uncomfortable in your classroom?
■ What are your strategies for personal growth?
■ What do you love to do?
■ How often do you do what you love?

SECTION C

Self-Evaluation for Instructor Growth

Adapted from ABMP’s Massage Educator Newsletter, Fall 2007

If asked, most massage teachers could probably recite three things they do very well in the classroom and three things they struggle with in the classroom. Teaching is a lifelong learning opportunity, and massage students are a dynamic group of learners who require constant adjustments and adaptations.

Evaluation is integral to learning and leads to greater self-awareness, which promotes good ethics, enhanced leadership behaviors, better communication skills, and the development of innovative teaching methods. Most often, administrators evaluate teachers, and evaluations are sometimes tied to pay increases. It is likely that these brief episodes do not illuminate the teacher’s true strengths and weaknesses. Some administrators are actively involved with the development of teachers at their campuses and support teachers in setting self-improvement goals around teaching skills. Administrators must then follow up to give feedback on the accomplishment of new skills. Often, administrators are simply too busy, and effective plans for growing teacher skills are placed on the bottom
of the priority list. How can a teacher develop and improve his or her classroom techniques without regular and specific feedback? The answer, of course, is a personal plan for goal setting and regular self-evaluation.

## TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE SKILLS

Teaching skills are sometimes tangible and sometimes intangible, and different teachers can arrive at the same positive end point, with the same material, in very different ways. It is not too difficult to determine the components of a good lecture. We know for example that the instructor’s voice should be easy to understand, should use a variety of visual aids, should have mastery over the material, demonstrate enthusiasm for the topic, get students involved when appropriate, and use real-life examples whenever possible to illuminate core concepts. Still, some elusive instructor qualities are impossible to really capture. It is easy to list “use of humor” as a skill but how do you quantify and qualify humor? Some teachers are very funny, and students laugh and joke throughout classes, but is every joke, or the amount of time spent joking, appropriate? When does the use of humor detract from the productivity of the class? This also raises another question. How does an instructor improve his or her use of humor? Is it as simple as looking up jokes on the Internet and opening each class with a joke? Perhaps it requires a deep shift in mindset and personality in which a disgruntled teacher must work on setting a positive tone in the classroom. Probably, use of humor should remain on a self-evaluation form, but it requires the teacher to contemplate the question from many angles. It would be too easy for the funny teacher to mark it off as “handled” and fail to analyze how humor supports the learning objectives in his classes. So, for each teacher, each skill set means something slightly different, and the tangibles and intangibles must be carefully considered.

## GOAL SETTING AND SELF-EVALUATION

The self-evaluation form provided here is a usable template for planning teacher self-improvement (Table 1-1). Before completing the form, think over the past academic year and write two stories about your classes. The first story should describe one class or learning activity that really worked. Students were invested and satisfied the learning objectives; you felt innovative and exhilarated by the class session. The second story should describe one class or learning activity that did not work. Students were withdrawn and bored, and they did not achieve the learning objectives; you felt depressed and exhausted at the end of the class. Recalling these experiences will help you tap into your strengths and weaknesses and answer all of the questions on the self-evaluation honestly. Now, complete the self-evaluation form (see Table 1-1) and review it. Set two teaching goals for the next month and describe the tasks you plan to undertake to achieve the goals. Give yourself deadlines and make the tasks as specific as possible. For example, if one of your goals is to improve your ability to facilitate classroom discussions, your tasks might include:

- Locate and purchase a book on how to facilitate groups by November 1.
- Plan and research three group discussion topics related to class content by November 15.
- Sit in and observe Debby as she facilitates a class discussion and ask her for tips by November 15.
- Ask Debby to sit in on one of my classroom discussions and give me honest feedback by November 20.
# TABLE 1-1 Instructor Growth Form: Questions for Self-Appraisal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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**Directions**: Tick the appropriate box to identify areas that need your attention. Use the question at the end of each section to reflect on these areas and set appropriate goals.

1. This area is a strength of mine.
2. Some attention is required in this area but it is not a high priority.
3. This area requires my attention but I can develop these skills on my own.
4. I urgently need help in this area from a peer or supervisor.

