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The Teaching of Psychology in Autobiography: Perspectives from Exemplary Psychology Teachers

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Society for the Teaching of Psychology

2005
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Preface

In 1992, the American Psychological Association (APA) published a wonderfully insightful, but not-so-small book entitled Teaching Psychology in America: A History (edited by Puente, Matthews, & Brewer). This volume provides a richly detailed and compelling account of the pedagogical progress in our field from the late 1800s through the early 1990s. It tells the historical story of the forces—the people, organizations, conferences, and publications—that shaped what we know today as the “teaching of psychology.”

Teaching of Psychology in Autobiography: Perspectives from Exemplary Psychology Teachers continues this story, albeit along more personal lines. It tells the individual stories of 53 people who have, in one way or another, been recognized for their contributions to the teaching of psychology over the past four decades. It chronicles their early development and maturation of teachers, offers insights to their personal philosophies of teachers, and offers their advice to those who wish to become effective teachers of psychology.

In determining who should contribute to this volume, we ultimately decided that our authors should be those who have achieved national recognition for their excellence in teaching and/or leadership in advancing the teaching of psychology. We invited recipients of all four of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) awards (Robert S. Daniel (Four-Year College or University) Award, Two-Year College Award, Moffet Memorial (High School) Award, and the McKeachie Early Career Award), all recipients of the American Psychological Foundation’s Teaching Excellence Award (now called the Charles L. Brewer Distinguished Teaching of Psychology Award), past and present editors of Teaching of Psychology, and all past-presidents of STP to contribute chapters to this volume. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and the result is the hefty volume you see before you.

To provide consistency in both content and style across all chapters, we asked each contributor to respond to the following 12 questions:

- What kind of preparation for teaching did you receive in your doctoral or master’s program? If you had a course on teaching, please describe it.
- Did you have a teaching mentor or mentors? If so, please describe any unique characteristics of that relationship.
- If you did not have any formal training in teaching or teaching mentors, please describe how you “taught yourself” to become an effective teacher.
- What factors may have led to your decision to become a college and university level teacher?
• Have you faced any obstacles in your teaching? If so, how have you attempted to overcome these obstacles in your own teaching? Please describe any issues with which you continue to struggle and how you attempt to deal with them.
• Many academics see their work as a zero sum game—for example, time spent in the lab is time that necessarily cannot be spent working on teaching and so on. Have you felt that you have to sacrifice your research, service, or outreach efforts in order to become an effective teacher. Why or why not?
• What principles rest at the heart of your personal philosophy of teaching?
• In what interesting and significant ways has your approach to teaching changed over your academic career?
• What sorts of things do you find most rewarding from your teaching? What are the greatest frustrations and how do you try to overcome them?
• What methods and processes do you use to evaluate and reflect on upon your teaching? How has your view of the role of assessment of teaching changed over the course of your teaching career?
• In what efforts do you engage to continue to improve your teaching? How frequently do you engage in these efforts?
• If someone wants to become a good or even outstanding teacher, what would you advise him or her to do?

As you will see when you read any chapter in this volume, the chapter authors organized their answers to these questions under the following headings:
• My Early Development as a Teacher
• Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher
• The Examined Life of a Teacher
• Advice for New Teachers
• Final Thoughts

We are grateful to our authors for the willingness to share with us—and with you—their personal stories as teachers of psychology. At every turn of the editorial process, they each responded to our comments, suggestions, and advice with enthusiasm, and in some cases, even with good humor. As you will see, though, for many of our contributors’ success as teachers was often the result of overcoming personal difficulties and professional obstacles. None of the autobiographies contained in this volume show success as a teacher to be anything less than well-earned.
We would also like to thank the STP leadership, particularly members of the Publications Board, for their support and encouragement of this book. Without such leadership, STP would not be the organization that it is today.

We hope that you enjoy reading the essays teaching as much as we have. We also hope that reading these essays will help you develop insights into your own personal journeys as teachers of psychology and that as a result, you will become a more effective teacher. After all, although we all seek perfection in our teaching, few of us ever achieve it, and when we do, it is only temporary.

Trish Benson
Carrie Burke
Ana Amstadter
Ryan Siney
Vinny Hevern
Barney Beins
Bill Buskist
October, 2005

Reference
Hello By Doing

Charles I. Abramson
Oklahoma State University

My major appointment is in the Department of Psychology at Oklahoma State University (OSU). I have been a full professor since 2002 and hold joint appointments in the Zoology Department and in the OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine. In 2003, I became co-director of the OSU Pet Food Testing center and Director of the Brasil Desk in the School of International Studies. I have been a visiting professor at a number of universities in South America and Europe and currently serve on the editorial board of 6 journals. I have published 10 books and over 70 peer-reviewed articles. One of my books earned a national book award. I have been honored with several teaching and research awards including OSU Regents Teaching Award, three-time winner of the Oklahoma Psychological Society Outstanding Teaching Award, a Commendation from the Oklahoma State Legislature, the OSU Chapter Sigma Xi Lectureship Award, and the 2003 Robert S. Daniel Teaching Excellence Award of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology of the American Psychological Association. I have also received two teaching and research awards from the Universidade Federal da Paraiba in Brasil.

I was greatly honored when I was invited to contribute to Teaching of Psychology in Autobiography. Although honored, I also felt a bit apprehensive because to understand my approach to teaching, it is also important to have some insight into my background prior to graduate training. The preparation of this chapter has forced me to come to terms with some of the factors that have shaped my teaching style and perspective.

My background may not be typical of an academic. I have no memory of my parents ever living together, neither of them attended college, and I am not confident that either of them graduated high school. I do remember that my mother highly valued education and maintained a large library of many first editions and would take me to Broadway plays and museums. She was particularly fond of biographies and autobiographies and would often have me read similar types of material and regale me with stories of people who have overcome great odds to become successful.

At the age of 10 or so I was banished to military school in South Florida and later to a similar institution in upstate New York. I attended military school during the 1960s where physical beatings and mental cruelty at such institutions were almost a daily occurrence and...
were the preferred method of behavioral control. It was here that I first learned that education leads to “special privileges,” if not opportunities.

After my third year it soon became obvious that I was not military school material, and I and spent 8th grade living with my father in a single room within an apartment, although we were allowed to have kitchen and bathroom privileges. When the time high school arrived, I took an entrance examination and entered Brooklyn Technical High School. Unfortunately, I did not last long there, perhaps two months or so. The regimentation reminded me of military school and, instead of attending classes, I could be found in the audience of a variety of game shows being produced in New York at the time. Eventually my truancy was discovered and I was transferred to Brandies High School Annex across from Lincoln Center. The annex was the home for 9th graders, many of whom were 17 and 18 years old. I soon stopped attending and became a security guard at the World Trade Center.

In an effort to continue my high school education, I was sent to Georgia to attend school. In return for working on a farm I would be given room and board. I was returned to New York City in under two weeks. A series of scholastic tests followed and eventually one school admitted me. Croydon Hall Academy was a small private school in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. The school was in financial trouble and took my word that I attended 9th grade and should be allowed to enter 10th grade. I enjoyed the school but was disappointed at being sent back to New York City several times because of nonpayment of the bill. As in military school years before, I experienced privilege associated with academic success. We could not afford the tuition for 11th grade, so I was sent to Brandies High School. Here, there were not enough seats or equipment to go around and I faced some of the same problems that confronted me in 9th grade. I believe I lasted about a month before returning to my job as a security guard at the World Trade Center.

My job as a security guard gave me the opportunity to study on my own. I saved some money, and with the considerable help of my parents returned to Croydon Hall for what, in theory, was my senior year. The administrators of Croydon Hall remembered me from 10th grade and naturally assumed I was now a senior. When it came time for college I applied to Boston University (BU) for no compelling reason other than it was far from New York. If I had not gotten into college I would probably be a longshoreman or a merchant marine.

When I entered the university, I knew I wanted to be a psychologist, specifically a behaviorist. I had no illusions of helping people – I wanted to predict and control them. No doubt my philosophy was shaped by my experiences in military school. It was at BU where I met Dr. Henry Marcucella. I marched into his office the first day of class armed with books by Watson asking if I could work in his laboratory. He said yes and I began my career as a
pigeon runner. I have been intimately involved in academic psychology since I was 18, with
my first professional publication appearing when I was a junior.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I received no formal training as a graduate student to prepare me for a subsequent
faculty position. Most of what I learned about teaching came from my undergraduate
instructors – particularly Dr. Henry Marcucella and Dr. Soda Bhatt. I was rather quiet as an
undergraduate – most of my human interactions were negative, and I saw no reason to engage
in social behavior. To this day I am not a joiner and believe that groups simply serve to
squash rather than encourage intellectual activity. I doubt that any of my graduate professors
would have predicted that I would become a teacher.

What I remember best about Dr. Marcucella was that he expected me to learn on my
own – though he was always in the background in case I needed assistance. Perhaps this
strategy was his way of separating motivated from non-motivated students. If I had a
question, I should ask only if I made an honest attempt to solve the problem on my own. This
pedagogical style suited me perfectly. An excellent example of this perfect fit was evident
from my learning how to program the relay equipment we used to control our experiments.
He presented me with a rack full of modules and a box of snap leads (wires used to connect
the various modules). After a lecture on the theory of electricity and the importance of not
directly connecting a positive voltage with ground he told me to get to it. When I had a
question about programming he would show me how it was done, asked if I understood, and
if I answered yes, would take the circuit apart. I have adopted this style in my own teaching.

Dr. Marcucella also gave me the opportunity not only to run his experiments but he
also gave me the freedom to run mine. I have never forgotten his approach. Any student has a
place in my laboratory independent of reference letters, grades, etc. They must however, take
advantage of the opportunity. If not, they are asked to leave; it can not be said that such a
student never had a chance or opportunity.

I also learned from Dr. Marcucella the importance of intellectual integrity. Although
the incident I am about to relate happened almost 30 years ago, I still remember it as if it were
yesterday. In the course of running a baseline condition for a particular pigeon I did not make
the required change from the baseline condition to the first experimental session. When he
asked me why I said, “You did not tell me.” I knew the second I uttered those words (of
course, I knew better) I had made a mistake. He did not say a word but his expression shamed
me and does still whenever I think about it.

In addition to Dr. Marcucella, the other professor who influenced me the most was my
undergraduate Sanskrit professor Dr. Bhatt. Dr. Bhatt was quite a remarkable scholar. He
spoke Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, and Sanskrit – which is not as easy at it sounds. Dr. Bhatt always had time for his students. His dedication was such that he intentionally lived within walking distance of the university just to be near his students. Unfortunately for him, he believed his intellectual property should be free. Accordingly, his book length manuscripts on these four languages were given away and not published. Subsequently, he was denied tenure. My relationship with Dr. Bhatt taught me that being an excellent teacher does not necessarily mean much without administrative support. Only the publications and amount of grant money really counts at some institutions. In my braver moments, I toy with the idea of publishing my work, not in academic journals, but on the Internet. If I were to do so, I have no doubt that it would be the end of my academic career.

Following my undergraduate experiences I applied to graduate school. The only school I applied to was BU. Eventually I was enrolled in two graduate schools simultaneously with BU my home institution and the University of Hawaii as my secondary institution. It was at the University of Hawaii where I conducted my dissertation research under the primary direction of Dr. Morton E. Bitterman, but that is another story. Upon graduation I sought an academic appointment, gained one ironically back in New York, and subsequently moved on to OSU where I have been for the past 12 years.

My reason for becoming a university teacher is a simple one – personal freedom. I have no great love of teaching or of universities. I searched for a vocation that would provide me with the opportunity to do what I wanted and be relatively free of changes in the economy. In some ways I look at my position as the closest thing to being self-employed without the risk.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Overall, I have not faced any obstacles with regard to my teaching. I have had the benefit of working under several excellent department heads who valued instruction. In particular, I have been given space to create a psychology museum and resource center, and I obtained support for an on-line version of the psychology museum. Moreover, contributions to teaching are appreciated in our department. For example, we make no distinction between teaching and research-based grants nor do we distinguish between articles focusing on teaching and articles focusing on basic research. Moreover, if a professor is having problems teaching, our department offers remedial help.

I have found that having a supportive department head and faculty colleagues who value teaching-related activities does not force me to choose between my research program and my teaching. In fact, many of my teaching-related activities flow directly from my research activities. For example, I have published several teaching-related activities that use
invertebrates to demonstrate principles in psychology. This work was the direct result of my research activities. I have also published exercises that show students how to use a research library and another turns pet stores into research centers. I enjoy writing such papers and receive the appropriate departmental credit. My outreach programs are also a direct result of my teaching. I have created programs such as the PsycMobile in which I go into local school systems to put on what I call psychology as science shows. I have also created the Citizen Scientist program in which I trained primary and secondary school students to run, for instance, palatability studies.

If I have a major obstacle to my teaching it is the so-called “course evaluation.” Frankly, I do not read them (others do) and do not believe they are worth the paper they are printed on (others do). In our evaluations, we do not ask such questions as “How many office hours have you attended,” “How many hours do you study,” and “What grade do you expect in this class.” If the purpose of the evaluations is to improve our teaching, why return them during the subsequent semester (i.e., the delay of reinforcement effect). Students in my classes are told that if there is a problem to come see me at the time of the problem. This way we can fix it immediately. I also do not like the idea that we are telling students that it is acceptable to criticize anonymously. Nor do I like the trend to publish these course “evaluations” on-line or create Web sites such as “myprofessorsucks.com.” Many of the criticisms I am subjected to focus on me being a native New Yorker and this, combined with my size, seems to intimidate students. I demand students be prepared, attend class on time, and restrict cell phone use and newspaper reading during class; I do not view this as my problem, yet I must deal with it each semester.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I am not voicing the popular opinion, but I believe that there is no such thing as a good teacher – only motivated students. As such, I do not suffer through endless self-evaluations, assessments, and self-criticisms. I take pride in the various achievements of my students, but this pride is tempered with the realization that those achievements are theirs, not mine, and they are the result of their efforts, not mine. I understand that I am opening myself to charges of being “anti-intellectual” but I have documented and repeatable success throughout my college teaching career. Moreover, my teaching style has not changed. I have personally experienced the success of the “learn by doing approach” while an undergraduate and as a professional educator this approach is the only one I use – I see none better and no reason to change.

Throughout my student career I have experienced professors who were enthusiastic and supportive and those who were not. In my view, it is not a competent professor’s job to
make a course entertaining or stimulating. If that happens so much the better; if it does not, why should it prevent a student from learning? As I have tried to illustrate, my life experiences taught me to value education and to seize upon educational opportunities. The burden of learning was on me.

Learning, like writing, is a lonely process. No one tells you when to study or for how long, no one tells you how to make a choice between going to a party and going to the library, and no one takes that test for you. I cannot force students to look at the Charles Henry Turner Web site or to study a bit each day rather than waiting until the night before as if they were a rodent responding on a fixed-interval reinforcement schedule.

If I were to have a core teaching principle it would be as Dewey would say – “learn by doing.” I have designed, implemented and disseminated many “hands-on” experiences. For example, my psychology museum Web site (http://psychology.okstate.edu/museum/index.html) contains exhibits on using animals in the classroom, a pronunciation guide for historical names in psychology, the contributions of women to psychology, and the life of the early African American scientist Charles Henry Turner. New exhibits appear all the time. I design my own Web sites, and I develop teaching exercises and programs to give psychology instructors and students the tools they need to be successful. The tools created by me and other professors are there – they only need to be used.

Some of my greatest frustrations in teaching are students who toss away an educational opportunity because they do not bother to make an effort. I have had the opportunity to teach in developing countries where students literally are dying for an education. It upsets me greatly when I come back here and see some bored look on the face of a student. Perhaps the hardest lesson I have learned is that you can only meet someone “49% of the way.” The student must make some effort before I can reinforce and shape intellectual attainment. I also was forced to confront the reality that some students are just resistant to learning and are attending the university for nonacademic reasons. In one specific case I was subjected to a grade appeal by a student who asserted that “There were questions on the final I did not expect.” I made an offer to retake the examination but the student refused. This student readily admitted he had no interest in learning the material. Surprisingly, the student lost his appeal.

**Advice for New Teachers**

My approach to teaching is, I believe, somewhat unique and is based upon my life experiences. You will find out what works and what does not through your own experiences. I am the last one who should be giving advice to new teachers. However, I would caution you to determine early in your career if teaching-related activities are highly valued at your
institution. If not, you risk losing your job. Perhaps the hardest lesson you will learn is that the receipt of knowledge is not really up to you – it is up to the student.
I am currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology at California State University (CSU) at Long Beach. I first became involved with psychological research and teaching as an undergraduate at Smith College where I worked as a teaching and research assistant. My research with Dr. Phil Peake ultimately took me to Stanford University, where I worked as a research assistant the summer following graduation. I then obtained a research assistant position at the Center for Health Care Evaluation at the Palo Alto VA Hospital. It was here that I became exposed to Community Psychology, the field that soon became my area of specialization. I received my PhD in Community Psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2002. It was during graduate school that I received the Society for the Teaching of Psychology’s (STP) McKeachie Early Career Teaching Award. I also received numerous university fellowships, teaching awards, and student research awards, and my dissertation was awarded the 2004 Best Dissertation in Community Psychology award from the Society for Community Research and Action (Division 27 of the American Psychological Association [APA]). While completing the final stages of my dissertation, I also took a one-year Visiting Assistant Professor position at Loyola University Chicago. I have now been working at CSU Long Beach for 3 years.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Although I come from a long line of teachers (my great-grandmother was a professor), I did not seek out the role—it sought me out. I had just completed my master’s thesis when I learned about a teaching opportunity at Loyola University Chicago. A faculty member in the Criminal Justice Department was going on sabbatical so I took over her class on domestic violence. I will never forget that first day of class. I was terrified. My hands shook, my voice trembled, and I could not stop wondering what the heck I was doing there. I did not feel qualified, and I certainly did not feel like a “professor.” Then something happened. I looked out into the class and saw all the eager faces. I realized that the students wanted me to succeed. They wanted this class to be interesting and were hoping to learn something useful. I realized that I had something useful to say. So I made a decision. Rather than focusing on being a “professor,” with all the stereotypes and role requirements that it entails, I decided to simply be myself. I talked to the students like I would talk to a group of friends. I shared what I knew about domestic violence, and I worked to draw each of them into the conversation. It
worked. By the end of class, everyone in the room was engaged, interested, and excited, perhaps no one more so than me. I was on cloud nine as I rode the subway home. For the first time in my life, I felt as if I'd found what I was born to do.

Feeling inspired, I then sought out teacher-training opportunities at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The Department of Psychology provided two distinct courses. The first course was a 6-week teaching colloquium geared towards preparing graduate students to work as teaching assistants. In this class we learned to create and deliver lectures, create and grade assignments, and create and maintain effective learning environments. Students who wished to teach their own classes took a separate teaching practicum class. This year-long class enabled us to develop course materials with the assistance of knowledgeable professors and peers. During the first semester, we created syllabi, lectures, and exams for our particular courses. We also gave practice lectures to peers and a group of undergraduates. These lectures were video-taped and evaluated to give us feedback about our strengths and weaknesses. During the second semester, we taught the classes we for which we had prepared but continued to meet weekly to discuss the joys and challenges we were facing in the classroom. I found both classes to be immensely helpful in developing my teaching skills and teaching philosophy.

I also benefited from faculty and fellow graduate students who served as excellent teaching mentors. Three in particular stand out. The first was my advisor, Dr. Rebecca Campbell. Becki was extremely generous in sharing syllabi, detailed lecture notes and overheads, class activities, and exams. Not having to recreate the wheel was an enormous relief, and I am forever thankful for her generosity. The second person was a professor for whom I worked as a teaching assistant, Dr. Bryant Marks. Bryant is one of the best teachers I have ever seen. I would sit enthralled during his lectures, noting how he engaged students, used interactive teaching strategies, and conveyed genuine enthusiasm for the material he was teaching. The third person was a fellow graduate student, Kimberly Duff. Kimberly was the best graduate student teacher in the department. She taught the teaching colloquium and made herself available to any student who needed help. She was a great help to me personally, particularly when I took over her position as the instructor for the teaching colloquium.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

My development as a teacher continues to evolve. It has been informed by my training, my experience in the classroom, and my experience as an academic. All too often, people assume that time spent on research detracts from teaching and vice versa, but this has not been my experience. My role as a teacher is informed by and guides my research and service activities. The classes I typically teach—Community Psychology, Psychology of
Women, and Fieldwork in Psychology—are directly related to my research on violence against women. I frequently use examples from my own research in my teaching and recruit research assistants from my classes. In turn, the theories I teach in class are often useful to my research, and my efforts to find internship and community service learning placements for my students put me into contact with community organizations. These organizations then benefit from my expertise on their advisory boards, and I benefit from their cooperation in my research and their willingness to appear as guest speakers in my classes. Thus, each aspect of my academic life is intricately related to every other aspect. Time I spend on one type of activity ultimately enhances my work in the other areas and I believe I am a more effective teacher as a result.

