



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## WEAPONS OF MASS EDUCATION

I am in the middle of my ninth year of teaching in a community college. I began this venture as a member of the A.D.N. Nursing faculty. Six years ago, I launched an online program for people seeking a license as a Nursing Facility Administrator; my live audiences have been nursing students, nursing assistants, and licensed professionals.

Many students come to us poorly prepared. They have passed entrance exams but have not mastered study skills or life skills. Our response often includes re-teaching, remediation, tutoring, and developmental studies classes. While these activities are important in helping students become successful, the principles introduced in these activities must be reinforced in the classroom.

My commitment to student success requires delivery of course content and the bigger messages. I have learned the value of entertainment. Armed with Powerpoint slides—which include pictures and music—and performing the unexpected, I periodically offer students a “Weapon of Mass Education.” The strategy provides a break from the doldrums of content and stimulates attention since they do not know what I will do next. And now, the weapons...

### Form a Posse.

A posse can be a study group or a social group. Some students live in dorms; some do not. Some work together; others do not. The posse provides a forum to learn from each other, learn about each other, develop strategies to learn the content, or develop strategies to outsmart the professor.

In many schools, learning is a solitary activity. Socialization is seen as disruptive to the class. Sharing knowledge is filtered through concerns of plagiarism. In their new world, community college students often form posses. The professor is valued for recognizing the phenomenon.

### Use Your Book of Spells.

Two slides introduce this subject. The first is a wizard; the second is a dictionary.

The message is that in health care, communication is perhaps the most important tool students should master. Misspelled words reflect badly on the writer and contribute to poor outcomes for patients/residents. Student are encouraged to read what they have written and are cautioned on the use of “spell check”—which is not foolproof.

### Use Your Magic Wands.

This slide is of a bunch of pencils. Students learn to write clearly when they have plenty of practice and accurate, consistent feedback. My colleagues and I have questioned why some students’ written work makes no sense. We have reviewed student work, completed in English classes and graded “A,” that was horrible. Our conclusion is the grade is for submitting the work, not for the content. I routinely include writing assignments. Grading is not punitive, and students have the opportunity to review my feedback and resubmit the work.

### Learn to Surf.

The Internet will replace books and probably educators. Internet surfing is a skill that almost every age group is learning quickly. My message to students is that things change rapidly in healthcare. Current pertinent information and “best practices” will be found online more often than in textbooks.

### Hook Up with a Wizard.

A wizard either knows stuff or knows where to find stuff; it can be a family member, faculty member, or peer. The wizard can be someone employed in a specific field, or a coach, mentor, preceptor, or dad. The wizard listens, corrects, directs, refers, and sometimes prays that the message sent is received.

### Do the Hokey-Pokey, the Macarena, or the Chicken Dance.

Students spend hours sitting. They work, raise families, and sometimes study. They read about the perils of obesity. Like most of us, they have little time for exercise. I have observed that when not sitting in class, students often can be found in the restroom.

Most students know how to do the Hokey-Pokey, the Macarena, and the Chicken Dance. So I suggest that, while in the privacy of a restroom stall, they perform



one of these dances. No one will ever know they are multi-tasking. (Go ahead; you know you want to try it.)

### **Sing Your Song, or Play Your Tune.**

Back then, it was not cool to brag on yourself. Today, if people do not know who you are and what you are about, you could be passed over. Using this slide, I encourage students to begin creating a portfolio and religiously keeping records such as CE certificates. I tell them about how somewhere in mid-career I trashed documents I had saved and then later found they would have been helpful.

I pass around one of my volumes for them to examine. I fill the dead time by either singing "I am Mr. Ed" or playing the "Jeopardy" theme on the Kazoo (the only instrument I can play).

### **Go with Your Gut Feeling.**

This Weapon of Mass Education is useful in life and in testing. Students are encouraged to trust their judgment. If it feels right, it is right. If it feels wrong, it is wrong. We have a short discussion on experiences and how gut feeling (i.e., common sense or "critical thinking") is a useful tool.

### **Don't Send Smoke Signals.**

If anyone should not smoke, it should be a healthcare professional.

This weapon allows me to tell the story of my Dad, a World War II Marine, whose two-pack-a-day Lucky Strike addiction stopped with a radical neck dissection. It allows me to tell my story of smoking for 10 years, followed by 30 years of COPD. The chronic wheeze I have helps make the point. An even bigger point is made when I look a smoker in the eye and say, "YOU STINK."

### **Learn One New Thing Every Day.**

Contestants on "Jeopardy" strike me as an odd group. How could people absorb so much trivia? It may be that they read and question.

Studies suggest that Alzheimer's disease can be delayed or avoided by keeping the mind busy. If you learn one new thing a day, you may delay onset of this regrettable situation for patient and family.

I use this weapon to encourage students to read. I suggest that they begin with the cartoons in the newspaper, think about the message, and consider how it could be useful for them.

I suggest students read Letters to the Editor in the newspaper. What motivates people to write these letters?

I suggest that they read cereal boxes and soup cans, recipes and magazines, and obituaries. They might even try reading books.

If none of these suggestions has appeal, I suggest that they read the dictionary. They can learn one new word each day. There is subtle satisfaction for students who ask the professor (or dad), "What is an aba?"

As educators, we all have messages that we wish to convey to our students. Use these Weapons of Mass Education to convey your message, or develop some creative weapons of your own.

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