## Knowledge of Subject and Organization of Subject Delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My knowledge of the subject is up to date and relevant.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have mastery of the subject matter.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to respond readily to questions from students on the subject matter.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use correct grammar and technical terminology while teaching.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material is organized and presented systematically and sequentially.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I carefully plan lectures, demonstrations, discussions, and other classroom activities.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use real-life examples to illuminate core learning concepts and increase subject matter relevance for students.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I deliver the material at a depth, breadth, and pace that is appropriate for the level of my student groups.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other:

As I look at my responses to this section, I would like to work on:

## Instructional Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I use teaching strategies that help guide students to be independent learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I alert students to the intended learning objectives for the class at the beginning of class and check that learning outcomes have been met in a review at the end of the class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use teaching strategies that challenge and extend students’ assumptions, competence, and understandings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I encourage cooperation and active learning by asking students to evaluate one another’s work, work together on tasks, and explain difficult ideas to one another.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I give my students real-life situations to analyze and use simulations, role-playing, research, and independent study in my classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I encourage students to challenge my ideas, the ideas of other students, or those presented in textbooks or course materials. Class discussions are lively and purposeful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I help students set challenging goals for their own learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I help students identify their learning styles, and I use methods to address the needs of each learning style in every class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I deliver well-planned lectures, illustrated with visual aids.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I regularly link new concepts back to old concepts or to content taught in other classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use planned repetition strategies and regularly check that students understand material before moving on to new material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I provide appropriate supervision during practical activities and give students in-the-moment feedback on practical skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use instructional methods that require active participation and responses from students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning experiences are diversified, and I regularly utilize a variety of methods, including lecture, demonstration, group discussion, independent study projects, and hands-on work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I make use of equipment and supplies during class time, including visual aids, overhead or PowerPoint projectors, models, video, diagrams, and the whiteboard.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
### TABLE 1-1 Instructor Growth Form: Questions for Self-Appraisal (Continued)

**General Classroom Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes start on time and end on time. Class time is used effectively to promote learning of the subject matter.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I make clear my expectations orally and in writing at the beginning of the course and periodically during the course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand and uphold the policies and classroom rules of the school where I work (e.g., no eating in the classroom, attention to dress code, attendance policy).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am attentive to cultural diversity, generational diversity, and curtail sexual innuendo in my classes. I regularly raise awareness of ways to desexualize massage in my classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I discourage snide remarks, sarcasm, kidding, and other classroom behaviors that may embarrass some students or promote an unsafe learning environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I set a positive tone for the class and handle classroom tensions in a timely manner.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Feedback to and from Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have an efficient system to provide feedback to students on their progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I prepare practical exercises that give students immediate feedback on particular skills and allow them to adjust techniques right away.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I return examinations and homework assignments promptly and take the time to give written feedback on progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I give students detailed feedback on their work early in the term.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I follow up with students who are not making adequate progress in class and form learning contracts to help them get back on track.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I positively reinforce positive behaviors and progress in students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I ask for and graciously receive feedback from students on class structure and progress.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Student Relations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students perceive me as being available to discuss their concerns about their progress and difficulties with course content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know my students by name by the end of the first 2 weeks of the term.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I meet with students who fall behind to discuss their study habits, schedules, and other commitments. I help students brainstorm workable solutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I periodically hold a class discussion to determine how students are feeling about class content and school in general.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I encourage students to speak up when they do not understand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students perceive me as available and helpful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I listen to students carefully when they ask a question or offer a comment. I treat all students respectfully and fairly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel confident in my ability to understand and capitalize on classroom dynamics. I can balance various student personalities, work with students at many different levels, and be respectful of different cultural identities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I look out at my students they appear attentive, enthusiastic, interested, and focused. I know from their attitudes that I am able to engage them in class content.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 1-1  Instructor Growth Form: Questions for Self-Appraisal (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal Teacher Characteristics:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would describe myself as:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair to all students and not partial to some students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsive to student needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding of students commitments and conflicts while upholding the highest standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stimulating: I encourage students to think outside the box, to offer opinions, to participate, and to get excited.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible and reliable: I do not evade students in situations where I fail to return homework or examinations in a timely manner. I own my mistakes and model accountability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confident: I know my stuff, and it shows. I still allow room for student opinions and exploration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptable: I always have a plan but can go with the flow if it will improve student comprehension.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated: I regularly link class content to other classes, real-life experiences, and professional life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic: I enjoy teaching, I enjoy the students, I enjoy the class content, and I share this enthusiasm with my students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broad: I welcome other viewpoints and make room for student-generated information in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aware: I look for and capitalize on “teachable” moments. I look for and capitalize on “aha” moments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humorous: I use humor appropriately in the classroom to facilitate active learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocal quality: My students can hear me easily during lectures, demonstrations, and discussions. I use proper grammar and terminology.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimistic: I regularly state high expectations to the students and expect students to meet challenges. I reinforce for students that I believe in their abilities and capacity to be successful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>As I look at my responses to this section, I would like to work on:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review: As I review this self-evaluation, the goals I would like to work on this month and the tasks I will undertake to meet these goals are:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month End Evaluation: Describe the new skills you learned and assess your ability to meet your goals:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