My experiences in the classroom have also allowed me to grow as a teacher. Perhaps the area of greatest growth is my ability to deal with difficult students. Everyone faces difficult students at some point in time—the belligerent student, the insensitive student, the student who dominates the conversation. We all hope and pray that we will not be faced with these situations. After all, most of us did not become teachers because we like being disciplinarians. Learning to deal with these situations is an on-going challenge, particularly because what works in some situations does not always work in others. Dynamics of the class and characteristics of the students often interact to create unique situations that require unique solutions. Talking to belligerent students after class has worked in some situations, but making these discussions public has been necessary in others. Calling on different students has successfully brought new voices into the conversation in some classes, but has caused resentment and discomfort in others. I have found that the key to handling such obstacles is to realize that each situation is unique and thus may require a unique approach. Being attuned to the dynamics of the classroom and being flexible in both teaching and disciplinary style can help create teaching environments that work in different situations. This skill developed with experience, and is one I hope to continue to refine.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I love teaching. It is as simple as that. I love figuring out how to communicate complex ideas in ways that students can understand. I love generating student enthusiasm for the learning process and the concepts covered in class. I love seeing the “click” that is visible in students’ faces when they finally understand something. I love seeing students grow in self-confidence and pride as they take an active role in their own learning. I love hearing about the changes students make in their own lives as a result of taking my classes, and, of course, I love the positive feedback I get from the students themselves. These things energize me and I would not trade them for the world. However, there are frustrations as well. The range of
student abilities in my classes is immense. Finding the right balance can be difficult, and I am constantly concerned about losing the struggling students or boring the high achievers. Combating a student culture focused on grades and graduation is also frustrating. It takes a lot of time and energy to convince students that there is more to college than receiving a diploma, time and energy I would rather spend presenting interesting activities or material.

These frustrations have led to a continuous effort to develop a teaching style and philosophy that works well for me and my students. Although my teaching philosophy has evolved over time, utilizing interactive and applied activities has always been at the heart of my teaching. I believe that actively engaging students in the learning process is the most effective way to encourage in-depth understanding of complex, theoretical principles.

I believe that this deeper understanding results from three main benefits of interactive and applied work. First, such activities can bring psychological principles to life in a way that a textbook or lecture never can. Complex theories are often difficult to describe in language, and many students struggle to understand just what the heck those journal articles are saying. When students see these principles in action, however, the theories often become much easier to comprehend. Just think of all of those confusing instruction manuals you have read in your life; having someone actually show you how to use that new palm pilot is usually a lot easier than merely reading about it. Actually doing it yourself, of course, is even better. The doing is the second benefit of using interactive and applied activities: Students gain a far more profound understanding of course concepts when they actually are required to utilize the information. They pay a lot more attention if they know that they will have to apply the theories, particularly when they are required to use course concepts in community settings. In order to use a theory, they have to understand its intricacies and implications—simply memorizing the theory will not help them at all.

Finally, using such activities is often quite motivational for students. Too often, students fail to see the relevance of information discussed in their classes. They seem to think that much of it is esoteric, irrelevant, and arcane. This attitude can be countered by showing students that many psychological principles have broad applicability. When students can see psychological principles play themselves out before their eyes, they see that these principles are both relevant and useful. When they see this for themselves, they become far more motivated to learn.

The extent to which I have used such interactive and applied activities has varied over time, however. When I first began teaching at the University of Illinois at Chicago, many of my classes were quite large and it was challenging to find ways to engage students in discussions and class activities. When I began teaching at Loyola, I had much smaller classes and was able to expand my use of active learning exercises. My emphasis on applied learning
increased yet again when I began my current position at CSULB. Driven primarily by the existence of the Community Service Learning Center on campus, I began exploring the benefits of getting students out of the classroom and into the community. I attended several training sessions at the center and received assistance in modifying my syllabi, lectures, and class activities. Students spend at least 20 hours per semester working at specific community organizations, and they answer weekly reflection questions that help them connect their community experiences to course concepts. I structure the class itself around their experiences, and I gear lectures toward discussing theories that students can use or observe at their site. Incorporating community service learning has required a radical change to my teaching approach, but it is one that has brought great joy and benefits both to my students and to me.

These changes in my teaching style have also been driven by evaluation results. Evaluation has been a key part of my teaching from the beginning. It was part of the culture of graduate school and has continued to be a part of the culture in my current position. As a community psychologist trained in program evaluation, it is also a personal interest of mine. I therefore systematically incorporate evaluation into my classes in a variety of ways. First, I create a list of learning outcomes that I want students to achieve. These outcomes then guide the development of my syllabi, lectures, class activities, and exams. Using student exam and paper performance as a guide, I continuously modify class activities to enhance these outcomes. I also assess student satisfaction. In addition to the university-mandated evaluation forms, I create my own evaluation forms that I give to students in the middle and end of the semester. These forms ask for more specific feedback on particular exercises, videos, lectures, and textbooks.

This information helps me to improve my teaching, an ongoing process that requires a lot more work than I once thought. I used to think that once I had prepared for a class, all I would have to do is pick up the lecture and deliver it. This assumption is far from the case. I have yet to find a lecture that I truly consider “done.” There are always new theories, updated statistics, new videos, and new textbooks. I get novel ideas from attending conferences, participating in teaching workshops, reading listserv discussions, or just having conversations with colleagues. There is always the feedback I get from my students or just from my own observations of the class. I am never really teaching the same class twice. Sure, some aspects of the class stay the same from one semester to the next. However, when I compare a class to the way I taught it 5 years ago, I realize that just about every aspect of the class has changed … and changed for the better.

Advice for New Teachers
There are standard steps toward improving your teaching—take classes, attend conferences, join electronic discussion lists, read books, observe others’ teaching, and talk to your colleagues. These activities will certainly give you ideas about course content and activities. However, effective teaching involves far more than using proven techniques. It takes skill, experience, and the willingness to make mistakes. It requires patience, commitment, and a passion for what you do. Above all else, it requires the ability to learn and change. In this spirit, I wish to share the three most important discoveries I have made in the hope that these lessons will serve others well.

1. **Be Yourself.** The worst teachers I have ever seen are those who are playing a role. Do not worry so much about being formal or appearing intelligent. Sometimes the ability to use small words sounds far more intelligent than using jargon. Allow yourself to make mistakes. Students like to see that you are human, especially if you can laugh it off. Smile. Tell stories. Have fun. If you are enjoying what you are doing, your students will, too.

2. **Avoid Power Struggles.** No matter how you handle it, the minute you engage in a power struggle, you have lost. There is no faster way to lose the respect of most students than engaging in a public power struggle. Even if you “win” by publicly exerting your power, you have forever changed the dynamic of the classroom. The students will not trust you and they will be ill at ease. If you have a confrontational student, handle it outside of class. If that does not work, learn to steer the conversation away from that student or reframe his or her comments in a useful way. If a student publicly complains about grading or assignments, open it up to the rest of the class. Start a conversation about what works and does not work or use an anonymous poll to get feedback. The students will appreciate your willingness to engage them in the conversation rather than simply dictating the rules of the game.

3. **Teach Classes you Love.** Find the classes about which you are most passionate. Figure out why they excite you and emphasize those aspects in your teaching. Communicate your enthusiasm to the students. Advocate on your own behalf to teach those classes on a regular basis. Although there are political reasons that you cannot always teach the classes you want, fight to teach at least one class about which you are passionate. This is where you get your energy. It will affect everything you do.

**Final Thoughts**

In his book, *Teaching Tips*, McKeachie (2002) emphasized the importance of loving what you do: “Once you find that teaching can be fun, you enjoy devoting time to it, you will
think about it, and you will develop into a competent teacher” (p. 3). I could not agree more. Find your passion and your skills will follow.

References
I am the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Psychology Department and hold the rank of Professor. I earned my BA in psychology from Simpson College in 1969, and continued my education at Iowa State where I earned my MS in personality psychology in 1971 and my PhD in experimental psychology in 1972. I began my teaching career at the ripe young age of 26 at Marian College in Indianapolis and remained there for the next 27 years. For the last 21 years, I served as the Chair of the Psychology Department. I have been the recipient of teaching awards from Marian College, IUPUI, and the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. I have also received a variety of advising and mentoring awards, and Simpson College has honored me with their Alumni Achievement Award. (My curriculum vitae is available at <www.psynt.iupui.edu/Users/dappleby/vita.htm>.)

I always wanted to be a college professor. This aspiration came naturally because my father was a professor and department chair in the University of Iowa’s Dental School. I have apparently passed this professorial proclivity to my daughter Karen, who earned her PhD in sports psychology from the University of Tennessee and who is a newly minted assistant professor in the Idaho State University Sports Science Department. Although I always wanted to be a college professor, I did not always want to profess psychology. I initially aspired to follow my father’s footsteps in dentistry, and I spent my first two years of college as a biology major, fulfilling the requirements for dental school until two things happened. The first was a gradual realization that I did not relish the thought of spending my professional career with my fingers moistened by the saliva of strangers. The second was an introductory psychology class that introduced me to a new and exciting area of study I formerly believed was restricted to the domain of Sigmund Freud and his menagerie of madness. This course abruptly opened my eyes to the panorama of normal psychology and, in the 38 years that have flown by since I took this course, I have never been able to tear my eyes away from this magnificent vista of human capabilities and variations.

I began to use the information I acquired in this class about memory, attention, and learning to transform myself from the mediocre student I had been to the successful student I would become. I had discovered my passion, and this discovery was a genuinely transformative experience. I no longer viewed my teachers as educational adversaries; they had become my academic allies. Studying was no longer a dreaded task; it became a pleasure.
Tests were no longer fearsome obstacles; they had become exciting challenges. Papers were no longer dreaded chores to be put off until the night before they were due; they had become exciting journeys into undiscovered realms of knowledge, which I researched for weeks before I polished them to my new high standards of academic excellence. Armed with these new ways of thinking about my education—and a sincere desire to share them with future generations of undergraduate students—I decided to become a professor of psychology.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I was required to take a teaching seminar and teach at least two sections of General Psychology at Iowa State. The seminar was a relaxed affair, taught by one of the department's senior faculty who was well meaning, but whose methods were a bit dated. Our classes were limited to approximately 20 students who volunteered to be in smaller, graduate-student-taught classes (the regular classes contained 400-600 students). I still display prominently on my office desk a photograph of my very first class. My biggest challenge as a beginning instructor was the instantaneous transformation from student (who knows little and must be taught by those who know more) to teacher (who is supposed to know much and who teaches those who know little). I loved my new role from the first time I moment into my classroom, and I knew that teaching was what I was meant to do.

I had always been an astute observer of my teachers. I watched them carefully to see what they did that helped me learn and what they did that hindered my learning. When I began to teach, I simply created in myself an amalgamation of these lessons. When I got into a tight spot, I would think back on what my teachers had done in this type of situation. Some had handled it successfully, so I modeled their behaviors. Some had handled it poorly, so I avoided what they had done. If I had to identify one person who was my mentor, it would be my father.

Growing up with a father who was a highly respected university professor had a profound effect upon me. He always made a special point of introducing me to his students, and these encounters led me to understand that the kind and gentle man whom I loved and knew as Dad at home was also loved—but known as Dr. Appleby—at school. His students told me how lucky I was to be his son and how grateful they were for all his help during their education. Another introduction I will never forget took place one night outside my father’s office when we encountered one of the custodians mopping the floor. My father said, “Drew, I’d like you to meet Mr. Green. Mr. Green is one of the most important people in the Dental School because without him, our school wouldn’t be clean, and dentistry can’t be taught in a building that isn’t 100% clean.” The look on Mr. Green’s face as I shook his hand is one I will never forget and, at that instant, I began to understand the remarkable effect that treating
everyone—no matter what their station or position in life—with kindness and dignity can have. There are countless professions that can produce encounters similar to these, but in my young mind becoming a college professor was the sure path that led to them. To be seen as a wise and caring teacher was a powerful incentive, and this incentive has had an amazingly compelling effect upon me during my entire career.

Although I may sound naïve, I have never faced a true obstacle to teaching during my career. I have certainly experienced temporary frustrations, but I have always been able to overcome them with either the advice of wiser teachers or by simply reflecting upon what has worked for me in the past or what I have seen work for other teachers in similar situations.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Some academics view their work as a zero sum game (i.e., time spent in the lab is time that necessarily cannot be spent working on teaching, service, and outreach). I have been playing the opposite of a zero sum game for my entire career. My teaching produces the questions that become the topics of my research, my research enables me to answer the questions my teaching produces, and my service and outreach activities allow me to share the answers to my questions with my colleagues. My classroom is my laboratory and the scholarship of teaching and learning has become the core of my professional being. For me, teaching is not a zero sum game; it is an infinite sum game. Rather than playing a subtractive role in my life as a teacher, my research, service, and outreach serve as powerful additive factors. The Gestalt psychologists were right. The whole really is greater than the sum of its parts, and I rejoice in the wholeness that teaching, research, service, and outreach have created in my career as a college professor.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

One basic principle drives my teaching: A truly successful teacher must play three roles in the lives of students as they travel their undergraduate journey, and I have striven to integrate the roles of teacher, advisor, and mentor during my entire career. When I teach, I help my students gain the psychological knowledge and skills that constitute the learning outcomes of my classes. When I advise, I lead my students toward an understanding of our curriculum and help them develop plans for completing it in a manner that will prepare them for their educational, occupational, and personal futures. When I mentor, I guide my students toward educational and occupational resources and encourage them to use these resources when they are faced with the various options they will encounter as they seek to accomplish their post-baccalaureate aspirations. The three inextricably intertwined roles of teacher, advisor, and mentor build upon one another to form a rich context in which students become increasingly more aware of what they must know, why they must know it, and how they can
use their acquired knowledge and skills. With this knowledge and these skills, the students can become active, articulate, and committed citizens who will provide solutions to the personal, social, and political challenges we face now and the unknown challenges we will face in the future.

One of the factors that prompted me to leave Marian and move to IUPUI was a growing discontent with the way that I had been teaching and the way that my students had been learning. I had been taught to play the role of the “sage on the stage” (Gibson, cited in Young, 1997) at Iowa State, and I continued to portray this role very successfully at Marian for the next 27 years. Walking into a classroom full of overtly appreciative students and delivering a successful lecture is a very satisfying experience. However, I grew increasingly less fulfilled with my classroom “performances.” I began to desire a different relationship with my students—one in which I could trade my “sage on stage” role for that of a “guide on the side” (Gibson, cited in Young, 1997). I wanted my students to stop entering my classroom empty-headed and expecting me to teach them. I yearned for them to walk through my classroom door with a fundamental understanding of the topic of the day and the ability and willingness to take an active and participative part in my classroom. When I heard that my friend John Kremer from IUPUI had transformed their introductory class into such an experience, I became immediately intrigued. When I discovered that the only rule in this class was “no lecturing,” I was hooked. Although it took some time to adjust to this radial change of pedagogy, I can honestly say that I have now made a complete transformation from lecturer to facilitator of active learning. The feeling of walking into a classroom of well-prepared and eager-to-participate students is truly exhilarating.

My greatest rewards as a teacher have been the accomplishments of my students. I experienced a week several years ago that brought this clearly to my attention. On Monday I visited the newly opened practice of one of my graduates who had earned his PhD in clinical psychology from Purdue. Not only was his practice coming along nicely, but he was also teaching a course in my department. He was a fine young man with a bright professional future. On Tuesday I discovered a copy of an article on a rape prevention program placed on my mail shelf by one of our administrators. It was co-authored by one of my recent graduates who was in the counseling doctoral program at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The article was well written and well researched—I was very proud. On Wednesday, I was invited to another university by their Director of Student Development, who was one of my recent graduates (Masters in student personnel from the University of Wisconsin) to give their psychology club a talk on how a bachelor’s degree in psychology can prepare students for the world of work. After the presentation, I had lunch with the chair of the department who said that the most successful change he had made in his department was to hire my graduate. On
Thursday, I received a note from a nursing student who had been in my general psychology class four years before. Her note thanked me for being the teacher who she felt had been the most influential in her entire undergraduate career. On Friday, one of my students who had graduated 20 years before brought her 18-year-old son to my office during their campus visit. She thanked me for teaching her sound parenting skills in Developmental Psychology, said that her son wanted to be a psychologist, and told me that she wanted me to teach him as well as I had taught her. Of course, not all my weeks are like this one, but these are the most important and most gratifying rewards that I gain from teaching.

My greatest frustration is time. I want my students to write well, so I give them many writing assignments ranging from one-page critical thinking projects in my Honors Introductory Psychology class to 50-90 page “books” that my students in Orientation to a Major in Psychology must write in letter-perfect APA style about their career plans. To help them develop these skills, I give them rapid and abundant feedback. Last semester I sat down to calculate how many writing assignments I had to grade and the number astonished me—it was over 1,300. No wonder I spend so much time grading papers. One of my former Marian colleagues would always say the same thing when he saw me hunched over my pile of papers: "Why don't you just stop assigning all those papers so you won't have to grade them all." I would smile, tell him he was right, and then go on assigning and grading the papers anyway.

My students provide me with the information I use to evaluate and reflect upon my teaching. As an experimental psychologist, I have always been acutely aware of the need to operationalize the variables I study—both in the laboratory and in the classroom. If one of the student learning outcomes (SLOs) of my course is critical thinking, I do not simply list it on my syllabus and then assume my students will know what it is, how they must perform to demonstrate they are capable of it, and how I will evaluate their performance. My strategy to assess my students’ ability to accomplish what I teach takes the following form.

1. I clearly identify my SLOs in my syllabus and during my introductory lecture.
2. I carefully define each SLO in a way that is comprehensible to my students.
3. I make a compelling case for the relevance of these SLOs in my students’ personal and/or professional lives.
4. I explain how the assignments in the class will enable my students to develop or strengthen these SLOs.
5. I describe the method(s) I will use to evaluate (i.e., grade) these assignments.

The data produced by the evaluation in Step 5 allows me to determine if my students are learning what I want them to learn. When they do not, I make data-informed changes in my class, and begin this five-step process all over again the next semester to determine if my changes were successful.
Advice for New Teachers

If I taught a class for beginning teachers, here is the advice I would give my students.

1. Master and stay current in the subject matter you teach.
2. Become a member of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, network with your fellow members, and take an active role in the society’s activities.
3. Know exactly how you want your students to change as a result of completing your classes, and communicate this to them with great clarity.
4. Do everything you can to help your students see the personal and professional relevance of the knowledge and skills they can acquire in your classes.
5. Explain to your students that you have high expectations of them and that you will hold them to these expectations.
6. Be excited about what you teach.
7. Teach your students to be active and independent learners.
8. Reflect upon how you were taught when you were a student. Use the teaching methods that helped you to learn most effectively and avoid those that left you puzzled and frustrated.
9. Devise and use evaluation techniques that will successfully enable you to answer the following question: “How do you know that your students know what you want them to know?” (T. V. McGovern, personal communication, April 17, 1997).
10. Above all else, treat your students with respect. Never forget that it is an honor and a privilege to teach them.

Final Thoughts

One of the most gratifying aspects of my career is that it has provided me with the rare and wonderful opportunity to collaborate professionally with both my father and my daughter. My very first publication was with my father. It was an article published in 1977 in the Iowa Dental Journal titled “A History of Teaching by Television.” Twenty-eight years later, the third generation of college professors in the Appleby family (my daughter Karen) has had her first manuscript accepted for publication, and I am her co-author. Our manuscript, titled “Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process,” will be published in Teaching of Psychology. Although my father is no longer alive, I am sure he would be very proud of how his son and granddaughter have carried on his scholarly tradition.

My career has been—and continues to be—a grand and glorious ride. The most amazing part of my academic life has been my complete freedom to do what I believe is best for my students. If I could choose to do anything in the world, I would continue to do exactly
what I am doing now. The pleasure I derive from watching my students develop from shy, hesitant freshmen, to confident seniors, and finally to competent professional colleagues is the greatest reward I could ever hope to receive.

References
A Self-Actualizing Career Choice Yields Unexpected Rewards

Harry P. Bahrick
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I am a research professor at Ohio Wesleyan University and a guest professor at the University of South Florida during the winter months. I am also Principal Investigator of a 5-year study entitled Cognitive Aging and Access to Knowledge funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

A native of Vienna, Austria, I immigrated to the United States in 1940 at age 14. My secondary education included 4 years of a Viennese gymnasium and 2 years at a public high school in Baltimore, Maryland. My undergraduate years at the University of Maryland were interrupted by military service in the US Army during World War II. I was assigned to a specialized training program in civil engineering at the University of West Virginia, where after my discharge from the service in 1946, I completed an undergraduate degree and a masters degree in psychology. Concurrently, I had my first university teaching experience as a full-time instructor of German. Most of my students were older, returning veterans, and the shortage of fully qualified language teachers gave me the opportunity to teach college courses at an early age without the usual academic qualifications.

After 1 year of graduate work at the University of West Virginia, I was accepted in the doctoral psychology program of The Ohio State University (OSU). There I obtained a PhD in experimental psychology in 1950 under the supervision of Delos Wickens.

I started to teach full time at OWU in 1949 while completing my dissertation. For the following 8 years, I also moonlighted as a research associate in the Laboratory of Aviation Psychology at OSU under the direction of Paul Fitts who became my mentor in all matters pertaining to research. I also taught psychology courses at Kenyon College on a part-time basis.

During my 55 years at OWU, I taught courses in introductory psychology, experimental psychology, statistics, learning and motivation, and history of psychology. I was promoted through the ranks to Professor in 1956. I retired after 36 years of teaching and was then appointed a research professor.

Additional opportunities at other institutions significantly enriched my teaching experience. I took several leaves to teach in German Universities, lecturing in German to large classes on learning theory and memory research. In 1959, I was a Fulbright Professor in Ulm and later a guest professor at the University of Marburg and the University of Hamburg. In 1964, I replaced Delos Wickens for a semester at OSU, teaching a course in learning
theories and I spent the 1967-68 academic year as a senior National Science Foundation Fellow at the Institute of Learning, University of California, Berkeley.

OWU awarded me the Outstanding College Teaching award in 1968 and a year later I was given an endowed chair. I was elected president of Division One (Experimental Psychology) of the American Psychological Association in 1993, and the American Psychological Foundation awarded me their Distinguished Teaching Award (now called the Charles L. Brewer Distinguished Teaching of Psychology Award) a year later.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My graduate training involved no formal preparation for teaching. During my second year at OSU, I taught sections of Introductory Psychology and Delos Wickens met weekly with all teaching assistants. There was some discussion of course content, but the focus of those meetings was on administrative details (e.g., reading assignments, grading procedures, and examinations).

None of my undergraduate or graduate teachers actually served as a mentor. However, several instructors, whose teaching style impressed me, became role models who influenced my subsequent teaching. Among these were Allen Edwards, who taught my first undergraduate statistics course at the University of Maryland; Wickens and Arthur Melton at OSU. Wickens had an informal teaching style that invited questions and discussion. He had an excellent command of subject matter, but gave the impression that most of the important psychological issues were unresolved and that his lectures were intended to present the protem status of the field. His style encouraged students to participate in class discussions and to challenge existing methods and conclusions.

Melton’s teaching style was formal and his articulate delivery left students in awe, not only because of his command of subject matter but also because of his imposing presence. His manner was not forbidding or authoritarian, but his personality and delivery were so impressive that listeners were likely to give his accounts the credibility of a course in algebra or geometry. I tried to profit by emulating Wickens’ informal and non-defensive approach to psychology and Melton’s articulate presentation.

During my first year of teaching German at the University of West Virginia, I was able to focus on my own performance. Since German was my native language, I felt confident that I knew the introductory language courses’ content. As a result, I quickly became comfortable in front of a class, even though I was younger than most of my veteran-students. Basic language courses also provide many opportunities to interact with individual students and to praise and reinforce positive aspects of their performance. Such interactions were important in making the class an interesting and pleasant experience and I applied this insight
when I first taught introductory psychology. To facilitate individual interactions, I made it a priority to learn the names of all my students using a seating chart and obtaining pictures of students from the registrar if necessary. I worked on associating names and faces before the second meeting of the class.

College teaching became attractive to me within days of setting foot on a college campus as a student. What appealed to me was the potential for independence and for intellectual growth as well as the performance aspects of teaching (i.e., experiencing the admiration and approval of students). My motives were self actualizing and self-serving; they did not focus on service to others, but I felt confident that I could become a competent teacher and researcher and that I would enjoy this role. I was used to living on a tight budget and I gave little thought to the financial limitations of a teaching career.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Before entering college I had considered a career as a psychiatrist but was deterred by the required medical training. The introductory psychology course I took, though poorly taught, immediately attracted me and opened my eyes to the possibility of exploring human nature scientifically. That option was more appealing to me than a focus on individuals.

Two obstacles left me pessimistic about my ability to obtain a college teaching position. First, academic positions and advancements were most difficult to obtain during the depression and. My status as an immigrant was an additional deterrent because prior to the impact of affirmative action policies, candidates with strong academic connections had preferential access to the few available positions. My undergraduate teachers who were still struggling in their careers in the early 1940s cautioned me against this choice. Second, my undergraduate grades were mediocre because of undisciplined study habits. Given those challenges, I decided to prepare for a career as an industrial psychologist rather than as an academic. It was my good fortune, however, that the end of World War II brought about an abrupt shortage of college teachers and a dramatic improvement in academic career opportunities. In addition, my study habits had improved after my military service and the improvement was reflected in my graduate school record. With increased optimism, I approached Wickens during my last year in graduate school about changing my program from industrial to experimental psychology, and he encouraged me to do so.

During my last year of graduate work, I was offered an appointment as an instructor at OWU, 20 miles north of OSU. The salary was slightly higher than that of an OSU teaching assistant, so I accepted, expecting to stay only for a year. Teachers at OWU taught four courses per semester, a course load not atypical for liberal arts colleges at that time, and at first I found the demands challenging. My prior psychology teaching was limited to the
introductory course, so preparing lectures for the other courses was time consuming, but all
told, my first year at OWU was a positive experience. Many of the undergraduates were older,
returning veterans who were serious about their education, and I found teaching the laboratory
course particularly rewarding. Students performed individual experiments during the last part
of that course. They appreciated suggestions from the instructor, and I was able to try out a
variety of ideas for my own research.

I always saw teaching and research as complementary aspects of an academic career. It is true,
of course, that hours spent in teaching are not directly available for research, and vice versa, but
the positive symbiosis outweighs these constraints, particularly at the graduate level. Research
illustrates and supports teaching content, and ideas about research inevitably arise during class
discussions and lectures. The focus on research is particularly strong in teaching and mentoring
graduate students. Teaching graduate seminars involves intensive reading and organizing
relevant primary literature, and the knowledge gained translates readily into research ideas and
scholarly publications.

Undergraduate courses generally cover broader topics and do not usually require equally
intensive reading. Many undergraduates do not plan to pursue an academic career and thus
may have a more limited interest and tolerance for the details of programmatic research on
relatively narrow topics. Such students tend to be more responsive to teachers who present
overall conceptualizations of content in interesting ways, with a more limited emphasis on
detailed documentation. It is also true, however, that my closest relationships with undergraduate students resulted from their involvement as assistants in my research program; their participation was a salient aspect of their education in psychology.

I believe that the differential rewards pertaining to undergraduate versus graduate
teaching shape our research productivity as well as our teaching style. Undergraduate teaching
has not limited my interest in research, but it has detracted from my mastery of specific
research literature. As a consequence, I tend to focus my research on topics that are less
dependent on an extensive literature (e.g., topics that have been neglected in the current paradigm). For similar reasons, I believe that undergraduate teaching is less likely to yield the type of expertise that is expected of editors of specialized journals.

Finally, teaching is generally valued more highly in undergraduate than in large,
research-oriented universities. Though relatively indifferent teachers can have highly
successful careers in research-oriented universities, such is far less likely in undergraduate
institutions. All of us want to be valued and rewarded for the things we do well, and these
rewards in turn shape our behavior. There are no generally agreed on criteria defining great
teaching, and the divergent reward systems of graduate and undergraduate institutions
influence the performance of teachers. Thus, undergraduate colleges are more likely to attract
and hold individuals who see their primary talents in teaching. I have enjoyed being an undergraduate teacher, and although the choice has involved tradeoffs, I do not view these as a net sacrifice.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I believe that scientific understanding of human behavior offers the best hope for the survival of human societies. Long before the atomic age, H.G. Wells said that “human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.” The fact that our ability to control human aggression lags far behind our ability to understand and control the physical environment jeopardizes our survival and makes progress in the social sciences including economics, sociology, and psychology matters of great urgency. As a social science teacher, I feel an obligation to stress this urgency and to illustrate and clarify the relevant issues.

Societal changes, as well as my own maturation prompted me to change some aspects of my teaching style. Enhanced societal appreciation of diversity has made me more responsive to individual differences, and my own appreciation of students has made me more aware of the satisfactions of being a mentor. In retrospect, I see mentoring relationships with students among the most enjoyable aspects of my career. My original motives for becoming a college teacher were self-actualizing and intellectual; serving students was incidental to my personal goals, but mentoring individuals increasingly became intrinsically rewarding.

A specific example of changes I initiated is the tutorial system I introduced at OWU some years ago to solve a departmental problem. We failed to attract many talented science-oriented students to psychology because such students frequently committed to a physical science major before taking their first course in psychology. We therefore decided to offer the tutorial program as an inducement for the top 10% of entering freshmen. It involved one-on-one meetings with an instructor throughout the semester and required students to complete a specific research project. Because tutees generally had no prior course work in psychology, the sessions and readings covered basic introductory concepts, preparation in the specific domain of their project, and guidance on all aspects of carrying it out. The program was labor-intensive, but we found that students were enthusiastic about individualized instruction and about their research, and approximately half of our tutorial students decide to major in psychology.

My greatest rewards as a teacher have come from the testimonials of students who credited me with having a significant impact on their lives. Students who became professional psychologists were most likely to credit me with influencing their career choice; others were more likely to credit me with having influenced their perceptions of human nature in conformance with a probabilistic, scientific perspective.
What I find most frustrating as a teacher is evidence that motivated students who worked hard failed to profit from my courses. Academic talents of students change over time, and effective teachers must adapt their content and style accordingly. Although I never managed to address these challenges to my satisfaction, I found that frequent monitoring of class notes, providing outlines and study guides, and offering review sessions were all beneficial.

I have used only conventional methods to evaluate my teaching. Course evaluations were the principal source, and I supplemented these with occasional discussions with colleagues who visited my classes or team-taught a course with me. I found that the individual comments students added to an objective course evaluation were often most informative. Early in my career I was ambivalent about the use of student evaluations, but I now regard them as an essential part of assessing teaching effectiveness and of providing feedback to teachers. Students may lack a sound perspective on what constitutes appropriate course content, but they certainly are able to provide useful feedback on personality characteristics, presentation style, and problems they experience with grading procedures, reading requirements, etc. Such perceptions significantly influence student satisfaction with their education, and I see no justification for teachers to avoid such information.

The most significant changes I implemented during my teaching career were designed to provide better monitoring and support of student progress. In the context of conferences I scheduled with students who performed poorly on tests, I discussed problems they perceived and examined their lecture notes. I found that the main problem for students who attended class regularly and worked hard was that their lecture notes lacked organization. No matter how many detailed notes they recorded, their notes were of little value in answering test questions pertaining to the interrelations among conceptual aspects of content. Based on this finding, I changed my lecture procedure, providing an outline of topics and subtopics to be covered at the beginning of each lecture. I put this outline on the board, but did not hand it out, so that students had to copy the outline at the beginning of class, actively engaging them in preparing for the lecture content to follow. The details under each subtopic were never part of the outline, but had to be filled in during the lecture. This procedure turned out to have a positive effect on student note taking and test performance. I also changed my grading procedures over the years, making them as transparent as possible so that students could assess their standing and ultimate grade with more accuracy.

Of the many conferences I have had with students who performed poorly on tests, one incident stands out in my memory. I asked this student where he thought the problem was, and whether he was disappointed with the course. He answered, quite to the contrary, that he enjoyed the course, and that in fact, I was his ideal instructor. I was quite pleased, and asked
him to elaborate. He said: “Yes, ever since I have been in high school, I have had this concept of the ideal college professor, and you fit the concept perfectly: a small guy with an accent.” I said: “Oh,” as evenly as possible. Eventually I felt comfortable enough to report the incident at home, and the following Christmas my daughter presented me with a t-shirt. The lettering on the front said; “Ideal Professor” and the lettering on the back: “Small guy with an accent.”

Advice for New Teachers

I believe that there are many ways of becoming a good teacher and that individuals should adapt a style that best suits their talents and personality. Great lecturers, for example, should not feel obligated to organize and facilitate discussion groups. It is essential, however, to invite frequent, anonymous feedback and to be responsive to that information. Making an effort to know and respond to students as individuals is undoubtedly an important aspect of successful teaching; and procedures that show interest, approachability, availability, and grading transparency all contribute to forming human relationships that students appreciate and enjoy.

Satisfactions of an academic career depend significantly on the quality of collegial relations. Young faculty members enjoy a great deal of independence, and this privilege may obscure expectations of senior colleagues in regard to supportive, cooperative behavior. Sensitivity to these implicit expectations affects performance evaluations and the quality of long-term collegial relations. A psychologist friend once remarked that departmental relations function best if seniors treat junior colleagues as complete equals from day one, and juniors show consideration to their seniors.
Successful Teaching: A Life of Connections

Bernard C. Beins
Ithaca College

My career is nearer its end than its beginning. As I look back, I see that remarkable serendipity has brought me to the present. I am hopeful that the rest of my academic life (and beyond) will be as fruitful and enjoyable as it has been so far.

It might be possible to blame it all on my sister. My initial exposure to books was in 1954 at the age of four, when she took the time to teach me to read. Since then, my life has been filled with books and I can imagine it no other way. It does not surprise to me that my career has revolved around the ideas I have encountered in print. It is but a small step to trying as a teacher to communicate those ideas to others.

I spent my formative years in Toledo, Ohio, departing for southern Ohio for my college education at Miami University in Oxford. My undergraduate mentor, John Jahnke, once joked that it was the wrong Miami and the wrong Oxford, but my interested in psychology flourished when I was there. So for me, it was the perfect Miami and the perfect Oxford. I graduated in 1972 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with General Honors. My next move was to the doctoral program in General Experimental Psychology at the City University of New York. Most of my classes and research took place at the Brooklyn College campus where another influential figure, Arthur Reber, guided me. He may be most responsible for my attainment of the doctorate in 1979: The university initially declined to accept my dissertation because the margins on the typed copy were too narrow; fortunately he browbeat them into accepting it.

When I left New York, I spent a short time engaged in science reporting for the Columbus, Ohio affiliate of National Public Radio. Then, because academic jobs were scarce, I spent an interminable year as a statistical analyst at Blue Cross of Central Ohio. My break arose when Thomas More College offered me a position. Out of about 150 applicants, I was their second choice; happily, the leading candidate declined their offer. I remained at Thomas More for seven terrific years (1979-1986). I first met a large number of my very dear friends and colleagues during this time.

In 1986, I gave up tenure (don’t try this at home) to move to Ithaca College, where I have taught ever since. I have been fortunate to be able to continue working on my craft of teaching in a department that values pedagogy.

Throughout my career, I have been most active in what we now term the scholarship of teaching and the scholarship of pedagogy. This predilection made my involvement in the
Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) virtually inevitable. Within STP, I served as its Secretary from 1993 to 1996, and as President in 2004. My other contributions to our discipline include my work as editor of the Computers in Teaching section of *Teaching of Psychology* from 1987 to 1996 and as Associate Editor to the present.

I have also been fortunate to have participated in activities fostered by the American Psychological Association (APA). These opportunities have included the National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology (the St. Mary’s Conference) and the Psychology Partnerships Project (commonly known as P3). In addition, I participated in the first three Education Leadership Conferences sponsored by the Education Directorate at APA. I also spent two intriguing and enjoyable years as Director of Pre-College and Undergraduate Programs at APA.

My other education-related activities have included being a Reader and then a Table Leader for Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology tests. I am also a member of the AP Psychology Test Development Committee and its chair-designate. In addition, along the way, I initiated the Northeastern Conference for Teachers of Psychology in 1994, which now continues as a pre-conference meeting of the New England Psychological Association.

My goal through it all has been to foster learning in my students, which is why I am proud to have sponsored over five dozen research presentations by undergraduates over the past 20 years. I continue to enjoy immensely my professional activities outside the classroom, but in the end, the important work is to benefit my students.

I have been fortunate to spend time with many generations of delightful and hard working students. I am pleased that I have been a partner in the successes they have achieved. However, I have to admit that I agree with E. C. Tolman’s (1959) statement that “In the end, the only sure criterion is to have fun. And I have had fun” (p. 152)

My Early Development as a Teacher

My teaching career began before *Teaching of Psychology* appeared as a journal. There was no emphasis on teaching, and graduate students received teaching assignments in a sink or swim environment.

My graduate program differed little from any other. Teaching was a necessity because it provided income for graduate students and it helped the department move undergraduates through the curriculum. Graduate students seldom aspired to learn the craft of teaching because our research mentors did not promote it.

Most graduate school mentors at that time identified the APA as their disciplinary organization, and APA’s contributions to teaching prior to creation of a teaching division were slight (Goodwin, 1992). Initially, the teaching division was largely ineffectual.
Education and training received more attention beginning in the 1950s (Nelson & Strickler, 1992), but APA’s initiatives had little impact on most teaching psychologists.

From my callow perspective in graduate school, I believed my teaching was quite good. Students voiced no complaints and graduate faculty who visited my classes were complimentary. Projecting forward three decades, the landscape has changed in ways entirely unpredictable at the time. Technology has driven some of these modifications, but higher education has undergone a sea change. What constitutes good and effective teaching has taken a new definition. Just as research subjects have become participants, students have gone from passive receptacles to active learners. My teaching transformed to match the Zeitgeist.

How has this change occurred? Over the years, there have been many teachers I have admired. Nonetheless, I cannot identify a particular person who mentored me in teaching. I admired the confidence, knowledge, and high verbal fluency of my major professor in graduate school. However, my desire to emulate him was oriented more toward style than toward pedagogical effectiveness. Back then, assessment was far from even a glimmer, and all teachers assumed that they were effective. The active mentoring that took place involved research, not teaching.

My graduate school teaching involved lectures and little else. My goal was to present as much information as possible. I believed that students probably retained a constant fraction of the information conveyed in the lecture, so I reasoned that if I packed the information densely, they would leave the classroom better off than if my lecture contained less detail. Each chapter in the book magically appeared and disappeared with no connections to any other chapters.

Looking back, I am struck by how little attention teachers paid to drawing connections across chapters. As a graduate student I was probably not knowledgeable enough to be able to draw broad connections across chapters in a book, much less about other disciplines or to life in general. My naïveté was irrelevant, though, because psychologists cared little about bridging different disciplines.

From my graduate student outlook, it never occurred to me that my teaching might change. I assumed I would spend most of my career conducting research, with teaching as an add-on. I now wonder about that myopic vision because, even in graduate school, I was not a highly productive researcher. The reality of my career has diverged from my original thoughts. It was quite true that I was looking through a glass darkly.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Even though I always enjoyed teaching, it only became a major focus of my professional identity when I secured a position at a small liberal arts college, Thomas More
College. A large portion of my change in attitude was due to my exposure to colleagues there. They viewed themselves primarily as teachers of psychology rather than as researchers, so they engaged in practices reflecting their commitment to teaching. Further impetus for my orientation toward teaching was that travel funds were scant, and professional research conferences became less attractive because my own research had flagged under a heavy teaching and service requirement.

In my first years of full-time teaching, I began to lose contact with other psychologists. It would have been entirely too easy to develop an inward focus at that point. The major obstacle to my teaching would have been stagnation. I might have remained competent in the classroom, but I do not think that my teaching would have expanded to the extent that it has, and my teaching philosophy would have been vaguely structured at best. I can easily imagine that in my 34th year of teaching (my current point), I would have lost my zeal for the classroom had I not met spirited psychology teachers who are peer mentors and sources of friendship, collegiality, and motivation.

Happily, the movement toward more active teaching and active learning was taking shape. My connection with psychology teachers began at student research conferences and regional teaching conferences that began to sprout. Also, I have been fortunate not to have been associated with an institution that regarded the scholarship of discovery as the only meaningful activity.

Most importantly for me, Joe Palladino (University of Southern Indiana) created a student research conference and, subsequently, a regional teaching conference, the influence of which still radiates in my professional development. His Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology (MACTOP) began in 1984 and ran for two decades. It attracted a cohort that took teaching seriously and that later formed the revitalized core of a then-dormant Society for the Teaching of Psychology (Beins, 2004a).

The Zeitgeist that fostered teaching was further reinforced by the American Psychological Association’s National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology, the so-called St. Mary’s Conference (see McGovern, 1993). I was lucky to be invited as a participant; I developed professional friendships there that have persisted. These types of connections have helped me constantly upgrade my teaching.
The Examined Life of a Teacher

For many psychologists who began their careers in the 1970s, teaching was not something to be examined. It was a mundane part of daily life and therefore unremarkable. It did not merit a well-formulated philosophy. Consequently, my own articulated philosophy of teaching emerged when I was prompted by the assessment movement fostered by the Psychology Partnerships Project (Psychology Partnerships Program, 2001) and by Project Kaleidoscope <http://www.pkal.org> initiatives.

As I thought about it, I realized that my perspective on teaching is tightly connected to my respect for students as people and as learners. From this viewpoint, it dawned on me that students spend most of their lives outside of psychology. Consequently, it would be prudent to expose them to psychology in connection with other aspects of their lives. So I strove to link psychology more explicitly with the liberal arts.

Another component of my teaching philosophy is that I trust that most students will respond with appropriate motivation and critical thought once a learning environment is established. Because I do not live in Utopia (from Greek, meaning not a place or nowhere), I realize that some students will resist learning, but I believe that teachers can minimize this resistance. The formula for creating an efficacious classroom environment varies for different teachers (Buskist, 2001), but, simply put, successful teachers develop their own voice and students respond.

Over the course of my teaching career, I have relied less on lecturing to students and more on activity. I firmly believe that if students leave a classroom with three or four well understood concepts and how they interrelate to one another and to larger issues, I have succeeded in my role as teacher. This belief has had a marked impact on my classroom behavior. I still work hard in front of the class, and I try to spend a preparatory hour before each class meeting, but my students work harder in class than they did in my early years as a teacher.