At the end of the month, evaluate your improvement and set two new goals. As noted in the example, asking peers to provide feedback is a useful way to get objective input without involving an administrator. Speaking of administrators, retain a copy of your self-evaluation forms and goal assessments. Present these to your administrator during your next review. These documents can help him or her “fine tune” the feedback they give you during a formal evaluation. These forms also demonstrate your willingness and commitment to improve your teaching skills. Finally, do not forget to celebrate when you make strides and achieve your goals. Although the self-evaluation process can feel challenging at times, it places the teacher back in the role of learner and inspires new and novel advances in lesson planning.
Chapter 1 ■ You the Teacher

SECTION D

Professional Boundaries and Ethics for Instructors

Nina McIntosh

No matter what you are teaching, your skills in modeling and conveying professional boundaries and ethics are crucial to your success as a teacher. As an instructor, you are helping your students with two important tasks: (1) taking in new information and learning new skills and (2) learning what it means to be both a massage therapist and a professional, incorporating these new roles into their self-image. For the first task, your students need safe boundaries in the classroom to take risks and learn effectively. For the second task, they need good role models to demonstrate appropriate professional boundaries, solid ethics, and positive ideas of what it is to be a massage therapist.

The term “boundary” is used here to mean an invisible border that surrounds the professional relationship between instructor and students. It encompasses what should be part of that relationship and defines what needs to stay outside of it. This boundary does not separate students from teacher; it brings them together in appropriate, healthy ways.

For students, learning how to create safe boundaries can be just as important for future success, if not more so, than learning the names of the muscles. In the professional world, the way graduates relate to clients and their ability to put a client at ease will “make or break” their practices. When clients complain, they are less likely to criticize a massage therapist’s effleurage or lack of knowledge of anatomy than to make comments such as, “She talked about herself too much,” or “He flirted with me.” Being able to create safe spaces for clients is the key to healthy practices.

It is important to make the distinction between unethical teacher behavior and unprofessional teacher behavior. Not all behavior that is outside of the appropriate teacher-student boundaries is unethical; some is merely unprofessional. For instance, if you talk too much about your private life during a class, you are probably being unprofessional, but rarely unethical, by stepping out of your role.

With an ethical violation, there is more harm to the student. Being unethical often involves taking advantage of the student and of the power difference between the two of you (the extra affection or power the student gives you). In short, an ethical violation usually involves your personal gratification at the expense of a student, such as gossiping about a student or sexually harassing a student. To help you “fine tune” your own principles of professional boundaries and ethics, this discussion will begin with ideas about your role as a model for students. It will explore the dynamics of the instructor-student relationship and offer guidelines and suggestions.

YOUR ROLE AS A MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES

In an exploration of the teacher’s role as a model of professional ethics and boundaries, it is important to teach by example, assess whether “what comes naturally” is problematic, understand how to take on a role, and look at the need for discussion.

Teaching By Example

All instructors, by their examples, are educating students about what it means to be a professional massage therapist and are thereby teaching ethics and boundaries. One colleague’s report demonstrates the importance of setting a good example: “When I was in school, some of my teachers were careless about student confidentiality. One of them befriended several students and would even gossip with her new friends about other students. I wasn’t sure if
confidentiality was an important part of being professional. However, when I started practicing, I learned that clients don’t trust you if you’re not careful with their privacy.” Even if your school offers a class on ethics and boundaries, students look to their teachers to see how ethical principles are carried out in the real world.