I try to connect the concepts in class to specific terms and ideas in the textbook, but my classes are largely devoid of definitions and small details that do not promote understanding of the larger picture. Instead, I try to pose questions that generate critical thought, even if I lose control over the exact path we follow. I agree with Henry Brooks Adams’s belief that "Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.” This approach has implications for students, who often prefer a class that has an obvious and rigid structure, with terms and definitions that fit nicely at certain, predictable points.
On my Research Team, the research is largely student-directed. I think that students learn best when their activities flow from their own critical thinking. My Team is not A. S. Neill’s Summerhill, with each student choosing an idiosyncratic path; I still need to corral their ideas, but they make virtually all choices. In the end, they are responsible for these choices. The Team generates fewer research projects than it might be if I were to make all the decisions, but the purpose of the Team is to teach students. Paradoxically, I am in charge, but in advance I am never sure what I am in charge of.

This issue of control is important. Students need to know that teachers structure the learning environment so students can achieve specific goals. The adage that you need to know the rules before you can break them is relevant here. Beginning teachers may need to impose more obvious control and structure on a class than veterans because it takes an element of experience to recognize the point at which an active classroom environment deteriorates and learning consequently diminishes. Inexperienced teachers may have a difficult time traversing that border. Classroom experience will undergird a teacher’s ultimate approach.

It is often difficult to know how well I have succeeded in my work. Ironically, although I regard student evaluations of teaching as being of little use for personnel actions like tenure and promotion, I find they can be useful in assessing whether the environment is propitious for student learning. However, good evaluations do not always equate with good learning. There is evidence that satisfaction with a training program is not always related to the amount that students learn. Roadblocks to learning annoy students but may actually be more beneficial than a smooth path. It requires effort to overcome the hurdles, which stimulate thought and evaluation, even as they may create aggravation (Bjork, 2001, 2005).

Fortunately for me, the curriculum at Ithaca College fosters long-term interaction between our students and the faculty. Each psychology major completes three semesters of research with a single professor. Consequently, I have the opportunity to see my students’ development unfold. It is delightful to see their excitement for research burgeon and their ability to ask and answer complex questions emerge.

Have I reached my students? My most direct assessment of student learning comes from tests, homework projects, and research that they conduct. These measurements, particularly the applied work, hint as to whether students have incorporated the framework from my courses into their thinking. Beyond this traditional assessment, my colleagues and I are developing an assessment procedure for the constellation of overlapping courses we teach. In the end, a single course provides part of a student’s overall learning, but only a part. We lead our students through an entire curriculum, so meaningful assessments will be global rather than specific. In the end, assessment is difficult because the real test of our success is
whether our graduates ultimately become active citizens who make sound judgments based on
critical evaluation of information.

Advice for New Teachers

When the Roman poet Virgil, author of the *Aeneid*, was dying, he requested that his
epic poem be destroyed because he was not satisfied that it was worth saving. To be honest,
the story was not all that original; he borrowed extensively from Homer’s *Odyssey*. To the
consternation of many Latin students, but to the benefit of western culture, the poem survived.
(This recalls the statement attributed to Heinrich Heine that if the Romans had been obliged to
learn Latin, they would never have found time to conquer the world.) I would not think of
comparing myself to Virgil, but I have the same feeling about my teaching that he did about
*The Aeneid*—it is not finished and it may not be all that exemplary. In addition, my teaching
owes much to my very creative colleagues whose work I have liberally exploited.
Nonetheless, I will offer my advice for whatever small measure of help it can provide for new
teachers.

The fundamental prerequisites for being an effective teacher are a passion for teaching
and an affection for students (with whom one should be friendly but not familiar). Further, I
believe that a critical element of a satisfying career in the academy is to have a network of
professional friends and colleagues. Over 20 years ago, I first met many of the psychologists
that I count as dear and valued friends. If I had not encountered them at student and
professional conferences, I might be isolated be in a career described by Thoreau, as a man
living a life of quiet desperation.

I encourage teachers to reach out to make personal contact with other psychologists.
One of the most congenial organizations for developing a network of professional friends and
colleagues is STP. I have heard people say that STP appears to be controlled by an in-group,
but I have always found people active in STP to be receptive to newcomers. It can be
intimidating to insinuate yourself into a group of psychology teachers who are fast friends, but
a look at the many new faces in positions of increasing responsibility in STP attests to the fact
that it quite a feasible undertaking.

The regional and national teaching conferences are also wonderful venues for
increasing your network. In addition to learning about teaching, you meet others who share
your interests and who are looking for collaborative and supportive colleagues. STP features
programming at the APA convention that effectively constitutes a teaching conference and
provides for social as well as professional congregation. The American Psychological Society
also created a preconference teaching workshop and has incorporated teaching-related
sessions into the convention proper.
I still attend every teaching conference I can. I have been fortunate to be able to do so two or three times a year over the past decade. Not only do these meetings enhance my teaching, they also provide the opportunity for expanded professional development with current colleagues. Just as important, these gatherings give me the chance to develop new professional friendships with young and energetic teachers.

It is also important to read voraciously outside psychology. The more you read, the more you learn about life. The more you know about life, more effective you can be in promoting a broad education to your students. I believe that it does not really matter what you read. You can make a compelling case for the importance of reading of any kind (Dunn, 2002).

Final Thoughts

I encourage teachers to get a life. It is entirely too easy to let your profession encroach on every aspect of your life. Computers are portable, e-mail is ubiquitous, and everyone (except me) has a cell phone, so you are never out of touch. A quiet room and a book can revitalize your mental life.

We need time for our thoughts to be unfocused and relaxed. We also need our families, who are ultimately more important than anyone or anything else. You should plan time to expand your horizons outside of psychology. All of these elements will make you a more interesting person and will let you draw connections between psychology and life (Beins, 2004b), which will ultimately increase your effectiveness as a teacher.

References


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I completed my bachelor's degree in psychology at the University of Pittsburgh in 1964, and my masters and PhD in clinical psychology at Northwestern University in 1966 and 1968, respectively. From 1968 to 1998, I was on the psychology faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I taught graduate and undergraduate courses ranging from introductory psychology to clinical practica. After reaching the rank of full professor, I served both as Associate Department Head and Director of Introductory Psychology. I am currently Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois, Courtesy Professor of Psychology at the University of South Florida, and Visiting Professor of Psychology at the University of Southampton. I am a fellow of both the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Psychological Society (APS).

My teaching awards include the University of Illinois Psychology Graduate Student Association Teaching Award in 1969, the University of Illinois Psi Chi award for excellence in undergraduate teaching in 1979, the Illinois Psychology Department’s Mabel Kirkpatrick Hohenboken Teaching Award in 1993, and the 2002 American Psychological Foundation’s Distinguished Teaching in Psychology Award.

My efforts to promote excellence in the teaching of psychology began in 1979, when I spoke at the Second Annual National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP). I joined its program committee later that year, and eventually became committee chair. In 1994, I founded the APS Preconference Institute on the Teaching of Psychology, and in 2000, helped to plan the First Annual Summer NITOP. From 1989-1991, I served on the steering committee for the APA National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education and, in 2001, on the advisory panel to the APA Board of Educational Affairs Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies. I am currently serving as Chairman of the Steering Committee for the APS Fund for Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science.

I have co-authored textbooks in introductory psychology, abnormal psychology, clinical psychology, criminal behavior, and progressive relaxation training, and have co-edited books in applied, developmental, and introductory psychology. My most recent book, authored with Sandra Goss Lucas, is Teaching Psychology: A Step by Step Guide. I have also contributed chapters to Teaching Introductory Psychology: Theory and Practice (Sternberg, 1997), The Teaching of Psychology: Essays in Honor of Wilbert J. McKeachie and Charles L.
Brewer (Buskist & Davis, 2002), Handbook of the Teaching of Psychology (Buskist & Davis, in press), Voices of Experience: Memorable Talks From the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (Perlman, McCann, & Buskist, in press), and (with Sandra Goss Lucas) The Compleat Academic: A Career Guide (Roediger, Darley, & Zanna, 2002).

My Early Development as a Teacher

I have referred to myself as an accidental teacher because, in graduate school, my main goal was simply to get a job in a psychology department somewhere. I knew that professors teach, of course, but the teaching aspect of academic life did not clearly register on my radar screen until the fall of 1967 when a note from the department head at Northwestern informed me that I was to teach Introductory Psychology the following quarter. The start of the quarter was barely two months away, and to make matters worse, my class was in the adult education division on Northwestern’s downtown Chicago campus. No one gave me the slightest clue about how to teach anything, and certainly no information or guidance about how to teach a course as broad as introductory psychology—to people who were not only older than me, but also tired, and perhaps in a bad mood, after working all day.

With no teacher training and no one to mentor me in teaching (it never occurred to me to ask my advisor for help, as I assumed that the department believed that I already knew how to teach) I forged ahead on my own. I chose the textbook that I had been assigned in my own undergraduate days, and because my teachers always distributed one, I wrote a syllabus for the course. The problem was that when I looked carefully at the textbook, I realized that did not know enough about certain areas to feel comfortable teaching them. These areas included biological psychology, sensation and perception, developmental psychology, motivation and emotion, thought and language, and social psychology. I was much more comfortable with research methods, learning, personality, intelligence testing, abnormal, and psychotherapy, so I simply distributed these latter topics over the 10 weeks of the academic quarter. This strategy worked out fine, except for the fact that when the quarter was over, I had actually taught a course in clinical psychology, not introductory psychology.

Still, two things happened during that quarter that affected me deeply. The first occurred when I faced my class for the first time. I was so nervous that, for a moment, I did not know what to say. In desperation, I made some lame joke and was amazed to hear some of the students politely laughing. When they did, I realized that students are not as hostile as I had feared, and I got my first inkling that teaching might be fun. The second memorable event from my first teaching effort was that I received excellent evaluations from my students. I now know that I didn’t get those ratings because I had offered a good course, as defined by the standards for introductory psychology that I now maintain. (I am sure that many students
noticed my omission of large sections of the book.) What they were telling me was that they recognized that I cared a lot about teaching the course, and about them, and that I had given it my best shot.

I am not proud of that first course, and every student who took it should have demanded a tuition refund. Good teaching is far more than just making students laugh while earnestly offering half-baked courses. However, the experience was enormously helpful to me in that it set me on the road to learning some teaching methods, and some ways of thinking about teaching, which made it possible for me to teach better in the years that followed.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Consistent with my status as an accidental teacher, when I took my first academic job I worried most about whether I could meet the psychology department’s rigorous research standards. So planning a research program, setting up a lab, applying for a grant, and hiring research assistants became my top priorities when I arrived in Champaign, Illinois in the summer of 1968. The fact that I had been assigned to teach a graduate course in Research Methods and a 350-student section of Abnormal Psychology slipped into the background.

As had been true at Northwestern, my ability to teach was presumed. No one told me what my courses should cover, how I might best organize them, or even that there was an instructional development office on campus that could help me improve my teaching. To be fair, though, I never asked about any of these things. The questions I dared to ask of departmental colleagues focused on plans for research (theirs and mine), how to write a grant application, which journals take what kinds of articles, and the like. I was not about to waste their time on such trivia as setting up a grading system or writing exam items. Instead, I looked at the syllabi used by previous instructors of my assigned courses, and did my best to follow their example. After all, it was the era of Woodstock and the Summer of Love. The focus of my fear of failure was on how hard-nosed senior colleagues would judge my research, not on how a sea of flower children would evaluate my teaching.

Indeed, I soon came to see my classes as a break from the pressures of life as an assistant professor in a department populated by some of the most famous names in psychology and where my annual evaluations depended as much as anything else on national impact and recognition! As nervousness about public speaking evolved into anticipation and even excitement, I walked to my classes with far more confidence than I had any right to experience. I had quickly developed a successful teaching style, aided in part by the fact that I was hardly older than my students, but I can now see that there was far too little substance. I simply did not know enough, either about my subject matter or about the nuts and bolts of effective teaching, to warrant the praise I began to receive in student evaluations. For
example, I am absolutely sure that the department’s newly formed graduate student organization gave me its 1969 teaching award simply because I was seen as friendly, approachable, and obviously not a member of the “establishment.” There was just no other way in which I, one year out of graduate school, could have been a better or more knowledgeable teacher than, say, Lloyd Humphreys, Charles Osgood, Raymond Cattell, or Hobart Mowrer.

The quality of my course content improved over the following decade as I learned more psychology, but because I was being rewarded for some rather unsophisticated and probably not very effective teaching methods, I did not think much about improving those methods. This situation changed, though, after I got to know Frank Costin. Frank was not a major star in the departmental firmament. His role as director of introductory psychology was seen mainly as a service job, and because most of his research was on teaching-related topics such as the effects of particular lecture methods and the validity of student ratings, he did not get big grants (or big pay raises). However, his interest in promoting excellence in the teaching of psychology inspired him to do a remarkable thing: In 1978, he organized an annual “Institute on the Teaching of Psychology to Undergraduates,” the first meeting of its kind for psychology faculty. Frank invited me to talk about teaching abnormal psychology at this event in 1979, and he later asked me to join the program committee for what became the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology, or NITOP (for more on the history of NITOP, visit http://www.nitop.org).

It was at the first Institute that I realized that there were psychology faculty whose careers and passion focused primarily on their teaching. Listening to them talk about their teaching opened new horizons to me, and I was soon asking myself a lot of questions about my heretofore unexamined teaching methods. Were my lectures as clear and logically organized as they could be? Was I taking advantage of the classroom demonstrations and other activities that were available to me? Were my multiple-choice exam items well worded and properly balanced across content areas, and were the correct answers randomly distributed across the four response alternatives? As my involvement with teaching grew over the years, new questions arose relating to such issues as promoting critical thinking and active learning, incorporating cultural diversity, creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere, dealing with student excuses, and discouraging academic dishonesty.

I am not teaching as much as I did in years past, but I find that talking to the faculty who attend NITOP and other psychology teaching conferences each year still gives me new things to think about, new ideas for improving my teaching, and renewed enthusiasm for the teaching enterprise.
The Examined Life of a Teacher

The elements of the teaching enterprise have changed considerably since the 1960s. The advent of the Internet, PowerPoint, Blackboard and WebCT, distance learning, wireless student response devices, online office hours, and other aspects of high-tech teaching have made the teaching of psychology more complicated, more challenging, and potentially more powerful. However, I have found that my basic approach to teaching has not changed much, and that when I do use various digital teaching tools, it is in the service of goals and principles that over the years have become simpler and somewhat less ambitious.

For example, although it is now possible to cover more content in a course, I now prefer covering less, especially during class, and especially in Introductory Psychology. I have learned to accept that students may not be as interested in psychology as I wish they were, that they may not read the textbook as assigned, and that they may forget many of my course’s finer points quite soon after the final exam. I have also realized that no matter how fast I talk, or how many multimedia displays I present, there will never enough time in class to get to everything that I might like to cover. However, I have not despaired because having these insights has led me to another insight, namely that there is always enough class time to make a small amount of course material come alive and to encourage students to learn more about it—and the rest of the course—on their own if they wish. So I like to spend my class time on material that I think students will find fascinating, or that I think I can make fascinating. I punctuate my lectures on these topics with lots of demonstrations and classroom activities, and I do not worry much about all the material that I have to omit. I like to think that this use of class time helps motivate students to read, or even re-read, their textbook, to ask questions and make comments in class, and to come to office hours or have an e-mail discussion about material that remains unclear. So, as in my graduate school days, I am still skipping a lot of material, but not because of ignorance, and only in class. The material I do not have time to cover in the classroom is to be learned by doing the assigned reading, and my quizzes and exams test students’ knowledge of the entire textbook.

This approach to teaching is based on the premise—a correct one, I believe—that college students are responsible adults who can decide for themselves what they want from their courses. If they want to learn a lot about psychology, I will bend over backwards to help them do so. If they just want to get by, I am willing to let them do that, too. Their choice is reflected in their grade. When I explain my approach on the first day of class, a few students inevitably drop the course, but the vast majority stick around, and many of them later tell me that they took great satisfaction from having faced and overcome the challenge I set for them. I benefit from this approach, too, because it has helped to maintain my enthusiasm for teaching, and it makes me miss teaching when I am not doing it. Knowing that I am going to
surprise, delight, confound, or challenge my students in tomorrow's class has made teaching—and planning my teaching—one of the most enjoyable and satisfying aspects of my life.

Finally, I find that the teaching approach I have described allows me more class time to pursue several goals that I think are at least as important as the teaching the specifics of psychology courses. These goals, which I have described in more detail elsewhere (Bernstein, 1997; Goss Lucas & Bernstein, 2005) include (a) portraying psychology as an empirical science based on critical thinking, (b) portraying psychological knowledge as a body of information that changes through research, (c) portraying the breadth and diversity of psychology and its subfields, (d) creating opportunities for active learning, (e) emphasizing the importance of psychology in everyday life, and (f) portraying psychology as a discipline whose subfields overlap with each other and with other disciplines.

Am I a better teacher now than I was when I started? I think so, but any improvements are not reflected in student ratings, which were (unjustifiably) high in 1968 and haven’t declined much since. Recent ratings tell me that students still like my classroom style, but I like to think that my courses are now more substantial in terms of the content I present, the methods I use to present it, and the tests I employ to assess students’ learning. With experience, including the experience that has come from writing psychology textbooks, I have found it easier to tell a richer story in class, to answer students’ questions in greater depth and within a broader context, to anticipate what material students will find most challenging, to help motivated students find relevant additional readings and resources, and to advise students about careers in psychology. Because of these changes, I believe that students taking, say, introductory psychology with me today would get a version that is superior in almost every way to the one I taught thirty-five years ago. At least I certainly hope so!

Advice for New Teachers

My uncertainty about the quality of my teaching reflects the difficulty inherent in trying to decide exactly what constitutes “good teaching,” or how, exactly, to do it. Still, I think there are some very simple, very general guidelines for effective teaching, and I wish that someone had told me about them before I taught my first course. My version of these guidelines is presented below. Further information about these and other characteristics of effective teachers can be found in other sources (e.g. Forsyth, 2003; Goss Lucas & Bernstein, 2005). Keeping these guidelines in mind can help make new teachers’ first forays into the white water of teaching a lot less stressful, and may thus help them become better teachers sooner.
1. Show students that you care about your teaching and about them. Caring teachers tend to get better ratings, have more enjoyable classes, and receive more student respect and support.

2. Be yourself. Students are not impressed by exaggerated efforts to impress or intimidate, and such efforts can poison the classroom atmosphere.

3. Be reasonable and fair, but set firm rules and stick to them.

4. Be prepared for your course, and for every class.

5. Expect the unexpected, and stay calm when it happens.

6. Remember that what you teach today may be proven wrong tomorrow, so present psychological knowledge in the context of a continuing research process.

7. Keep your sense of humor, and don’t be afraid to let it show.

8. Keep your students in mind. Can they easily see and hear you? Are your visuals visible from the back of the room? Repeat every student question and comment so that everyone can hear it.

9. Do not demean or argue with students in class. If you are disrespectful to a student, even an obnoxious one, you will look like a bully. Deal with individual problems outside of class.

10. Remember that most students are on your side when the course begins. They want you to succeed, and they want the class to go well, so you actually have to work at alienating them. In other words, success in teaching is largely a matter of keeping a positive atmosphere positive.

Final Thoughts

I hope that you find some of these guidelines useful in your own teaching. To those readers who are about to start an academic career, I would like to say that teaching psychology is the greatest gig I can imagine. Every term, you are given a new group of students who, for the most part, know less about psychology than you do. You then have the pleasure of telling them about what psychological scientists and practitioners have accomplished over the last 125 years, and why those accomplishments are important—not only for promoting human welfare in general, but for their lives in particular. You also get paid. Not a lot, of course, but there are many other compensations.

For example, every now and again, sometimes with an offhand comment or example of which you may later have no memory, you will affect students’ lives in ways you could never have foreseen. I will never forget the APA convention at which a well-known psychology professor told me that it was his experience as a student in my abnormal psychology class at Illinois that led him to change his major to psychology. I was delighted,
because—even though he has written a competing book in introductory psychology—I realized that I had indirectly contributed to our field through him and his research. I am sure that readers who are experienced teachers have had similar experiences, and that you share these same feelings of pride.

References


I teach high school psychology. The larger audience for this book is likely to be individuals involved in or considering teaching at the college level. Thus, my particular niche is going to be different in some ways different from most of the stories in this volume. Welcome to my world!

I have taught psychology and advanced placement psychology at Cedar Falls High School in Iowa since 1978. I graduated from St. Olaf College with a BA in psychology and later earned an MA in teaching from the University of Iowa. I have been involved in a number of American Psychological Association (APA) initiatives, serving as a member of the task force that authored the *National Standards for High School Psychology*, chairing the executive board of Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS), and co-editing the 4th volume of the APA *Activities Handbook for the Teaching of Psychology* (Benjamin, Nodine, Ernst, & Blair-Broeker, 1999). I have been an essay reader or table leader for the Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology Examination since the test was first administered in 1992, and I completed a 3-year term on the AP Psychology Test Development Committee. I have had the opportunity to lead workshops or make presentations in 20 states or provinces. For 3 years, Perilou Goddard and I co-directed Teaching the Science of Psychology, a summer institute for high school psychology teachers supported by the National Science Foundation and the Northern Kentucky University Foundation. Among my teaching awards are the 1996 Grinnell College Outstanding Iowa Teacher Award, the 1989 University of Iowa Distinguished Teacher Award, and the APA Society for the Teaching of Psychology (Division 2) Teaching Excellence Award (now known as the Moffet Memorial Award) in 1992. Randy Ernst and I co-authored *Thinking About Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behavior* (Blair-Broeker & Ernst, 2003), a high school psychology textbook. Most of these accomplishments would not have been possible without the loving support and endless patience of my wife, Lynn, and my two sons, Carl and Eric.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I have met many teachers who knew since childhood that they wanted to be in the classroom. This thought never crossed my mind until I was a graduate student in clinical psychology at the University of Iowa in the early 1970s. My undergraduate major was psychology, and I applied to clinical programs based mostly on my interest in the field and a lack of any real examination of the alternatives. Getting accepted into a competitive program
sealed the deal, and I started at Iowa with a high dose of enthusiasm, but little clear understanding as to what I was ultimately after professionally.

I cannot tell you where the idea to teach high school psychology came from, but I do know exactly where and when it entered my head. I was walking to class in Iowa City one morning in my second semester of graduate school, and—wham—there it was. I had never taken an education class or even considered this career before. Nobody in my family has ever taught, and in fact my parents did not have particularly high regard for teachers. Nonetheless, there the idea was, staring at me and not looking at all like it was about to go away. I ended up in several offices that morning trying to learn how this new idea could come to pass. A master of arts in teaching program seemed perfectly suited to what I had in mind, and in a year and a half I had jumped through the necessary hoops to walk into a classroom in Kearney, Nebraska as a newly minted teacher of history, sociology, and, thank God, a couple sections of psychology.

Unlike many psychology teachers, I have had a full dose of education courses, ranging from educational psychology to social studies methods to A-V technology (this course is the one course that no prospective teacher at Iowa could avoid. If you ever need something laminated or require a filmstrip projector operator, I am your man.).

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Teaching in a public high school is never dull. It is an occupation that continually brings you in contact with a wide variety of people. In fact, when people ask me what I teach, my typical answer is “people.” I get 48 minutes a day with five classes of about 25 students each. A semester is 90 days, so that leaves me 4,320 minutes—72 hours—to make whatever impact I will make. In my career, I have had some 7,000 such opportunities, and I know of no way to quantify the nature of the impact. The anecdotal evidence is usually gratifying. I will occasionally get a note or, in recent years, an e-mail bringing me up to date on the life of a former student, and I admit to wondering how many have continued in psychology at least in part due to the seeds planted in my classroom. One time at the annual National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP) teaching conference, I was riding an elevator when a young woman whom I did not recognize said, “B2?” (B2 is the nickname I was given years ago by students who found Blair-Broeker to be too much of a mouthful). Turns out she was now teaching psychology in a community college and credited me for her interest in the field. Such moments are as delightful as they are rare.

Of course, one can influence students in ways other than career choice. I like to think I model intellectual curiosity, integrity, critical thinking, optimism, and other qualities I believe make our world a better place. Sometimes the influence is humorous. Just this spring I
received an e-mail from a former student titled “the lucky pink eraser.” On the day of the AP psychology test, I usually give my students a little eraser for good luck (and to help them be able to change answers on a machine-scored form without losing credit.). Jeremy had kept his eraser for 10 years. His e-mail related how it had accompanied him on foreign travels, sat on the desk when he took various qualifying tests and filled out applications, and rested in his pocket as he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation in political science the week before he wrote. I chided him about being a highly educated young man who was still unable to distinguish between correlation and causation, but remain highly pleased that I apparently touched his life in a significant way. This, at its core, is why I teach.

The job would be relatively easy if one’s only contacts were with students in the classroom. My greatest challenges often come from different directions. This year, for example, I am assigned to supervise the cafeteria for 50 minutes each day. Although most students are well behaved on most days, there are still enough thrown carrots, spilled milks, and bruised egos to make the duty unpleasant. The irony is that, in light of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, teachers are required to devote additional time to professional development. Two days of classroom instruction time were shifted to this purpose this year. However, if my colleagues and I could devote our supervision duty to professional development, we would each have about 150 additional hours a year for the task. What’s the rub? The district would have to hire non-teaching supervisors, and the money is not available. So, the students pay for the privilege of not being “left behind” with their instructional time.

After almost 30 years, I admit I am tired of supervision duties. I am tired of faculty meetings. I am tired of committees. I am tired of bureaucratic paperwork. I recognize that sometimes these other activities have merit, but in my mind they distract me from my primary responsibilities in the classroom and rarely seem to relate to my ability to teach effectively. Alas, I have become a curmudgeon.

I truly hesitate to put a philosophy of teaching in writing, because it bestows a permanence that does not exist. Analogies often speak to me, and clarify for my students, so perhaps it is enough to say that part of my philosophy finds teaching a bit like a nice garden; it changes from month to month and season to season but generally is productive. I try to stay fresh like the garden; fertile like the garden. Gardeners require sun, water, and compost to work their magic. I require contact with colleagues and time to read and reflect if I am to serve my students. Gardens are a place for seeds to grow, and I certainly try to plant seeds in my classroom as well. Vegetable gardens serve practical needs and flower gardens serve aesthetic purposes, just as I try to touch on both realms in my classroom. A garden reflects the personality of its keeper, and a good classroom does the same. Gardens are earthy, genuine,
sometimes contaminated with a weed or two, and occasionally fail to produce. All can be said of me and my teaching from time to time.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

When I began teaching, I found it exhilarating but frightening. I still do. I am perhaps more mellow about it than I once was, and on a cognitive level I understand that my work will be adequate and often good, but I still start most days with some nagging doubts about the lesson about to unfold. I worry more than I used to about lost opportunities, convinced that our most precious resource is time. Maybe what I have planned is okay, but is it the best possible use of the day’s time?

Not only do I fret before I start, I also spend time at the end of the day deconstructing what has happened, especially when the lesson has not gone well. On those relatively rare occasions when there has been an unpleasant interaction in the classroom or I must deal with unhappy parents or confront a student about cheating, my day is largely ruined. I replay the scenario in my head wondering what I could have done differently to avoid the unpleasantness. I think these situations just go with the territory. Even in cases where I can attribute almost all the blame to a dishonest student or an unreasonable parent, it is difficult to let it go. Albert Ellis would be all over me.

I have always emphasized content in my class. Public schools are called upon to handle everything from personal hygiene to computer literacy. At various times just in the current school year I have been asked to consider how to instill a love of reading, how to improve the performance of my students on standardized tests, how to help students develop a sense of personal responsibility, and (this seems to be the big one in my school this year) how to get students to dress appropriately within the confines of our dress code. If I am not careful, it is easy to forget I was hired to teach psychology.

The vast majority of students appreciate a content-rich course. It’s the classes filled with busywork and with no clear expectations of academic accomplishment that they complain about most. I hear some grumbling along the way, but most students enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes from mastering new material.

Finally, I have learned that effective teaching and learning are not incompatible with having fun. I want laughter in my class every day, partly because it makes it a more pleasant environment for me (after all, I spend more time in my classroom than anyone else) does and partly because I am convinced students learn more under such circumstances.

Advice for New Teachers

My father was fond of saying that a good life is a balanced life. The same, I believe, can be said of a good teacher. Those who cannot maintain a sense of balance (some days it
seems more like juggling) ought not apply. Somehow, one must deal with both the little details, like how to get students to see the distinction between positive and negative reinforcement, and the big picture, like helping students realize the incredible potential of psychology to improve our world. One has to consider overall lesson planning for an entire semester along with how to spend four extra random minutes when a lesson is completed early. One needs to appreciate that allowing one more student in an overloaded class, in itself, does not create an unreasonable burden on your time, but saying yes to every request to do just a little more is a rocket ride to burnout. One must carefully consider the concerns of every disgruntled student (not to mention parent, colleague, and administrator) yet remember that you cannot please everyone.

Ultimately, every teacher, whether new or well-seasoned, must chart his or her own course. Literally hundreds of decisions are made in the course of a single day. Some will be easy and some will be hard; some clear-cut and others ambiguous; some trivial and others crucial. You will not make the right call each time, but then again you do not have to. Take pride and comfort in the fact that our discipline specializes in critical thinking and, whatever else, know that you are doing something important, worthy of your passion, and fun. Teach well.

References
This chapter should be titled “Joys of Teaching,” because there are so many such joys. I chose the singular noun to parallel titles of two popular books that people of my generation will remember: *Joy of Cooking* and *Joy of Sex*. I hasten to add, however, that this chapter focuses more on teaching than on cooking or sex, which will disappoint some readers more than others.

Born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, on May 10, 1932, I graduated from high school there, received a BA degree in psychology from Hendrix College, and earned MA and PhD degrees in experimental psychology from the University of Arkansas. In addition, I did graduate work at Indiana University and postdoctoral work at Harvard University and the University of Michigan.

After teaching at The College of Wooster and at Elmira College, I joined the faculty at Furman University in 1967, was promoted to Professor in 1970, served as chair of my department from 1972 until 1984, and was named the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Psychology in 1998. My work has received more recognition than it deserves. For example, I received Furman’s first Meritorious Teaching Award in 1969, the American Psychological Foundation’s (APF) Distinguished Teaching Award in 1989, and the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Distinguished Career Contributions to Education and Training Award in 1995.

I especially cherish a few memorable highlights. After serving as editor of *Teaching of Psychology* from 1985-1996, I was named Editor Emeritus during a special session at the APA convention in Toronto. Stephen F. Davis and William Buskist edited a book, *The Teaching of Psychology: Essays Honoring Wilbert J. McKeachie and Charles L. Brewer*, that was published in 2002. The editors and many authors of these essays are dear friends, and I was touched by their work on this extraordinary project. To be associated in this way with Bill McKeachie, my long-time friend and a national treasure for teachers, was a peak experience. In 2003, the APF renamed its teaching award, which was first presented to Fred S. Keller and Freda Gould Rebelsky in 1970, the Charles L. Brewer Distinguished Teaching of Psychology Award. Recipients of this prestigious award include many legendary teachers, and I am deeply honored to be associated with them. Endowed funds to enhance the teaching and learning of psychology have been established in my name at Furman University and Hendrix College. I received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Hendrix in 2004.
APA convention in Washington, DC, the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) will sponsor a session titled Affecting Eternity: Honoring the Contributions of Charles L. Brewer.

Most of my recent scholarship and publications concern undergraduate education; teaching; and John B. Watson, who graduated from Furman in 1899. Having participated in almost all important conferences dealing with undergraduate education in psychology during the last 30 years, I have been a consultant on psychology curricula and teaching for many colleges and universities throughout the country. I have presented numerous invited addresses at local, state, regional, national, and international conferences. In all this work, I received abundant positive, but intermittent, reinforcement from many wonderful colleagues.

My Early Development as a Teacher

When I was a graduate student in the 1960s, not many psychology programs stressed teaching and even fewer provided formal preparation for aspiring teachers. The lacuna in this important aspect of academic preparation was appalling, and it still is. I was fortunate, however, to have several excellent mentors. Dr. John P. Anderson was my favorite Hendrix College professor. As his teaching assistant, I presented lectures in a few of his classes. After college, I served an apprenticeship with Miss Emily Penton, a history teacher at Little Rock Central High School, in a program sponsored by the Ford Foundation to encourage college graduates to pursue teaching careers. Both of these master teachers provided good guidance as I struggled to cultivate an appropriate philosophy of education and approach to pedagogy. They both insisted that beginning teachers should not merely emulate their role models, but that all neophytes must develop their own educational philosophies and personal styles. These two teachers were important influences in my early career, and they still are. Memorable mentors at the University of Arkansas were Professors Donald Kausler and Hardy Wilcoxon. I learned a lot about psychology from them, and their exacting standards and teaching techniques affected my further development. The most valuable lesson I learned from these four extraordinary people was how exciting and rewarding the life of a teacher can be.

I never took a course in the teaching of psychology, and nothing in graduate school prepared me for those first few frenetic years of full-time teaching. Staying two pages ahead of the students in courses I never taught, or maybe never took, required more time than I ever imagined. This illustrates what later became Brewer’s Third Law: Things always take longer than they do.

Since early childhood, I wanted to be a teacher, but the problem was deciding what to teach. I could have been happy teaching biology, English, history, philosophy, or political science, but taking General Psychology with Dr. Anderson changed my life. After this course, I decided to be a psychology major and a teacher of psychology. His excellent teaching, high
standards, and constant encouragement were critical in shaping every aspect of my academic career and professional life.

**Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher**

*Not Enough Time*

In addition to ignorance about how to teach, the major problem in my teaching relates to the previously mentioned Third Law. There is always more to do than time to do it. After decades of experience, I still struggle with this problem. I concluded many years ago that most college teachers are far smarter and more efficient than I am. This conclusion came from observing that I have to spend more time doing my work than they spend doing theirs. One effective strategy for overcoming this deficiency is to start earlier and work later than they do.

Another adaptive strategy concerns setting priorities for spending one’s time. Early in my career, I did a lot of university committee work related to so-called faculty governance. Many years ago, however, I decided to do less of this work after learning that most of it is neither productive nor rewarding and that much of it is a waste of time. I now leave such work to people who are eager to do it and who seem to have nothing else to do. My only regret is that this decision did not come earlier in my career.

*Teaching, Scholarship, and Service: A Delicate Balance*

The relative importance of teaching, scholarship, and service for college teachers has been a contentious issue for a long time (McGovern & Brewer, 2003). Perhaps because of widespread public criticism and greater insistence on accountability by various constituencies, the debate has become hotter in recent years. College teachers are expected to excel in all three areas. Some people can, but most of us cannot. These conflicting demands have never been a problem for me, however, because I try to balance them in a way that is manageable and right for me. They all complement each other. For longer than some readers are old, I have been a spirited teacher, an active researcher, and a frequent participant in far-flung professional activities. Each of these aspects of my work improves performance on the other two, thereby making me better at all three. My problem is not allocating appropriate time to each of the three but the total time available. As noted earlier, my strategy is to work harder and longer.

*The Examined Life of a Teacher*

Trying to discuss one’s philosophy of teaching is difficult and perhaps fatuous. Forced to do so, however, I suggest that my approach has several important ingredients, including passion, principles, preparation, parsimony, perseverance, patience, and precision. Brewer (2002) and Batson and Einstein (2002) illustrate how these qualities pervade my life as a teacher, and I shall comment on them later in this chapter. A critical aspect of my philosophy
concerns academic rigor. Based on extensive experience, I can assert with confidence bordering on certainty that academic rigor is on the wane and grade inflation is a national travesty. Intellectual pursuits that are not challenging and rewarding are probably worthless; they are surely worth less than those that are challenging and rewarding. My rigorous, no-nonsense approach to teaching was greatly influenced by the four mentors mentioned earlier. This approach received a high compliment from a student who graduated from Furman more than 3 decades ago and who is now a clinical psychologist in Charlotte, North Carolina. In the postscript to a letter, she wrote: “Brewer, leave no academic butt unkick’d.” This exhortation is now my maxim. One obligation of academic butt-kickers is to embody facets of my philosophy mentioned earlier. These will go a long way toward engaging students and inspiring them to do better than they can. I hope that many of my former students, including some of the more than 200 who have earned doctoral degrees in psychology, would agree that this is what I try to do in all interactions with students. To conclude the first lecture in every course, I tell students that I will not teach them anything. After watching their reactions of incredulity, I repeat that I will not teach them anything. Then, after a pregnant pause, I say that I will try to arrange the situation so that they cannot avoid learning more than they ever wanted to know about psychology and more than they ever learned in any other course. They leave that first class thinking that this course will be unusual, and I try not to disappoint them.

Changing Approaches

As a beginning instructor, I thought that students had to learn everything in their textbooks and that they could not learn anything that I did not teach them. Trying frantically to cover every chapter, I lectured in a style resembling rapid-fire pontification. My approach is different now. I start on the first day of the term and stop on the last day, without fretting about covering everything about everything. I have not covered all chapters in my introductory psychology textbook in decades. Likewise, I now believe that good teachers are good story-tellers, so I tell more stories. (As a beginning teacher, I had no stories to tell.) Ever since I started teaching, students complain about two things: I talk too fast and my exams are too hard. After hearing these comments for many years, I have no plans to change my rate of speaking or the difficulty of my exams.

Technology in Teaching

Computer technology may have produced more dramatic changes in how we teach and students learn since Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1437. Many Web sites contain valuable information for teachers and students, and I consult them often. Accessing the Oxford English Dictionary with one mouse click is delightful. I regularly check certain Web sites devoted to science, and I frequently use information from them in my classes. Electronic access to journals, with full text and graphics, has changed how I do many things.
that were unthinkable a few years ago. In addition, most textbook publishers have their own Web sites that provide more information than I need or use. PowerPoint presentations have supplanted old-fashioned lecturing for many teachers. I routinely use computer technology in ways that improve my teaching and scholarship. I have never used PowerPoint presentations as substitutes for lectures, and I probably never will. I continue to believe that the most important education occurs in face-to-face interactions of teachers and students.

How Am I Doing?

One of the most rewarding things about teaching is lecturing in ways that combine effective communication, panache, and a willingness to try anything to make a fact or principle memorable. Such lecturing can be exciting and fun. When it no longer is, I will stop teaching and do something else.

The most frustrating thing about teaching is that you never know what you are doing. As a beginning teacher, I was concerned almost exclusively with assessing students’ knowledge of the substantive content of courses, and this assessment seemed straightforward. Recent emphasis on more varied and comprehensive assessment, including such things as critical thinking, diversity issues, portfolios, and group projects, has complicated the situation. Assessing students’ knowledge of the substantive content of courses is the easy part; assessing these other aspects of performance is frustratingly difficult. The APA’s Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies provides valuable suggestions and a copy of its report may be found on STP’s Web site: http://www.teachpsych.org.

The most reassuring and valuable assessment has little to do with what students learn about psychology, although I hope that my students learn a lot about it. A teacher’s greatest rewards often come when students write or visit, sometimes many years after they graduate, and tell you that something you said or did changed their lives in important ways. Making the world a better place by making a difference in students’ lives is the real reason for teaching. Understandably and unfortunately, few formal assessment techniques address this facet of our work.

Instant success as a teacher is impossible, but constant improvement is not. I ignore the former and concentrate on the latter. I read every issue of STP’s journal, Teaching of Psychology. In addition, STP’s Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology (OTRP) provides a plethora of useful information, and I consult it often. Local, state, regional, national, and international conferences of psychological organizations and on the teaching of psychology are excellent opportunities to learn about good teaching and how others do it. I have participated in more of these conferences than I can remember, and I always learn from them. The camaraderie and informal discussions at these meetings are important benefits as well. Information about the resources mentioned in this paragraph is included on STP’s Web site.
Advice for New Teachers

My advice for new teachers is called “Brewer’s Ten Commandments of Teaching” (Brewer, 2002, pp. 503-506). Summarizing them briefly is difficult, but they involve the following:

1. Be clear about your educational goals and objectives.
2. Go beyond the facts; teach principles.
3. Questions are more important than answers.
4. Strive for clarity, conciseness, and felicity of expression in speaking and writing.
5. Be passionate about learning and teaching.
6. Be fair and friendly will all students but familiar with none.
7. Maintain high academic standards.
8. Cultivate close relationships with colleagues of all ages.
9. The most important education is self-education, and it is a lifelong process.
10. Be patient with your students and with yourself.

Practical advice is easier. A few suggestions:

1. Read and heed McKeachie’s Teaching Tips (2002).
2. Participate in the numerous activities concerning teaching sponsored by APA, STP, and APS. These are updated on each organization’s Web site.
3. Read every issue of STP’s journal, Teaching of Psychology.
4. Learn about teaching from colleagues and/or mentors.
5. Proudly celebrate teaching as a sacred calling.

No advice from me or anyone else will ensure success for new teachers, but these things have benefited my academic odyssey and made teaching more interesting and exciting for me and my students.

Final Thoughts: Personal Joys

One great joy of teaching is to observe students’ personal, academic, and vocational success. Many of my former students are psychologists and other professionals with notable accomplishments, and I heartily celebrate them. I rejoice when students do well, but I am proudest when students do right.

Another great joy is working with many exemplary and indefatigable teachers of high school psychology, especially in TOPSS. Their outstanding work in getting APA’s official approval of national standards for the teaching of high school psychology is one indication of their stunning success. I am pleased to have played a role in that historic project.

Still another great joy comes from mentoring colleagues at Furman and elsewhere. Many of these people have won teaching awards at local, state, and national levels. Several of
them are outstanding scholars who contribute regularly to the primary literature. Others are leaders in APA, STP, TOPSS, and APS. Many of them now write with greater clarity, conciseness, and felicity of expression as authors, reviewers, consulting editors, and editors. (Another great joy of teaching is to read good writing and to write good reading.) I take no credit for their noteworthy and commendable achievements; I merely note and commend them. I must admit, however, that I take pride in having encouraged these valued colleagues to pursue certain opportunities for their professional development.

My greatest joy as a teacher comes from the warmth and support of congenial colleagues and faithful friends throughout the world. Most of these people are kind enough not to dwell on my many foibles and idiosyncrasies, for which I am grateful. My simple and heartfelt message for all of them: You have enriched my life, and I thank you very much. Borrowing from Alexander Pope and Henry Brooks Adams, I revere teachers who devote their lives to “bending twigs” and “affecting eternity.” I always have. I always will.

References
Born in Long Beach, California in 1934, I received the A.B. degree from Pomona College and Ph.D. from Princeton University. I undertook additional study during postdoctoral and visiting professorships at the University of Virginia, the Pennsylvania State University, the Delta Primate Center of Tulane University, the University of Stirling (Scotland, UK), the Medical Research Council, Cambridge (England, UK), the University of Mysore (India), and the University of California at Berkeley.