The Problem With Doing What Comes Naturally

If you are like most massage instructors, you have probably had little education in the importance of creating safe boundaries with students. There has been little guidance for teachers in this area. Many instructors have pieced together their own codes of conduct, leading to misconceptions about effective teacher behavior. Sometimes instructors think they should be entirely natural, open, and honest with students. Although it is good to be natural in some ways, especially when it means being warm and friendly, making good judgments as a teacher does not always come naturally. For instance, self-revelation is not usually helpful. Here is an example: “When I first started teaching, I thought I should always be honest with my students, but sometimes I said too much. For instance, I once vented to my class about being unhappy with the salary the school paid me. Later, I realized that knowing about my dissatisfaction could dampen my students’ enthusiasm for my class, make them doubt their choice of schools, or even make them want to take care of me. I’ve learned not to use my students to air my personal frustrations.”

We all have blind spots that interfere with our effectiveness in our work. Without clear guidelines, decisions about boundaries and ethics are likely to be based on a hodgepodge of conflicting influences or ideas about what makes good teaching. Unless you are unusually self-aware, your personal history can interfere with making wise choices. If, for instance, your own boundaries were violated as a child physically, emotionally, or sexually, then what seems natural to you may be off balance. Even if we have had no significant childhood trauma, we all have rough patches in our behavior where we do things that do not make sense. In addition, we all have our own prejudices and biases. Judgment can be clouded by ego and the human need to be in control, right, or important. We may imitate mentors and teachers who themselves were not taught the need for good boundaries.

Taking on a Role

As an instructor you assume a role and a responsibility that is different from the role of friend or colleague. Your task is to help each student become the best massage therapist he or she can be. You are not there to be that student’s best friend or buddy. In staying in your role as teacher, you are not being dishonest or putting on airs, you are just appropriately keeping the focus on your job.

The Need for Discussion

Students cannot completely learn effective boundaries by learning dry facts; professional boundaries have to become part of their belief system through good role models, discussions, and applications to real-life situations. The same is true for teachers. To know how to navigate the ins and outs of professional boundaries and ethics in your classroom, you need to discuss your choices with other teachers and with school administrators. It helps if others at your school are in agreement with you about basic ethical behavior.

Even if there is general agreement or clear policies, there are still many gray areas in figuring out the best response in many situations. To clarify how to handle the gray areas, it helps if you can find others with whom you can freely debate and discuss these issues.

DYNAMICS OF THE INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

If you understand the underlying dynamics of an instructor’s relationship with students, then you will understand why it is necessary to have safe boundaries to protect both you and your students. Both of you are vulnerable and need the protection of clear boundaries. Another factor is the innate power difference between instructor and student.
The Vulnerability of Students

No matter what their age, economic status, or success in life, your students, by virtue of being in a new environment and learning a new profession, are insecure. They are in transition, out of their element, and on shakier ground than they normally are. They may be more uncomfortable than you realize. The 40-year-old woman who looks like a confident adult to you may be feeling overwhelmed in an unfamiliar world that is a far cry from her previous line of work. The 23-year-old man whom you see as a young entrepreneur with a bright future may be feeling anxious about his first attempt at learning a useful trade. Students are often anxious about the intimacy of the work, embarrassed by the need to be unclothed in a room full of strangers, or afraid of the responsibility of working with a stranger in such a delicate situation. Moreover, the experience of being massaged or having bodywork day after day may leave students emotionally open and raw. Feelings of anger, grief, or fear may come up. Although it is not your job to work with those issues, you can provide clear expectations and a safe, consistent structure to help students withstand these ups and downs.

The Vulnerability of the Instructor

Instructors have their own vulnerabilities that are helped by clear boundaries. If your previous experience has been as a massage therapist, not as a teacher, you may be surprised or even confused by the different roles. As an instructor, you are required to evaluate students and keep order in a classroom. This is quite different from the role of the massage therapist, which is often comforting and nurturing. Even though setting limits is ultimately good for students, you may not always be comfortable in the role of holding people accountable. To add to your discomfort, some students may be older and more accomplished than you are. Some may challenge your authority. They may ignore what you say, be hostile, flirt, or treat you like a buddy. Being clear within yourself and with the class about what the boundaries are can help you meet these challenges.

Another obvious difference between the role of massage therapist and that of instructor is that, rather than creating a boundary for one person, instructors are holding a space for a group of people. When we make a boundary mistake, and making small ones is very common, it affects the entire classroom. Several people, not just one person, may respond in different ways. For example, if you allow a student to show up late consistently without comment or warning, you have to deal with that student wanting to test you in other ways, and with testing from the rest of the students as well. By making too many boundary mistakes in a classroom, you can quickly lose control of the class. If you try to make up boundaries as you go along, it can take time and energy that you need for the important task of helping students learn. Giving some thought beforehand to how to handle different situations can make the job easier for you.