Early Development as a Teacher

It occurred to me during my year of intellectual awakening, my sophomore year at college, that I could not decide among philosophy, biology, or psychology as a major. The first two areas were exciting, but I saw no distinct future for myself in either field. My introductory course in psychology was taught by a person who seemed to lack enthusiasm for the field, although he was to become a distinguished researcher in educational psychology. I searched for a teacher who communicated some passion for the big ideas that occupied psychology in those days: the theories of Hull, Skinner, Tolman, Guthrie; the place in working theory of logical positivism, hypothetical constructs, and intervening variables. The arrival of just such a person at Pomona College, the late Joel Greenspoon, led to the capturing of my enthusiasm, a summer of research on Estes’ mathematical theory through the Social Science Research Council, and the decision that if I were to continue with the luxury of learning, graduate school would be the obvious path.
Training for Teaching

I had no formal training in how to teach, although during a postdoctoral year at the University of Virginia, I attended a seminar offered by the late Frank Finger in which we designed hypothetical psychology courses and assignments and discussed their merits and failings. This was an excellent way of becoming prepared to teach and, not unimportantly, of having something useful to say during job interviews.

Motivation for a Career in Teaching

I cannot say what lead me to college-level teaching. No one in my family had attended high school. The only people I knew who had gone beyond high school were, I supposed, teachers. Their patient support led me to apply to several colleges they selected, none of which I knew. None offered me the full scholarship I needed to attend.

With no further education in sight, I went to work for the Civilian Conservation Corps clearing the Angeles Crest Forest of poison oak in the company of day-release prisoners. I learned much from them, and it seemed for a time that this was the only higher education I would receive. One evening, the dormitory phone rang. I received a call from Pomona College. The Director of Admissions, William Wheaton, was calling for me to say that the college had received unanticipated funds that would allow me to enroll, even though the semester was six weeks underway. I took the bus to Pomona, California, only to learn that Pomona College wasn’t there. I found it in Claremont, California.

What I Learned

The first lecture I attended was on Plato, a name previously unknown to me. I did not understand the point of the *Phaedo*. The second was on the Minotaur of Crete, another unfamiliar topic. I did not understand that the opening of “The Wasteland” was a reference to Chaucer’s opening line in *Canterbury Tales*, having heard of neither. (On the social level, it was noted with hilarity during my first breakfast that I did not know how to use an egg-cup.) The fourth new topic, the corpus callosum, was explained in a psychology course. To my shock, a daring student pointed out to the teacher inaccuracies in the description of the brain. From this episode I suspected, a suspicion later confirmed many times, that teachers do not always know what they are talking about—and that students are expected to contribute their knowledge to any discussion if learning, as opposed to indoctrination, is the goal of education.

I was frightened and in love: frightened that I could never know what other people knew and in love with the ideas I was finding. I was drunk on nothing but the pure water of the muses said by Alexander Pope to haunt the Pierian Spring. My heart still beats faster when I recall the first time I asked a question in public, a slyly aggressive question (I thought) addressed to the aesthete, Philip Wheelwright. He thanked me for my thoughtful point, and, later, sent me a postcard expanding on a point made during his answer. My career was
launched by his taking my comment seriously and by his courtesy. The lesson I learned was
that all good teachers respect both their subject matter and those who would learn it no matter
what their level of experience and understanding.

Graduate school was a different matter. Minnesota, my first choice because of its
faculty in the philosophy of psychology, sent me a springtime telegram: “DON’T ACCEPT
AN OFFER UNTIL YOU HEAR FROM US.” I have heard nothing further, although the
telegram is now half a century old. Another lesson learned. I selected Princeton for reasons
now unclear to me, although it is fair to say that among the many things I learned in college,
the location of Eastern seaboard colleges and universities was not among them, as to attend
Princeton I purchased a ticket to Boston, Massachusetts. This was wise, as it turned out, for I
used an introduction to visit with B. F. Skinner, E. G. Boring, and S. S. Stevens. Stevens took
about five minutes to determine that we had in common being direct descendents of
polygamous families.

The formal teaching at Princeton, once I found it in New Jersey, surely did not meet
the standards I had known as an undergraduate, but the differing kinds of scholarship
represented by the faculty provided the dimension that added quality to the experience. In the
presence of dedicated scholars, teaching techniques meant nothing, scholarship everything.
Princeton’s form of graduate education appealed to me even more. We graduate students were
given a reading list of some 50 books, expected to pass the exams in German and French,
required to sustain ‘prelims’ in each of eight areas, wrote a thesis, and defended it before the
full faculty. The plan was clearly built on the assumption that one learns because one wants to
know.

In those days, Princeton graduate students lived in the Graduate College, a Gothic,
monkish place at which we wore academic gowns to dinner, listened to pre-dinner prayers in
punning Latin from the Master, and wherein the only women ever seen or even allowed were
those who served meals. Friendships with folk in different fields were fostered, and my
closest associates came to be architects, art historians, and composers. Of the six students in
my psychology graduate class, two remained life-long friends: Alan Baddeley, now of York
University, the UK, and the late Bruce Faulds, whose teaching career was in his native South
Africa. We argued psychology and other matters long into the nights, learning by teaching
one another.

Next to the Graduate College lay the buildings of Princeton Theological Seminary. I
had no idea what went on there then, but I do now, for it was my good luck to marry the
Dean’s daughter, this act honoring me with a lifetime’s relationship with her and her family.
By osmosis I learned something about theology and those who study it. Sometimes great luck
lurks in unexpected places. As my wife was raised in an academic family, she was inculcated
to the odd hours and even stranger intellectual concerns of academics. Finding a life-
companion who takes academic oddity for granted is a recommended move for teachers.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

What I have learned about teaching is this: The process is not so much about ‘speaking
words and doing deeds’ as about listening and asking (Candland, 1980). I am fortunate to
have specialized in a subdiscipline—animal behavior—in which research often requires
young, eager hands and brains, working in other countries often under trying conditions. This
environment thereby leads to a constant ebb and flow of energy, conversation, and ideas.

The ideas about learning and teaching that most readily influenced me are those of
Rudolph Steiner (e.g., 1926, 2002) and John Dewey (e.g., 1899, 1996). Most important,
however, have been the opportunities to observe other teachers at work. I had the good
fortune to be one of 17 folk who jointly designed and offered a year-long course in
environmental science. Watching teachers from English, chemistry, engineering, and math,
both in lecture and lab, showed me the strength of the diverse ways of successful teachers. In
like fashion, I participated for years in a team-taught Introductory Psychology course. Being
in the audience to listen to my colleagues’ ways of teaching and watching my fellow students’
reactions were revelatory.

My thinking has been much enlarged by residence for year-long stretches in other
colleges and universities, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, and my
understanding is much broadened by spending time elsewhere overseas attending various
conferences and advancing my teaching and learning. My own fieldwork has helped me
become familiar with several countries in East Africa and with South India. These
experiences add priceless depth to my understanding of how reliant we human beings are on
the props of our own culture and how provincial American psychology, and English-speaking
psychology, in general, has become.

The most important thing I have learned about teaching is that students will forgive
you, and not even notice the transgression, for disobeying every rule of pedagogy, so long as
you have passion for the material. When the passion is still, the teacher has become a drone.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Plato may have been a little harsh in his view of the value of the unexamined life, but
he was right that the competent teacher is always examining anything and everything. I have
never met a ‘good’ teacher who is not also knowledgeable about subjects other than those he
or she teaches: ornithology, musicology, and literature come to mind. Psychology is at once—
and yet neither—a humanity and a science, the first feeding questions to the methodology of
the later. Some people see the tension between the two as destructive, as a quarrel to be resolved. I see that inherent tension as what makes psychology interesting and meaningful.

Advice for New Teachers

What do great teachers have in common? What is my advice? My advice is free and therefore worth what you pay for it. I propose these few precepts:

*Teaching is the Art of Learning*

When the teacher loses interest in learning, students sense this lack of personal passion, and when so noted evaluate both the subject and the teacher as unworthy of their attention.

*Respect for the Subject Matter is Essential: So is Respect for Other Subject Matters*

Plato, Eliot, the Minotaur, and the corpus callosum—my introductions to college-thinking—all relate to our understanding of ourselves, as do poetry, history, chemistry and sociology. The mix is the strength of psychology, not its weakness.

*Respect for Students is Demanded*

Remembering this dictum is more than simple civility. Philip Wheelright’s postcard established my career. All influential teachers know the importance of civilities, an encouraging comment to a student, and how these models can make great changes in how our students come to live and appreciate the world.

*The Teacher’s Task*

The human mind, at any age, holds a store of ideas and materials, all capable of reorganization. New material is not so vital as encouraging rethinking, reorganizing, reclassifying, and re-evaluating what the student already knows.

*The Teacher’s Temperament is Critical to Success*

Teachers show their souls in subtle but prepossessing ways. Understanding one’s own temperament and how it affects others is a life-long task. Understanding and adjusting one’s own temperament is an essential aspect of learning for anyone who presumes to teach others.

*Evaluate Yourself*

Try new ways, so long as they are authentic to your temperament and voice. Provide a means for students to evaluate you, especially about methods that you are unsure of. Forget standardized forms, as they lead inevitably to standardized, passionless teaching. Alas, legal and professional forces have now made it difficult for beginning teachers to experiment, thereby making it impossible to find, in time, their own authentic voice and technique.
Avoid Textbooks

Few events have so ruined the teaching of psychology as textbooks filled with “facts” but void of thought, imagination, and viewpoint. Far better to read and discuss a few original works showing the author’s voice and concerns than to toss to the student a text with thousands of unconnected “facts.”

Final Thoughts

Just as there are three kinds of students, so, in my experience, are there three kinds of teachers: the mental, the ornamental, and the detrimental. Mental teachers enjoy the subject matter, especially its mysteries and problems, and take pleasure in communicating their pleasure. They believe that students have minds stuffed with information unorganized yet often vivid, if repressed by years of “education” and awaiting only the teacher’s leading questioning for continuing mental organization and insights to occur. The mental teacher knows much about but cares little about teaching ‘techniques’ or the ‘science’ of pedagogy.

The ornamental teacher enjoys the pulpit and imagines that all listeners are spellbound by the tone and quality of the rhetoric. They think most of their thoughts and personal experiences to be gems of knowledge. They mistake student attention for audience appreciation of their talents as performer. In fact, if the students are attentive, it is only because they have learned that they will be tested on this teacher’s interpretations, not on what they as pupils might bring to the conversation.

Detrimental teachers are certain of their knowledge. Therefore, they believe, they must offer pieces of their minds to be placed unchanged in the mind of the student. If a student has an original thought outside the knowledge of the teacher, it is regarded as inappropriate. This teacher ‘owns’ knowledge and often uses the whip of the grade.

A quick way to distinguish teachers of the three kinds is this: A teacher who blames a “bad” class on the students’ ignorance will surely be detrimental. The teacher who prefers students who admire his or her ideas or presentation is often ornamental. The teacher who can overcome these natural tendencies and love the subject matter will be a great teacher to many, no matter how awkward the presentation.

As for students, every student will respond in time to some teacher, bad or good, but never to one indifferent. The symbiotic response occurs, when it does, because there has been a match in temperament. If it is true that all philosophy is but a footnote to Plato, (and, I would add, all psychology a footnote to Kant), then the relationship between student and teacher is not a rational one, as we pretend: it is an emotional one.

Therein hangs a problem, as Socrates well knew and as we forget from time to time. The emotional nature of knowledge leads student and teacher alike to misread their feelings.
True love of knowledge is directed at knowledge itself, not at the presumed possessor. The student understands this distinction only on the dimmest, and therefore most dangerous, of levels. If nothing else, teach the difference between love of knowledge as distinct from love of the presumed possessor of it—for the world is full of charlatans who think that possession of a little knowledge or powerful emotions entitles them to respect and affection.

Wise and honest teachers learn so by coming to understand their own temperament and motivations to teach. The task is never be complete, but the path offers a lifetime gift to teacher—namely the impetus to continue learning and refining one’s own temperament, coming to see one’s illusions and preconceptions, thereby coming as near as humans may to teaching wisdom.

References
My journey in the field of education began as a dream of a young girl who loved to learn. Childhood games followed the theme of teaching and learning, school was fun, and I always wanted to be the teacher. I am currently pursuing my dream, as a teacher in a large suburban high school. I am the Department Chair of the Social Studies Department of L. V. Berkner High School, Richardson, Texas that serves a student population of near 3000. I teach the Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology course that affords high school students the opportunity to sit for an AP Exam and attempt receipt of college credit. In addition to these duties, I also teach Introductory Psychology and Economics. I have chosen this level of education because I feel that I can have a positive impact on students as they begin to make decisions about the direction of their lives. After teaching bright-eyed 7th grade students the glory of geography for several years, I moved to teaching high school seniors so I could guide them to success in postsecondary education and motivate them to contribute to their communities.

I am a secondary educator by training. I came to teach high school and AP Psychology by assignment and discovered that there was much to be updated. The field had changed dramatically in the years between my graduation and beginning teaching. I began to seek opportunities to enhance my teaching of psychology. I attended several intensive training sessions for the new AP Psychology course, and I became affiliated with the American Psychological Association (APA). I joined Teachers of Psychology in Secondary School (TOPSS) and was elected to the Board where I served as chair (1996-1997). I was subsequently appointed to its Board of Educational Affairs as a high school representative. I also served on the planning committee for APA’s Psychology Partnership Project (P3), which brought together nationally recognized educators for a planning conference to determine ways to bring the field of psychology to the general public. My committee developed a variety of plans to bring active learning of the science of psychology to students of all ages.

I also have worked with The College Board as an Advanced Placement (AP) test development committee member, reader, and table leader for AP Exams. I guide workshops for AP Psychology educators in The College Board’s Southwest Region. I was the AP Psychology representative for the Texas Education Agency committee that developed a manual for the best practices teaching of Pre-AP and AP courses to prepare students for the rigors of greater academic challenges.
I have been honored by being named a Richardson Independent School District RISE Teacher of the Year (1998), the APA Society for the Teaching of Psychology’s Moffett Award for High School Teaching Excellence (1999) and the College Board’s Southwest Region Special Recognition Award for Advanced Placement Education (2005). Although each of these honors has been a pleasure to receive, the real reward for teaching comes from my students who say, “Hey, I liked this course!”

My Early Development as a Teacher

My professional goal has always been to be a high school educator. I meet students at a crucial point in their educational journey from the discovery of learning to a view of what they can ultimately accomplish in their lives. Students in my classes are usually studying psychology for the first time. Although postsecondary educators will guide students in a specific direction, I can say I have helped students take the first step along that path. Many students feel they have a rudimentary understanding of psychology when they enter my classes (which is usually gained from popular media); I introduce them to the science of psychology. I have the responsibility to develop my skills as an Introductory Psychology instructor to give my students the best learning experience possible.

Unlike many psychology educators, my formal educational training is in curriculum and instruction. I specialized in the social sciences, including history, economics, government, geography, and psychology, all of which I have taught. My college course of study taught me specifically how to reach and teach the budding minds of adolescents. Only after a number of years teaching other disciplines did I rediscover my interest in teaching high school psychology. With limited support from my academic institution, I retrained myself to teach the rapidly changing field of psychology. I was assigned to teach the AP Psychology soon after The College Board established it.

I was determined to hone my skills with specific attention to teaching young people on the pre-college level. I applied to be a participant in a National Science Foundation funded summer institute designed to prepare the high school educator for the teaching of AP Psychology. The institute was led by Dr. Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr. at Texas A & M University, College Station. I was accepted as a participant and returned for subsequent summers to act as a teacher-facilitator. This intensive study provided a strong content base and the opportunity to develop hands-on, active learning demonstrations to bring the science of psychology to students. Subsequently, I was named as a facilitator for the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation funded summer institute led by Dr. Ken Keith at Nebraska Wesleyan University (now at the University of San Diego), which also offered teachers an intensive educational experience. Additionally, I was asked by several AP summer institute directors to develop week-long
training for teachers new to AP Psychology as well as for those seasoned professionals who wish to update their knowledge base and be introduced to new teaching techniques. I also have developed a number of one-day and two-day seminars for The College Board in the southwest region. Preparing these educational seminars has made me a better teacher for my students and hopefully has led others to the joy of teaching the science of psychology. Each of these experiences has given me room to grow as an effective instructor.

It had been through these varied learning opportunities that I have met some of the finest scholars of the field of psychology. It was during my first AP Psychology learning experience that I met the professor that I would consider as my professional mentor. Perhaps he is unaware of the influence he has had on my teaching career and subsequently on my colleagues and students. I am but one of many students, teachers, and colleagues that Dr. Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr. has powerfully influenced. Dr. Benjamin affects my work daily as I aspire to have a long-term impact on students just beginning their study of psychology. He works tirelessly for the advancement of students of psychology from AP students through those pursuing doctoral degrees.

There are many other colleagues from whom I have learned successful teaching techniques. Of particular note are exemplary educators such as Dr. Charles Brewer (Furman University) who has shown me the fascinating history of the evolution of learning; Randy Ernst (Lincoln, Nebraska), and Charlie Blair-Broeker (Cedar Falls, Iowa) who inspired me to demonstrate active learning to every student in class; Nancy Grippo (Palo Alto, California) who showed me how to teach reading and writing to students with varied backgrounds; and Nancy Grayson (Waco, Texas) who showed me an example of using knowledge to extend learning opportunities to students of all ages.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I was formally trained as an educator and not a psychologist. With my undergraduate background, I focus a portion of each of my psychology courses on how students can become effective learners. The teaching of skills to collect and acquire knowledge, to process and analyze information, and to develop critical thinking is essential part to my instruction. My teaching of Social Studies courses often adds an interesting element to my teaching of psychology. I have the opportunity to mold and shape young minds, dispel false notions regarding psychology, and introduce students to what I believe is the science that will bring the greatest benefit to the world in the future. I believe that the psychologist of tomorrow will solve the issues of people living together in a shrinking world. I have the opportunity to show the most creative, intelligent, and motivated students at my high school the value of psychology, and to attract them to psychology as a potential profession. I hope that as their
first introduction to psychology, I have had some small part in getting students excited about their future studies here on the “ground floor” of teaching of psychology in high school.

Times have certainly changed in my career of teaching. Is it me or have my students changed? I teach in a very large suburban, middle-class area of Richardson, Texas. In times past, students have entered the classroom as naive learners with relatively few demands on their time, limited life experiences, and the entire world open to them. Currently my students have a much greater academic experience, having taken many other challenging courses and perhaps several other AP courses. They have many demands on their time, many working as many as 20 to 30 hours per week in addition to full-time school work, participating in extra curricular activities, and doing community service. My students have situations in their lives that far exceed what adolescents should have to deal with on a daily basis; these issues represent obstacles for attaining many of their desired educational and career goals. Even with these pressing issues, my ultimate goal is to support all of my students as they grow and expand their educational life.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

A principle to guide daily classroom instruction, a motto for those involved in the learning process and a personal philosophy for teaching, is “motivation is of greater importance to future success than current level of skills.” Past academic experience, obstacles to current performance, and excessive demands on time are of little importance. Motivation, the driving force of all behavior, the directing of goal-oriented actions, and the energizing of accomplishments, is of greatest concern. If I am motivated to guide student learning, and if students are motivated to gain from our collective experience, then we are ready to rise above any challenge. We, as a class, are ready to teach and learn from each other. If we are directed toward a common goal, we are on our way to a winning experience. My daily work is guided by the philosophy that all students are capable of success.

In my 25 years in the classroom, trends have come and gone. New ideas and theories have been introduced as the ultimate way to teach. Early in my career, I felt it was my responsibility to present each morsel of knowledge to students. As the years and trends have passed, I have decided the following basic approaches to teaching. First, allow students the joy of discovery in learning; they need not have all content materials formally presented. Second, allow students to take personal responsibility for their own learning; they need to take ownership of their progress. Finally, allow students to take part in active learning through a variety of techniques. At my teaching level, it is important to be a guide for student learning. With changing ideas about the best way to teach, I have come to rely on these basic tenets.
It is quite amazing to be in the high school classroom. Students enter with only a vague notion of expectations, and they question whether their abilities will help them achieve success. Students often do not think that they can achieve on the college level while they are still in high school. I push and pull to show students what they can do. I have high expectations and express them to the young people in my classes. The reward for my students’ and my efforts comes as they sit for the AP Exam. When my students complete this strenuous exam and feel that they have grown academically from the experience, we are together successful. An additional reward emerges when my students return after their first or second year of college and tell me that their AP Psychology experience truly prepared them for post-secondary learning. One former student told me that my AP Psychology was a “really hard course,” but it gave her the confidence to be a successful psychology major. Such comments help me continue what I do from year to year. I strive to modify my course to keep up with the requirements set forth by the College Board and the updated research in psychology. My personal educational goals are to continue to learn so I can provide my students a rewarding experience. My personal satisfaction comes from student success.

Advice to New Teachers

One bit of sound advice to aspiring teachers is to be brave. I also suggest individuals who wish to become outstanding educators love learning, never be satisfied with their current level of knowledge, and continue to expand their personal life experiences. Excellent educators should surround themselves with like-minded professionals who are also life-long learners. Superior teachers collaborate with other superior teachers to enhance teaching on all levels. Inspired educators work diligently to transfer the excitement of learning to students each and every day.

Early advice to teachers came from William James, Harvard professor, psychologist, philosopher, and master teacher who saw it as his duty “to devote some of his best efforts to the improvement of teaching and the education of teachers.” (1899/1958, p.12). James concluded his *Talks To Teachers*, by saying:

I have now ended these talks. If to some of you the things I have said seem obvious or trivial, it is possible that they may appear less so when, in the course of a year or two, you find yourselves noticing and apperceiving events in the schoolroom a little differently, in consequence of some of the conceptions I have tried to make more clear. I cannot but think that to apperceive your pupil as a little sensitive, impulsive, associative, and reactive organism, partly fated and partly free, will lead to a better intelligence of all his ways. Understand him, then, as such a subtle little piece of machinery. And if, in addition, you can also see him *sub specie boni* and love him as well, you will be in the best possible position for becoming perfect teachers.

No better advice can be given.
Reference
Variety is the Spice of This Teacher’s Life

Stephen F. Davis
Emporia State University

I am Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Emporia State University (Emporia, KS). I received my Ph.D. in General Experimental Psychology from Texas Christian University. I taught at King College (Bristol, TN), and Austin Peay State University (Clarksville, TN) before joining the Emporia State faculty. Most recently, I served as the 2002-2003 Knapp Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences at the University of San Diego.

My research interests include academic dishonesty, student professional development, student responsibility, conditioned taste aversion learning, and olfactory communication in animal maze learning. Since 1966 I have published over 275 articles and textbooks and presented nearly 900 professional papers; the vast majority of these publications and presentations included student coauthors.

I have served as the President of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division 2 of the American Psychological Association [APA]), the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, the Southwestern Psychological Association, and Psi Chi (the National Honor Society in Psychology). In 1987, I received the first annual Psi Chi/Florence L. Denmark National Faculty Advisor. In 1988, I received the American Psychological Foundation Distinguished Teaching in Psychology Award, and in 1989, I received the STP Teaching Excellence Award. I am a Fellow of APA Divisions 1 (General), 2 (STP), 3 (Experimental), and 6 (Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology).

My Early Development as a Teacher

My high school senior yearbook suggests that I was destined to excel in the world of drag racing and auto mechanics. My love of building and racing cars persisted from high school into my freshman and sophomore years at Southern Methodist University (SMU). These activities, plus the “responsibilities” associated with being a fraternity member, were not especially compatible with academics. My first-semester grade point average of 2.25 slipped to a 1.25 the next semester, and then to a 1.00; the Dean was poised to expel me. Then I managed to make a 2.00 and the Dean allowed me to stay in school.

This close brush with expulsion from SMU was sufficient to raise a new sense of purpose and dedication. The result, to the Dean’s amazement, was a series of straight-A semesters. The support, guidance, and encouragement of three SMU faculty during this time was invaluable and had a lasting influence on my career as a teacher. Virginia Chancey, Al North, and Jack Strange showed me, in the broadest possible terms, what it means to be a
teacher. They had both high standards and genuinely cared about their students. They opened more than one door of opportunity as I struggled to gain and maintain academic credibility.

Following completion of my B.A. degree, I remained at SMU for the M.A. degree. During my Master’s program I was awarded an assistantship. The assistantship duties for my final semester at SMU involved assisting the new statistics professor. In this capacity I conducted review sessions and helped students who were having difficulty with their homework assignments. I had never taught before, but this experience convinced me that teaching was to be a major component of my professional career; little did I realize how major this component would be!

I began my doctoral program at Texas Christian University (TCU) in January, 1967. A few days after the end of my first semester at TCU, I happened to be riding on the elevator with the Department Chair who asked how my semester had gone. I replied “outstanding.” Following a few more pleasantries, the Chair dropped what was akin to an atomic bomb on me. He indicated that my fellowship duties for the summer would be to teach a class. “Don’t you mean helping one of the faculty teach a class?” “No.” “When does summer school start?” “In two days.” “What class will I be teaching?” “Statistics.” I shudder to think what my blood pressure and heart rate were at that moment! My assistantship experience at SMU had been great, but it was a far cry from having such complete responsibility for a class.

With my copy of textbook in hand, a friendly pat on the back, and an encouraging “go get ‘em” from the Chair, the 1967 summer statistics class was in my hands. I carefully prepared my lecture notes and printed in large letters on every other line of sheets from a legal pad. I tried to leave nothing out. I stayed exactly 1 day ahead of the class and prayed that no eager students would read ahead. Teaching the statistics class proved to be a major event in the evolution of my career. Despite my apprehensions, the students actually seemed to learn something about statistics and I fell passionately in love with teaching.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

In the spring of 1969 I began to entertain visions of establishing my own career. Such considerations as institutional size, research or teaching orientation and private liberal arts college or state university never entered my mind. After several interviews and offers, I accepted a position at King College, a small, Presbyterian college located in Bristol, Tennessee. For the next 3 years I was half of a two-person psychology department and I truly learned the meaning of the term generalist. In addition to perpetuating and enhancing my love of teaching, the King College years spawned other activities that would become integral components of my professional life—research collaboration with students and taking students to conventions to present their own papers. So, at the outset of my career, I found my research
focus shifting. To the dismay of my dissertation director, all of those hours he had invested in teaching me the importance of programmatic research seemed wasted. In some ways he probably was correct. I had come to the realization that my laboratory and research interests did not exist to serve any specific type of research; they existed for the training of quality students. I quickly found that this shift in focus meant that I was going to have to learn a lot about a large number of diverse areas and that I would be working with a consistently large number of students. Both of these changes fit my temperament and desire to work with students perfectly; yes, variety has been the spice of my life as a teacher!

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Major Principles in My Personal Philosophy of Teaching

Four major principles appear to be at the core of my philosophy of teaching. First, teaching and learning do not take place only in the classroom. In fact, I firmly believe that students learn some of their most valuable lessons when they are conducting a research project or attending a psychological convention. Second, my teaching rests on the belief that a substantial part of my job as a teacher involves challenging my students to achieve to the best of their abilities. Third, continually challenging my students means that I have to monitor my own standards carefully; what I reinforced as exemplary work in the classroom or research lab last year may not be exemplary work for that same student a year later. As students rise to and meet the challenges, the definition of excellence changes. Finally, I strongly believe that teaching should be fun and enjoyable for both students and teacher. In this regard I keep a card on my desk that says “Learning is a Grim and Serious Business.” My dear friend, the late Michael Best, gave me that card, and anyone who knew Mike and his unparalleled passion for making psychology come alive and be fun for his students knows exactly how to interpret that message!

Changes in My Approach to Teaching During My Career

Probably the biggest change that has occurred in my approach to teaching was to wean myself away from a strict dependence on my lecture notes. This change occurred slowly and sometimes painfully; after all, lecture notes are a security blanket. As I found myself relying less and less on my notes, I found myself investing more and more of the class in the hands of the students. The amount of student discussion, in-class projects, and the number of student presentations increased. I quickly became convinced of the efficacy of peer teaching (see McKeachie, 1999). I commend these activities and peer teaching to all teachers. More recently, the technological and media revolution has impacted my approach to teaching. The Internet, e-mail exchanges, and PowerPoint presentations have become part of my teaching repertoire, just as they have for countless other teachers.
Rewards and Frustrations Associated with Teaching

Without any question, my greatest rewards from teaching have always come in the form of student successes. For me, student successes come in many different varieties. On a day-to-day basis, seeing the light “go on” in a student’s eyes when he or she has mastered a concept never fails to serve as a reinforcer. Some successes, such as completing a research project, presenting a paper or poster at a convention, publishing an article, being admitted to graduate school, or accepting a position are more tangible but just as reinforcing. Charles Brewer put my sentiments to words very eloquently, when he indicated that “Good teachers stretch the mind and heart. I hope the world is a better place because we teachers make a difference to our students; after all, that is what teaching is all about” (Brewer, 2002, p. 507).

For me the most frustrating aspects of teaching have always centered around what I consider to be the plethora of “semi-meaningless” activities that we seem to find ourselves engaged in on a fairly regular basis. For example, during the 13 years that I served at department chair at ESU, I never really was able to embrace the endless succession of meetings, paperwork, and bureaucracy as completely and passionately as did the other administrators. On many occasions I commented to my friends that being able to teach an extra course (or two) was my reward for being chair. I still feel this way well over a decade later.

Reflection, Evaluation, and Assessment

Even though the need to assemble teaching materials for tenure and promotion have long since passed, I have assiduously maintained a personal teaching portfolio. My formally stated teaching philosophy, statement of teaching goals, and delineation of the teaching methods I use to attain these goals are of central importance in my teaching portfolio. I review and update these items on a regular basis. Additionally, I write a brief narrative about each course I have taught. These narratives include my thoughts about what went well, what could be improved, and the students. Finally, I add course materials and student evaluations. I believe that my portfolio is one for “reflection and change” (Korn, 2002); it has served, and continues to serve, this purpose quite well.

An examination of my teaching portfolio reveals that my methods of assessing student performance have changed over the years. Because my testing format has stayed relatively constant throughout the years (typically I use a mixture of multiple-choice and short essay questions), I believe that “expanded,” as opposed to changed, is a better descriptor. In addition to completing several exams and a final, students in my classes can expect to (a) write an APA format paper on a topic that is uniquely related to their course, (b) engage in a group project and make an in-class presentation related to the project, or (c) prepare a
portfolio of course-related materials. I have found that using a variety of assessment techniques provides a much better appraisal of my students.

Efforts to Improve My Teaching

For many years, my efforts to improve my teaching have included a variety of activities. For example, I routinely attend and make presentations at regional and national teaching meetings. I find that I can, and do, learn a great deal from my colleagues, especially the young faculty who have fresh ideas and an excellent understanding of the latest advances in technology. Also, I review and reflect on the contents of my teaching portfolio on a regular basis. Such review sessions always yield several new approaches to try or changes to make—some work, some do not. Finally, for many years my students and I have been conducting, presenting, and publishing teaching-related research (e.g., Condon et al., 2000; Davis & Huss, 2002; Kennedy, Nowak, Raghuraman, Thomas, & Davis, 2000; Kennedy, Rodrigue, & Davis, 2000). These activities help provide new insights about the teaching process, which, in turn, have impacted my own teaching.

Advice for New Teachers

The best advice I can offer someone who wants to be a good or even outstanding teacher is to read and reread Charles Brewer’s “Ten Commandments of Teaching” (Brewer, 2002). These guidelines for “surviving and thriving in an academic career” (Brewer, 2002, p. 503) are truly invaluable; once you have read them, then conduct your teaching accordingly.

Although all 10 of Brewer’s lessons are exceptionally important, I have always had a special affinity for Number 5:

For your learning and teaching, develop a passion that approaches religious fervor. If you are not passionate about what you are doing, your students will not be passionate about what you want them to do. I have often spoken and written about passion in teaching, which is the principle ingredient that separates adequate from exceptional teachers. Ralph Waldo Emerson insisted that ‘nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm,’ and he was right. The best teachers I know are as excited about learning and teaching as they were when they first started to learn and teach. The saddest people I know are teachers who have lost their passion for teaching, but they continue to teach. When teaching is no longer fun, give it up--grow geraniums, play golf, read mystery stories, help with Habitat for Humanity, watch soap operas, or become a football coach or rock star! Your colleagues and students will rejoice. (Brewer, 2002, pp. 504-505)

I believe that Charles Brewer’s comments are right on target! Passion is the key to being a good, if not outstanding, teacher.

Final Thoughts
In his description of former American Psychological Foundation Teaching Award recipients, David Pittenger (1992) eloquently and correctly summarized my career as a teacher in the following manner:

It should be noted that Davis teaches at a state school that does not have a competitive admissions policy, a prestigious history, a national reputation, or a comfortable endowment, and that does not view itself as a research institution. Hence, Davis’s level of activity appears to have been maintained by the reinforcing value of his continued interaction with his students. (p. 165).

Looking back over my teaching experiences from the 1960s to the present, I would have it no other way. My students have enriched my life in more ways than I can relate in the few pages of this chapter.

References
I have spent my entire professional career as a Professor of Psychology at Mesa Community College (MCC) in Mesa, Arizona. Although teaching has changed considerably over the years, my love for teaching at MCC has never waned. The opportunity to give students their first taste of psychology and to share my enthusiasm for the field has kept me energized about teaching. I love students and I love teaching, thus the community college environment suits my passions.

I received my B.A. and M.A. in Experimental Psychology from Occidental College (Oxy) and my Ph.D. from Arizona State University. I served as Psi Beta National President in 1994 and was awarded the Virginia Staudt Sexton Psi Beta Faculty Advisor Award in 2000. Also in 2000, I received the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division 2 of the American Psychological Association [APA]) Two Year College Teaching Excellence Award. I am a Fellow and Executive Board Member of Western Psychological Association (WPA) and was awarded the WPA Outstanding Teaching Award in 2003. At MCC, I was honored with the MCC Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award in 1995, and most recently, with the inaugural MCC Distinguished Faculty Award in 2005.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My first exposure to psychology, as a freshman at Occidental College, proved to be addicting. I was so enthralled with my first course in psychology that I knew right away that this was the field for me. It was 1970, behaviorism was popular, and I was especially interested in comparative animal behavior. Although Oxy had only 1600 students, the Psychology Department had eight outstanding full-time faculty members. I developed my concept of what constituted good teaching by observing these individuals.

I had the good fortune of having Dr. Dennis VanderWeele as my senior honors thesis advisor. He had recently joined the Oxy faculty and he was pleased to have an undergraduate who was interested in animal research. Although he said that he did not know much about birds, he was willing to help me with my thesis study on prenatal auditory imprinting in quail. This point marked the beginning of my fascination with experimental psychology and research. Dr. VanderWeele not only taught me how to conduct animal research, he also initiated my socialization into the field of professional psychology. He helped me design, run, and publish my undergraduate thesis, then enabled me to present the findings at the annual meeting of the WPA. He also facilitated a graduate fellowship that enabled me to stay at Oxy.
and complete a Master’s Degree in Experimental Psychology. In addition, he inspired me to think about college level teaching of psychology. His dedication to students provided a model that has influenced my teaching throughout my career. Although I did not have any formal training in teaching, I had the good fortune of learning from a master teacher.

One week after I completed my Master’s thesis defense at Oxy, I was hired as an adjunct professor to teach Introduction to Psychology at Mesa Community College. At the age of 23, I was simultaneously elated and terrified at the prospect of teaching college students. I overprepared for every class and read everything that I could on college teaching. I knew right away that I loved teaching. The subject matter of psychology continued to intrigue me and I found my interactions with students fulfilling.

I began a PhD program in Educational Psychology at Arizona State University while I continued to teach part time at MCC. Because I was simultaneously playing the dual roles of teacher and student, I paid close attention to the techniques used by my professors and privately critiqued their methods. As I watched them teach, I thought about what they did that I wanted to emulate and what they did that I wanted to avoid. I think we can learn to become better teachers by occasionally returning to the classroom as students.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Meanwhile, my husband and I began our family and we were blessed with three sons in six years. I was faced with juggling a career while raising young children. I continued to teach part-time until my youngest son was two-years old, and then I was hired full-time at Mesa Community College as the only female in an eight member department. I finished my PhD several years later. I discovered that teaching usually gave me needed flexibility to work around my children’s schedules. I was even able to plan their births during spring break or summer. My time on campus was spent primarily teaching classes and meeting with students. I could do my grading and course preparation at home, after the children were asleep. As long as I did not need more than 5 hours sleep per night, I was alright. One of the greatest conflicts occurred when I suddenly had a sick child who required my care while I felt committed to hold classes for my students. This sort of dilemma always created great stress for me, but I reminded myself that my children had only one mother and my students had several teachers. As a result of this experience, I became more empathetic to my students who were also parents, and it helped me keep a more realistic perspective of the importance of my classes in my students’ eyes.
Psi Beta as a Vehicle for Mentoring Students

Some of the most rewarding experiences of my teaching career have been spawned by my role as advisor of our Psi Beta Chapter. Psi Beta is the national honor society for students of psychology in community colleges. Chartering a Psi Beta chapter was one of the first efforts that I initiated after becoming a full-time faculty member. There were no other Psi Beta chapters in Arizona at that time. We started with eight members in 1989 and, as of 2004, we have inducted 607 members. We have an active chapter that engages in a variety of community service, academic enrichment, and social activities each semester. Every year, several colleagues and I take students to the APA Convention and/or to the WPA Convention to present their research and to begin their socialization into the field. Our chapter has won the National Outstanding Chapter Award six times and has been inducted into the Psi Beta National Hall of Fame. Three of our students have won the Carol Tracy National Community Service Award and 11 have won awards in the Allyn & Bacon Research Paper Competition. Psi Beta has provided a vehicle for me to mentor more than just the students in my classes. I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to encourage and guide students in the same way that I was guided during my undergraduate experience.

Involvement in National Psychology Organizations

My association with Psi Beta has impacted my life in multiple ways. In 1993, Carol Tracy, Executive Director of Psi Beta, encouraged me to run for Western Region Vice President. I had never considered doing anything on a national level before and I was very flattered. Little did I know that my decision to accept her invitation would change my career forever. I was elected to that position and served on the Psi Beta National Council for the next 5 years. I had the good fortune to meet some wonderful psychologists from around the country whom I will always value as good friends. I feel tremendous admiration and gratitude to Carol for her friendship, personal encouragement and leadership in the formation and administration of Psi Beta. In 1994, I was elected National President of Psi Beta and I continued to network with psychology teachers all over the nation. I learned so much from these dedicated people and my teaching greatly benefited from their association. By venturing out of my local campus and networking with this national organization, my career took a significant turn that proved exciting and life altering.

STP is another organization that has broadened my horizons in teaching and facilitated networking with outstanding teachers of psychology. In 1998, Dr. Diane Halpern invited me to participate on the STP Long Range Planning Committee. This exciting opportunity allowed me to work closely with outstanding teachers whom I had only admired from a distance. I had the unbelievable experience of discussing teaching and learning with the best teachers in the
field. I was inspired to think a lot about teaching and how I could emulate some of their techniques.

*Psychology Mentors in Professional Organizations*

In 1999, Diane Halpern, then president of WPA, nominated me to run for the Representative-At-Large position on the Executive Board. To my surprise, I was elected and I am currently serving my second 3-year term in this position. This outcome directly resulted from the mentoring efforts by Diane Halpern and many others who have recently enabled community college faculty to get involved and make contributions to the teaching community.

In 1997, I was invited to join Community College Working Group, a five-member group appointed by the APA Board of Educational Affairs. Through monthly conference calls and biannual meetings, this group studied and conferred on the needs of community college psychology faculty. The efforts of this group led directly to the formation of the APA Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC) in 2002. This group now numbers over 700 community college teachers of psychology who are full APA members or APA affiliates. The support of many prominent psychologists from universities and colleges facilitated the establishment of PT@CC. As inaugural chair, my involvement in the “birth” of PT@CC has been an exciting and satisfying experience that has fostered many new friendships with outstanding community-college psychology teachers.

Participation on these national boards and committees has been an enriching experience. I have had the good fortune of support from MCC in terms of allowing me time away from my classes to attend national meetings and conventions. I have often missed several days each semester to attend these activities; that is the major drawback of my participation. However, these associations have provided inspiration and motivation for me to become a better teacher, so I think my students have benefited in the long run. I have no doubt that I have given much more consideration to issues of effective teaching and learning than I would have without these opportunities.

*The Examined Life of a Teacher*

In my opinion, good teaching involves relating effectively to students as individuals. In the classroom, I try to personalize my lectures so that students feel that I am talking to them rather than “at them.” I use personal examples and encourage them to connect the subject matter to their own experiences. Many of my assignments involve students’ active application of the concepts being studied. I think that students will best remember the material that they find relevant. For many students, the Introduction to Psychology course is the only psychology class that they will ever take. My goal is to give them something that they can use to become a better employee, better parent, better spouse, or better consumer of information.
Our job as teachers is not only to explain the concepts and theories of psychology, but to help them discover how those concepts relate to their lives.

Another important tenet of my teaching philosophy is that “less is better.” I strive to identify a few of the most important concepts and theories, then explain them thoroughly, rather than using the machine gun approach to touch on everything in the text. My primary goals are to impart depth and relevance to my students’ understanding of the classes that I teach. There is so much interesting information in psychology that I think we often teach smatterings of too many different things, leaving students overwhelmed, thus retaining little. I try to ask myself ahead of time what really are the most important concepts that I need to communicate in this lesson, this chapter, and this unit. As Dr. Ludy Benjamin (2002) so wisely commented, “If you feel that you have to communicate to students all that you know about your discipline, you are in for a lifetime of disappointment” (p. 62).

Students remember much more of what they learn outside the classroom than what they learn within its walls. I require students to do outside projects that allow them to pursue their own interests and express their creativity in areas related to the course. Due to their personal investment in these projects, students are more likely to remember the content over the long run. I also try to engage students in extracurricular activities, such as Psi Beta, and to enable them to conduct their own research and present it at conferences and through avenues such as the PT@CC Allyn & Bacon Electronic Poster Contest and the Psi Beta Research Paper Contest. Many times students underestimate their own ability, but with a little nudging, they achieve great things and become more confident. When I hear back from former students, I realize how important these experiences have been in their academic and professional careers.