The Power Difference

Whether or not you want to be one, you are an authority figure for your students, and there is a power difference. Students automatically see you as an authority figure or a parent figure and give more weight to your words and actions than they would if you were someone they met at a social event. It does not matter if a student is 20 years older than you and has been more successful in the world. It does not matter how friendly you may be. You are still the one standing in front of the class, in charge, and ultimately deciding whether a student has passed your class. Depending on their own history, students react differently to your authority. Everyone has memories and feelings from as far back as grade school about “the teacher.” You may notice that some students react to you with hostility, especially in the beginning before they know you, whereas others seem to think you can do no wrong. Students project onto you feelings that are related to their past relationships with authority or parental figures.

Another sign of the power difference is that students usually have a difficult time confronting teachers. They feel that they are captive audiences in the classroom where they must sit passively and endure. If they met you at a party, they could excuse themselves and walk away if you became boring, or they would be free to argue with you if you said something they disagreed with. Yet students are often reluctant to complain in a classroom.
If you recognize the power difference, it is easier to understand that student feelings are usually more about your role than about you as a person. You will probably never know why some students react to you as they do, and it is not your job to dig into their pasts. Your job is to avoid taking either their anger or their adoration personally and to do your best to respond evenly and professionally to whatever comes your way. Some teachers do not understand that when a student idolizes them or has a crush, it is rarely the same as a grown-up attraction and does not mean that the student wants a sexual relationship. (Even if they seem to, it is a serious violation of students’ trust to take advantage of those feelings.)

Teachers may also react to their authority role by always wanting to be right in the classroom or being unwilling to admit that they have made a mistake. Remember that taking on the role of teacher does not mean you have to know everything. Your job is to provide guidance and a safe space for students to find their own answers.

GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES AND ETHICS

Although these guidelines are focused on the individual instructor, the broader picture cannot be ignored. You are functioning within and affected by the larger school setting and by the school’s requirements for professional behavior. Instructors’ influence on the wider school policy varies. Some of you are part of a smaller school and may be both an instructor and an administrator and can easily set policy for the entire school. Others may work with a school that allows an instructor to set his or her own policy. Still others may work in a large school where policy is set by the administration. Some of these guidelines, such as avoiding sexual or social relationships with students, can be used by any individual instructor regardless of school policy, whereas others might need to be implemented by the administration. For the sake of being comprehensive, all guidelines are being included. You are invited to implement what is relevant and valuable for your role as either instructor or administrator.

Sexual Issues: Ethical Considerations, Professional Concerns

Sexual violations are the most potentially damaging. They can cause emotional harm to the student and set a disastrous example for that student (and any student who knows of the behavior). Sexual violations are also by far the most potentially damaging to the reputation of the instructor, the school, and the profession.

Rumors of sexual impropriety travel faster and stay in peoples’ memories longer than any other breach of ethics. An instructor who is sexually inappropriate quickly loses the respect of his students (and is likely to lose his job). A school that allows instructors to have romantic or sexual relationships with current students is not considered a safe and reputable school. The reputation of the profession, too, is at stake. The most persistent misconception by the public about massage therapy is that massage therapists offer sexual services. It is a painful, embarrassing, and harmful misconception. To counteract it, instructors need to be especially careful in how they set up sexual boundaries with students.

Sexual Issues: Guidelines

Do not have sexual relationships with students or sexualize a relationship with a student in any way. Instructors should take care with dating even former students. For one thing, the former student may still be under the influence of a crush, so the teacher may still be taking advantage of him or her. For another, if an instructor is known to have a pattern of having sexual relationships with former students, current students may wonder if they are being “checked out” as a possible future sexual partner by that teacher.

Early on, tell students the ground rules for what is appropriate in class, in their relationships with one another, and with you. Students should be reassured that it is unethical for instructors and administrators to have sexual relationships with current students unless a prior such relationship exists. Remember that students are coming into an unfamiliar situation in which adults are in close contact, putting their hands on one another, in various stages of undress. For anyone coming into such a situation, the need for clear
structure from the beginning is obvious. It is especially true when you consider that a
good percentage of people in the general population and, therefore, in your classroom,
carry a history of having been physically or sexually abused.

Explain to students that flirting, sexual innuendo, suggestive remarks, offensive jokes,
or any comments about the appearance of someone’s body are not appropriate. Because of
the power difference, teachers should avoid making any kind of sexually oriented com-
ments or jokes.

Instructors need to be watchful that they do not give subtle signs of sexual interest in
students, such as spending more time helping the more attractive students in the class.
The rest of the class always notices such favoritism. It can create resentment and cast
doubt on the teacher’s integrity.

Help students understand safe touch (in all classes, not just the hands-on ones).
Students need to learn to respect other people’s physical boundaries and feel safe from
intrusive touch. Although the intentions behind wanting to give a classmate a sponta-
neous shoulder rub are usually good, even a well-meaning mini-massage is not always
welcome. Ask students to take care not to begin working on another student (or a person
outside the school, for that matter) without asking permission first. During hands-on prac-
tice, students should be taught to ask before doing any kind of maneuver that could be jar-
ing to the other student, such as adjusting the underwear of the person they are working
with or working close to the genitals.

Ask students not to have sexual relations with one another while they are in school
unless a prior relationship exists. This can help provide a safe environment for students
during their time in school and avoid an atmosphere in which the work could be sexual-
ized. Students need to be cautioned that, even with a prior relationship, intimate displays
of affection are not appropriate in any school atmosphere. For instance, a quick, friendly
hug does not usually make other people uncomfortable, but seductive touching or caress-
ing belongs in private. A massage therapist tells this story: “When I was in school we were
told that while we were there, we weren’t allowed to date other students, let alone the
staff. The instructor said it was best to keep that kind of tension out of the classroom. This
rule worked really well to keep awkwardness and drama among our non-clothed bodies
to a minimum. And it also started us with the standard that you don’t touch someone in
a sexual manner during a massage. Of course, we bring this to our professional lives now.”

Ensure that the school has policies in place to protect students from clinic clients who
make sexually inappropriate remarks or behave inappropriately. When working with the
public, students should not have to work with a client who is sexually inappropriate. Such
a client needs to be banned from the clinic. Although this sounds obvious, there have been
instances in which school owners or instructors have shrugged off inappropriate behavior
by a frequent customer.

How you model ethical behavior with touch and sexual issues in your classroom will
(1) make a difference in the level of safety your students’ experience and (2) determine
whether they feel free to settle in and do their work. Giving them firm guidelines can help
them learn the kind of discipline, self-respect, and respect for others that they need to take
into their practices.

Dual Relationships: Ethical Considerations,
Professional Concerns

Having a dual relationship with a student means having a relationship with him or her
outside that of instructor-student. Some common situations involving dual relationships
are initiated by the instructor, such as socializing with students, becoming friends with
students, taking on a student as a massage client, trading massage or some other service
with a student, testing a student by having him work on an instructor, or involving a stu-
dent in another kind of business arrangement. A dual relationship also occurs when a cur-
tent friend, acquaintance, or business associate becomes a student. Sexual relationships
are, of course, dual relationships and have already been discussed.

The problem with dual relationships is that you have to switch roles, and that can
cause confusion. For instance, it is appropriate to talk to friends about your personal prob-
lems but not appropriate to burden students with them or to put students in the position
of taking care of you. It can be disillusioning for students, and they can lose respect for you as a teacher. Moreover, the normal give and take of a friendship can be too much for a student. If you make insensitive remarks to a friend, they can usually deal with it, but it can be much tougher on a student for you to be callous or critical. Also, being friends with a student can blur your professional judgment when you need to hold that student accountable for poor performance or arriving late to class.

Perhaps the most important reason for not having a dual relationship with a student is that it is disruptive to the entire class. The possible problems are many as other students can become jealous, can resent your favoritism, or can mistrust decisions that you make about your new friend (to name a few).

**Dual Relationships: Guidelines**

Be clear from the first invitation that you do not socialize with students, unless it is a class activity. Making a class announcement about this restriction would be awkward, but you can let students know as it comes up on an individual basis. For example, if a student asks you to join him or her for coffee after school, clarify whether it is about school business. If it is, it is better to meet at the school to keep the boundaries clear. If the intention is social, you can let the student know that it is your policy not to socialize with students. If you end up in a social situation with students, stay in your role and do not talk about your personal life or reveal the more personal side of yourself.

Avoid becoming friends with a student or students. Students need you to be their teacher, not their pal. They are paying good money for an education and need your help to get it. Here is what one practitioner said: “When I was in school, a few female teachers became too close (in my eyes) to the students by becoming friends and even attending a party that one of my classmates held. There was no separation of teacher and student relationship and that caused troubles in the classroom. Once they did things outside of school, the teacher lost control of the class, which inconvenienced all who attended. I found it highly unprofessional and very annoying because I was attempting to get a serious education.” Most teachers have learned they cannot be “one of the gang” and also keep the respect of the class.

It is not a good idea for a student to be your client. Certainly you do not want to use your power as a teacher to invite or pressure students to become clients. As mentioned before, students cannot easily refuse a teacher. That is an abuse of your power and an ethical violation.

If a student is also your client, the main concern is that there are several ways the client-therapist relationship could interfere with the student-teacher one. Having a student as a client requires you to step into a nurturing role that can interfere with your role as instructor. You can lose your objectivity about that student in the classroom or become too involved in his or her physical problems to maintain your perspective as a teacher. Think, too, of what would happen if the student does not like your work. Suppose you make a mistake and the student feels worse after the session; how will that affect the classroom relationship? Also, when a student is your client, the other students may experience it as a favored relationship. For those reasons, it is also suggested that if a client enrolls in your school, it is best if you discontinue the client-therapist relationship while he or she is a student, explaining to the client that you need to have a more objective relationship with him as a student.

Avoid engaging students in other business activities, such as having a student work as a receptionist in a spa that you own. Choosing some students, but not others, for a business deal is not fair to those who are excluded and will hurt class morale. Using your role to influence students to buy anything from you, such as vitamins or magnets, is an abuse of your power. Students do not feel free to say “no” to a teacher.

Avoid trading massage with students. For one, it implies that you are equal colleagues, which you are not. Students should not be put in the confusing position of taking care of your personal needs or seeing the vulnerable side of you. Unless you are actively instructing the student (and even then, there are considerations discussed below), it is a bad idea to step so far out of your role as teacher.

Reconsider the idea of having a student give you a massage as part of an examination. Evaluating students by receiving a massage from them has been a practice in schools for a long time, the rationale being that it is the best way for the teacher to know the quality
of a student’s work. Many teachers believe that they can give students good feedback about such things as pressure or quality of touch, or they find it useful in teaching certain techniques, such as stretching, because if another student were the client, he might not know how to give educated responses. However, many teachers feel that they can give adequate feedback by watching a student work with someone else, and some schools have abandoned the practice, believing that the minuses outweigh the pluses. Some believe that being a student’s client detracts from the instructor’s dignity and authority, is potentially too embarrassing to both them and their students, or is a source of possible misunderstandings. For instance, if a student has a crush on the teacher or thinks, either correctly or not, that a teacher has a romantic interest in him or her, this level of intimacy can be an overwhelming and confusing amount of stimulation for the student. The maturity level of the students and your own comfort with the practice or with this particular group of students are also factors. Allowing students to work with you is a practice that should be carefully evaluated rather than assumed always to be the best choice.

Confidentiality: Ethical Considerations, Professional Concerns

Communicate your student confidentiality policy and keep student information confidential. School policies about confidentiality should include an assurance that instructors will not share student information with anyone outside the school without permission. Students should be apprised of the types of information that instructors may need to discuss with other staff members and that such conversations will be private. Students need to know that confidentiality is the cornerstone of professionalism, and they need to experience having their privacy honored. Violating confidentiality is a serious breach of ethics. Keep records and confidential papers in a locked cabinet where they are not accessible to unauthorized personnel.

Instructor Scope of Practice: Ethical Considerations, Professional Concerns

Staying inside the scope of practice means sticking with what we have been adequately trained to do, what we have permission from the student to do, and what we have been hired to do. A common mistake is for an instructor to take on the role of counselor or psychotherapist. Even if you have the training and experience to deal with emotional issues, it is not appropriate to work with them in an educational setting. Even with the best of intentions, trying to “analyze” a student or delve into his or her psychological background, takes you out of your role as an instructor, and it takes the student out of the role as an adult learning a profession.

That said, how do you distinguish between being sympathetic and acting inappropriately? A student on the table begins to cry and you want to help. You can be understanding and acknowledge that it is not unusual for feelings to arise. However, you want to avoid encouraging the student to explore his or her feelings at that time. You do not want to “fan the flames” of an emotional release. Students who have been emotionally “torn open” by an unskilled teacher can be, at the least, embarrassed and at worst, retraumatized. Working with traumatic memories takes a skilled therapist working in a safe therapeutic environment, not an educational environment.

Students are not trained or prepared to hold safe space for psychological work. It is not appropriate to ask other students to participate, even by silently observing. Because they are being massaged frequently, students’ defenses are “down” and emotions can come up quickly, surprising or even scaring them. Old traumatic memories can emerge. This reaction can happen for both the student on the table and others who are watching. Instead, make an understanding statement, such as, “I see that the work brought up some sadness.” Then help the student come back into his role, “Would you like some water or do you need to take a break?” Later, you can take the student aside for a check. If a student seems overwhelmed by feelings or if you believe that his or her psychological issues might interfere with his or her learning, then you might want to refer that student to a therapist.
If you have cause to refer a student to explore his or her feelings further for reasons related to his or her future as a massage therapist, it is best to refer to a therapist who is not a member of the school staff, unless you have qualified therapists on staff who are not also instructors. You can let the student choose a therapist who is not connected to the school or make a referral to a professional in the local area.

In teaching, stay within your area of expertise and within what your contract is with the school. If you have recently attended a weekend workshop and been exposed to the latest exciting technique, you could be tempted to show it off to your students. It is a good idea to resist that temptation and stay with what you are thoroughly trained to do and what you have agreed to teach. Students need to be comfortable with the basics first; it is confusing to bring in advanced material that is irrelevant to curriculum learning objectives.

Consistency and Fairness: Ethical Considerations, Professional Concerns

Being professional involves being consistent and objective with your students. Consistency creates the framework of your class and includes logistics such as starting and ending on time. Students should be held to equal standards for attendance and performance. Exceptions can be made to policies about deadlines, tardiness, and so forth if you have well-thought-out objective reasons for changing your policy. Avoid making exceptions in requirements without good reason. Determining policies and the circumstances under which you will make exceptions beforehand helps you avoid being swayed in the moment by personal issues with a student or being manipulated by a student.

Use clear grading guidelines. When you know a student is trying hard but still struggling, for instance, it is natural to want to give him or her a break on grading and not apply the same standards you would apply to others. To avoid grading unfairly, set up clearly defined criteria for competence ahead of time. For evaluating hands-on techniques, many teachers use rubrics, which spell out the step-by-step process of each technique and how to evaluate adequate completion.

Personal Information and Opinions: Ethical Considerations, Professional Concerns

Within reason, keep your private information and problems out of the classroom. When you interact with students, ideally all your words and actions will be student centered, focused on helping them become skilled and
compassionate massage therapists. Of course, teachers do not ever achieve perfection, but they can notice when they are wandering into personal territory and then bring their attention back to the needs of students. Occasionally, it can be useful to tell students about past experiences if they are work related and can help you make a point that will be useful. For instance, you might let them know that you too faced fears of failing when you graduated but that time and experience helped you overcome those fears. Let them know about past dilemmas that you solved, but do not burden them with your current problems.

Avoid sharing your opinions about outside subjects, especially controversial ones, such as politics or religion/spirituality. Remember that students are not as free to disagree with you as a colleague would be and that they are more easily influenced by you. Do not take advantage of your captive audience.

Be respectful when you speak of other staff or outside practitioners. It is unethical to malign another professional in public or to a client. However, in a classroom setting, in which your influence on listeners is heightened, it is particularly offensive. Never imply that your skills are greater than those of another instructor or practitioner. Such a claim is unethical and reflects more poorly on you than on the other professional.

Use differences among instructors as a learning experience. Instructors are bound to have different methods of teaching, different beliefs, and different ways of handling boundaries. If, for instance, a student asked you why you do not attend student parties, whereas another instructor does, you could use it as a way of developing critical thinking and making good judgments. For example, you can invite students to weigh the possible positive and negative consequences of this kind of dual relationship. Ask if they are comfortable with what the instructor is doing. Take care not to malign the other instructor, but help students understand the considerations involved.

You need to provide clear, safe boundaries in the classroom and in the instructor-student relationship for a number of reasons. By your example, you are teaching students how to be professional massage therapists. Your behavior toward students and the professional and ethical standards you apply in your classroom speak louder than any textbook.

**RESOURCES**


Cantor JA. *Delivering Instruction to Adult Learners.* Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Wall & Emerson; 2001.