One of the most rewarding experiences of teaching has been to watch students get excited about psychology and use it to become successful in their personal lives and in their chosen fields. Some of my former students have gone into careers in education or business, as well as in psychology, and they tout the usefulness of their experiences in psychology as among the most valuable in their educational experience. It is also very gratifying to see students gain self confidence as a result of classroom or extracurricular opportunities that I have encouraged. One of the greatest joys is to see quiet, insecure students blossom as the semester proceeds and they begin to realize that they can be successful or even master the subject matter of the course. When this attitude carries over into their approach to academia in general, you know that you have done your job.
**Good Friends**

One of the most rewarding components of teaching has been the opportunity to associate with wonderful colleagues. I am fortunate to have colleagues in my department whom I respect and admire, both as psychology teachers and as good friends. I enjoy going to work every day and discussing psychology and life with these people. They unselfishly share information and teaching ideas. They are supportive and inspire me to work continually to improve my teaching. I learn so much from them.

At a national level, the opportunity to work with many of the master teachers in psychology has been both enlightening and exciting. As a result of hearing many presentations on effective teaching, I have been energized and educated by these outstanding psychologists and educators. Although involvement in STP, PT@CC, Psi Beta, and the WPA Executive Board takes a lot of time and energy, the networking opportunities and the friendships established make it well worth the effort involved. My career is greatly enhanced by these experiences.

**Reflection as a Tool**

One of the great things about teaching is that we continuously have the opportunity to refine our skills. When things do not go well in a particular session, we have the opportunity to examine and improve it either next hour or next semester. No two classes are exactly the same and teaching never gets old or boring. Several times during the semester, I solicit written and/or verbal feedback in the classes that I teach in Statistics, Social Psychology, and Introduction to Psychology. If asked, students are usually willing to offer suggestions regarding what works well and what does not. They also appreciate the fact that their opinions are valued, especially when their suggestions are quickly implemented. In Statistics, I offer students an opportunity to write a letter to the next semester’s students on how to succeed in my Statistics class. I distribute these letters among students the following semester and they have the benefits of their previous cohort’s advice. Students usually make the same suggestions to their successors that I would, but it is perceived differently coming from their experienced peers. This tactic is just a playful way to engage students in the assessment process.

**The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

I place great value on the scholarship of teaching and learning. I make liberal use of publications such as *Teaching of Psychology* and the *APA Teaching Activities Handbooks* for acquiring new teaching ideas. Currently I am meeting biweekly with three colleagues to discuss ideas presented in *Thinking About Teaching and Learning* (Leamnson, 1999). I carefully test new teaching techniques and gather data on their effectiveness. I recently received a Maricopa Institute of Learning Fellowship that will enable me to evaluate the
effectiveness of the new student response system technology that has become available. I want to measure the effectiveness of the technology on my students’ attendance, retention, test grades, and satisfaction. For me, teaching is a dynamic process that requires constant input and refinement. The more I learn about teaching, the more I realize there is so much more to know.

Advice for New Teachers

Good teaching is an elusive goal that requires continuous research and refinement. One must stay current with information in the field and with the data on assessment and new classroom teaching techniques. Technology has had a huge impact on how we structure our courses. However, we must be careful to use technology to help us teach more effectively without allowing it to overwhelm the essentials of good teaching that have served us well in the past. We can learn much from master teachers in the field by reading their publications, attending their lectures, and getting involved in their organizations, but we must each develop our own unique style that works for us. Good teaching requires enthusiasm, energy, immersion in the field and a love for learning, but the satisfaction that it brings is unparalleled. Teaching has defined my professional life and my students and colleagues have enriched the experience beyond description.

References


I am currently a full time high school teacher at Perth Amboy High School in Perth Amboy, NJ and an adjunct Professor at Middlesex County College in Edison, NJ. I teach Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology and high school psychology, and depending on the year, I teach anthropology, US history and mathematics. As a college adjunct, I have taught introductory, abnormal, social, educational, and child psychology. My favorite college course to teach is child psychology. I have been a co-presenter at teaching of psychology summer workshops at numerous universities and had the incredible opportunity to be a researcher and teacher in the Yale Summer Psychology Program that was held at Yale University in 1993.

These experiences have made me a better teacher and person, and I was fortunate to interact and watch numerous superb teachers in action. Individuals such as Robert Sternberg, Mahzarin Banaji, Rick Kasschau, Ludy Benjamin, Charles Brewer, Jack Nation, Bruce Henderson, Barney Beins, Perilou Goddard, Diane Halpern, Jane Halonen, Randy Ernst, Charlie Blair-Broeker, Rob McEntarffer, Kristin Whitlock, Mary Jean Voigt, and Marty Anderson.

I have been an AP Psychology reader since the test’s inception in 1992 and have been a member of the AP Psychology Test development committee. In 1994, the Society for the Teaching of Psychology bestowed upon me the Moffett Teaching Excellence Award for high school psychology. In 2002-2003, I was named Perth Amboy’s School District Teacher of the Year, and in 2003, was given one of four annual Distinguished Secondary Teaching Awards from Princeton University.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I enrolled in teacher preparation courses in graduate school, but felt they were not very helpful. I never had a formal teaching mentor, but I did have an amazing high school teacher in my senior year who greatly affected my life, especially my decision to become a teacher, and who fostered the development of some of my beliefs about teaching. He taught the high school sociology class, and the students sat in a large U shaped arrangement with the teacher at the front of the U.

One time upon arriving in the class, I noticed that the teacher had written about 150 names on the blackboard. The names I recognized were famous individuals throughout history in many different fields (e.g., philosophers, psychologists, writers, poets, historians, scientists, artists, musicians, etc.). The teacher looked at the class with a warm smile, and then
repeatedly alternated between glancing at the board and looking at the class while maintaining that same smile as if he knew some secret we could not comprehend. After about 30 seconds, he finally looked intently at the bewildered students and said, “This is it!” He then erased the names on the board and began the lesson of the day that was unrelated to anything that just happened. I remember going home and asking myself what was the point of this demonstration? It suddenly dawned on me that he was saying do not miss out what the best minds in history have thought or accomplished. Do not limit yourself to your culture, space, and time.

This experience prompted me to become an avid reader and explorer of knowledge. I always make sure that my students in all the classes I teach are aware of well-known scholars in that field. I discuss the work of current historians, mathematicians, anthropologists, or psychologists when I teach those courses. I want to be sure that the students realize that knowledge is always expanding and based on current research and investigations. I stress to my students, that they, too, might have the opportunity to be creators of knowledge.

I believe that over the years I have become a better teacher by observing effective teachers and by extensive reading in a variety of areas. I firmly believe that the single most essential characteristic for teachers is to be very knowledgeable in their respective subject areas. I am not saying it is the only important trait, but the most essential one. Knowing how to teach a subject derives more from knowing the material than any other single factor.

I read extensively in psychology, history, philosophy, and mathematics, and try to read a few trade and professional psychology and science magazines each month. I often discuss this information with my students to let them know how exciting it is to be aware of how the world is changing. A student once said to me that she eventually wanted to become a “reality cracker.” When I asked her to explain, she replied that she wanted to have intensely meaningful perceptions about the world.

I decided to become a high school and college teacher because I enjoy the challenge of changing students’ lives. I want them to think about the world differently and in a more humane manner than they might otherwise. I enjoy teaching psychology in high school because it is so exciting to teach at this level. Where else can one imitate a schizophrenic, a split-brain patient, a preoperational child, a Freudian therapist, a dog suffering from learned helplessness, or a rat in a Skinner Box? Teaching psychology gives me an opportunity to lead in-depth topics that are intrinsically fascinating, relevant to students’ lives, and have important personal and social consequences.

I also very much enjoy teaching child psychology at the college level because I feel that my extensive reading and passion for psychology can influence these students, nearly all of whom want to be elementary school teachers, which in turn will influence their students for...
years to come. Some of my goals are to have the students realize the benefits of using positive reinforcement over aversive conditioning, the empirical validity of phonics over whole word approaches, and a greater understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social worlds of the children for whom they will be caring.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I face many obstacles in my teaching. The high school in which I work is in an urban school. Many of the students face stressors that are not present in the suburban school world. Most of the students work to assist their families with the essential basics of existence, and many students actually live on their own—they have single rooms and pay for all of their expenses. There are dozens of students who live in charity shelters and have no stable caring adults in their lives. Many students, and even some staff members, have little regard for academic excellence. Forces in the school actively oppose challenging students to take advanced courses. Every day, the school has numerous disruptive announcements. Many students cut classes and many others are disruptive.

I struggle every year to encourage as many students as possible to take AP psychology in my school. I have to hold a few “voluntarily mandatory” psychology sessions at night to review for the AP test. I struggle daily in dealing with many of my students’ emotional problems that interfere with their ability to stay focused in class. Over 85% of my students are bilingual; English is not their first language. This circumstance is even more challenging because I assist them in reading a difficult college textbook. Virtually all of my students come from families in which no parent or guardian is a college graduate; these students have been deprived of childhood experiences that middle class individuals take for granted. For example, I have had many seniors tell me that they have never gone to a museum, on vacation, to a nice restaurant, or to a bookstore other than at the local mall.

I try to be as humorous and engaging as possible with all my classes while demonstrating my genuine love for psychology. I tell my students about important research studies and scientists who changed and developed the field of psychology and also about current scholars who are actively doing so now. One of my most important underlying daily goals is to make my students more humane by emphasizing the application of psychological knowledge as an aid in understanding themselves and others. For example, nearly all of my students have been raised in authoritarian parenting style families, so I impress upon them the advantages of an authoritative parenting style. I continue to struggle with students who have profoundly low socioeconomic backgrounds with very little intellectual stimulation at home.

The Examined Life of a Teacher
My philosophy of teaching, as Charles Brewer so wonderfully puts it, is to “kick some academic butt!” I continuously challenge students to read and think on a higher level. For example, after presenting the standard definition of learning, I ask the students if Piaget would define learning in that way. How about Vygotsky? I start each new chapter with some kind of cognitively-stimulating puzzle or story. For example, how can psychologists discover the kinds of things that infants might be able to perceive? Can an organism habituate to an unconditioned stimulus? What are other ways to assess intelligence besides the standard intelligence tests? My philosophy of teaching is to use guided constructivism. Such questions lead to invigorating and interesting class discussions.

The most important aspect of teaching for me is to connect with my students by relating to them and then actively engaging them in a journey of discovery—sometimes leading them and sometimes allowing them to discover connections of meaning on their own. I realize that communication skills and enthusiasm are necessary, but again, for me, by far the most important trait for a teacher is knowledge of the material.

My teaching has changed over the years mainly by questioning students more often than I used to and by using a greater variety of challenging activities. I use demonstrations before explaining what they represent, but after the students have learned enough to figure it out. I often use video clips to highlight certain content areas. Additionally, I use creative and practical questions and activities along with standard analytic type questions. Sternberg’s research on teaching and intelligence is influential in my teaching as is the work of William Perry, Diane Halpern, and Peter Gray.

The most rewarding aspect of my teaching career has been getting to capture the imagination of young people who have had minimal dreams for themselves and to help them to reach for something better—whether it be a decision to apply to a top university rather than the local two-year college or to work toward a scholarship for a prestigious summer program. Another rewarding aspect of my career is that I have had hundreds of students who have taken only one AP course in all of their 4 years of high school and that is AP psychology. I also find it gratifying when a student who has not done high quality work finally produces an excellent piece of writing. I do not give out praise unless deserved and thereby students realize that it is genuine and relish it.

The four major aspects of teaching are relating, innovating, evaluating, and motivating and each is essential for effective teaching and linked with the others. With this in mind, I think about each class immediately after it is over, and at the end of each day, I write notes on what went well and what could have gone better. I do item analyses of each of question on every test and have discovered very common errors that have occurred over the years with
many students. I also develop challenging, encompassing, and motivating essay questions for each chapter of the text.

To continue to be a better teacher, I read constantly. For example, I read American Psychological Association (APA) and American Psychological Society (APS) journals, current psychology books, and articles from *Scientific American*, *American Scientist*, *Natural History Magazine*, and *Cerebrum*. I have been leading AP Psychology workshops for 12 years and do so each summer. I am also glad to have attended the AP National Conference for each of the last 4 years. I have also been fortunate enough to have been a member of the AP Psychology test development committee for the last few years.

Advice for New Teachers

New teachers should be passionate about their subject area, devoted to their students, and always believe that their students can do what they are able to do not just what they want to do.14

*At Play in the Fields of Academe*

Hugh J. Foley  
Skidmore College

The story of my journey, as will likely be true of others in this volume, is a story about people. For me, teaching is quite personal, so what I have to say about teaching must revolve around people. Two people highlight my undergraduate experience: Julian Granberry and Mary Ann Hartnett.

I received my undergraduate degree from St. John Fisher College in 1971, where I did not enjoy any of the psychology courses I took. However, I did come to love Anthropology (and academics), primarily because of Julian Granberry—a most engaging professor. The biggest lesson that I learned from Julian was the positive impact a teacher can have on a student because he made learning fun and made me work hard to master difficult material.

In my senior year I encountered another kind of love, falling head over heels in love with Mary Ann Hartnett. Since our marriage in 1973, Mary Ann (now Foley) has supported me and taught me so much. As fortune would have it, not only is Mary Ann my best friend, but she also is a wonderful colleague and a talented teacher.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I went to SUNY Stony Brook to pursue a Ph.D. in Anthropology. Those plans changed after I met Dave Cross, who got me excited about perception and psychophysics. I soon left anthropology to become a graduate student in psychology. Mary Ann had also become a graduate student in psychology, so we were able to share an office. I was allowed to teach several courses as a graduate student, which I truly enjoyed. I received positive evaluations from my students and a teaching award from the
university. In 1984, I completed my PhD in experimental psychology with Dave Cross as my dissertation advisor.

In addition to the university teaching award (which, ironically, relieved me of teaching responsibilities), I also received the McKeachie Early Career Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology in 1983 (although at that time, the award was simply called the “Graduate Student Teaching Award”). That award has certainly had a pivotal impact on my professional life. First, it surely played a prominent role in helping me to secure my first faculty position at Union College in 1984. (Fortune continued to smile on me, because Mary Ann joined the faculty at nearby Skidmore College in that same year.) Second, Margaret Matlin (who knew me only as a recipient of the award) contacted me in 1989 about collaborating on her perception textbook. I have had the pleasure of working with Margaret on two editions of that textbook (Matlin & Foley, 1992, 1997). Margaret has been appropriately recognized by many organizations for her significant contributions as an educator. Personally, however, Margaret’s strengths as an educator are best illustrated by her ability to improve my writing. Margaret is remarkably knowledgeable and patient — important virtues for any teacher—and I am now a better writer because of her efforts.

In 1994, I left Union College to join Mary Ann on the faculty at Skidmore College, where I am currently a professor. I teach courses that students often find to be challenging: statistics, advanced statistics, experimental psychology, and perception. Through the auspices of a Mellon Foundation grant, I am currently developing courses directed at enhancing the first-year experience (such as Psychology in the Courtroom).

My Early Development as a Teacher

I was an undergraduate when I first entertained the notion of becoming an academic. Naïvely, after observing faculty (but asking nary a question), I decided that teaching would be a wonderful profession. As it happens, I was right, but not for the reasons that filled my head at the time. In retrospect, it is probably the clueless approach I took to making such decisions that now makes me such a proactive advisor and mentor.

Once I started taking graduate classes in psychology, it dawned on me that I would actually become a teacher one day. With that realization I became a different kind of student. Instead of focusing solely on the material in a lecture, I was also studying the pedagogy of my teachers. Stony Brook was blessed with a number of talented teachers, including Dave Cross (who actually made statistics interesting), Dave Emmerich (who taught a marvelous perception course that continues to influence the course I teach), Howie Rachlin (who led a wonderful seminar on philosophy and psychology), Marcia Johnson (from whom I learned
about both cognition and statistics), and Everett Waters (who had a lot of interesting ideas about teaching statistics). So, I learned a lot about teaching by watching others teach.

I learned even more by teaching. Although I served as a teaching assistant for several courses, I was soon allowed to teach my own courses. I taught both statistics and research methods, which I consider to be great courses for the novice teacher. The nature of the material is fairly circumscribed and the students typically approach the courses with trepidation. Thus, if you can convince the students that the material is important and that you are their best hope of getting through the course, they become quite receptive.

While at Stony Brook I took a teaching seminar, which was required of graduate students who were teaching courses. I taught at least one course before Alan Ross offered the seminar. Here is an embarrassing revelation: I remember thinking that the seminar would be a waste of my time, because I could not imagine that Alan (or anyone) had anything to teach me about teaching. My position was a combination of arrogance and a belief that one could not be taught to be a better teacher. I do not remember many details about the seminar, but I do remember that Alan won me over right away because he was supportive and not the least bit authoritarian. He was surely a better teacher than any student in that seminar, but Alan made us all feel that we were colleagues working at the common goal of educating students.

Over the years, I have learned enough about teaching to know that I will always have a lot to learn. I have learned from colleagues at both Union and Skidmore. I have also learned a lot from my “virtual” colleagues on the TIPS (Teaching in Psychological Science) listserv.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

My professional life may be atypical, but it truly revolves around teaching. When I reflect on what my days are like, I might be advising (which I truly enjoy), working on the textbook, conducting research, preparing or delivering courses, working on my Web sites, reading books or articles, writing letters of recommendation, or reading e-mail and corresponding with colleagues and current and former students. The connections to teaching may not always be apparent, but they are real.

Research is a good example. I have yet to engage in any research in which students have not played prominent roles. I conduct research to learn about the world and to infuse student research assistants with an appreciation for the research process. In fact, it was the teaching-research connection that led Mary Ann and me to run a summer research program (through the auspices of the National Science Foundation’s Research Experiences for Undergraduates Program) for five summers.

I love teaching and I would teach for a pittance. Some people might argue that I do. However, I detest committee work and begrudge the time it takes away from work that I truly
enjoy. As a graduate student, my admittedly naïve view of academics had not a single committee in it. Although I recognize the value of committee work for institutional goals, I wish that I did not have to contribute. Because I want to be a good citizen, I serve on committees, but never happily. Although I have to admit that I reap occasional rewards from serving on committees, I consider the net effect a loss.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Although I did not think to save the source, long ago I read an article that likened being a teacher to being a wilderness guide. I have always liked that image. First, it evokes the shared purpose that should lie at the heart of the educational enterprise. People come to the wilderness guide because they have a goal that they cannot meet without help. All too often, I fear, our students do not really come to college with a desire to learn (Pirsig, 1982). I cannot know that for certain, so I treat students as though they are seriously committed to learning. Second, it defines my role as protector and facilitator of a student’s educational journey. Having presumed that students are in my course because they are serious about learning, I can then work with students to achieve mastery of the material.

Consistent with that image, students in my courses do a lot of work—much of it during class time. That is, I am a firm believer in the value of active learning. Over the years, I have found more and more ways to engage the students in work during class time, so that every student is actively engaged and social loafing is at a minimum.

Because of the popularity of psychology among female students, they typically outnumber men in my courses. Early in my career, I read a brief piece by Gorra (1988), who teaches at Smith College. He was reflecting on being a male professor at a women’s institution and on gender differences in styles of interaction. He drew on Adrienne Rich’s (1979) essay (“Taking Women Students Seriously”) in which she urged that we “listen to the small, soft voices.” Surely, women students have changed somewhat in the intervening years, but my experience has been that finding a strong woman student who lacks self-confidence is much more likely than finding a male student with similar characteristics. I hope that over the years I have improved at listening to and encouraging all my students, but particularly women.

Advice for New Teachers

Take Teaching Seriously

Faculty who teach at small liberal arts institutions, as I do, probably have a biased perspective. We have sought these positions because we want to work at an institution that takes teaching seriously. However, when we send students off to graduate school, we warn them not to be too explicit about any ultimate desire to work at an institution that focuses on
teaching, because we fear that their graduate faculty will see them as less serious. We envision university faculty who treat teaching as a necessary evil and pass such a perspective along to their graduate students. My own experiences as a graduate student suggest that many university faculty do take teaching seriously, but I still fear that most graduate students do not find themselves in an environment that reveres teaching. Anyone reading this advice is probably already a member of the “choir” to which I am preaching, but I would encourage faculty everywhere to embrace the notion that teaching is vitally important at whatever institution it might occur.

Talk to your colleagues about teaching. Visit their classes and encourage them to visit yours. Plan your lectures carefully and work to hone them year after year. Be on a constant lookout for materials and strategies that will enliven your classes.

Make Personal Connections With Your Students

Admittedly, I never have a class larger than 25, but I learn all my students’ names within the first week or two of a semester. Doing so serves the dual function of making me more comfortable in the classroom (because I am basically shy) and letting my students know that I value them as individuals. Then, throughout the semester, I try to be myself in the classroom. That is, I do not assume a “classroom persona,” but behave as naturally as possible. If something funny happens, I laugh. If something happens that annoys me (like a cell phone ringing), it is clear to everyone that I am annoyed.

I am now at the stage of my career when I have a large number of former students scattered about the world. Some of them have become faculty colleagues. Hearing from these former students is always the high point of my day. Think of the personal connections with your students as an investment in the future. One day they will make you proud.

Teach What You Know Best

Henry Gleitman had some great advice for me at an early stage of my career. Although his advice works best for introductory courses, I think that it applies more generally. Henry had written a comprehensive introductory textbook, but he argued that no one should attempt to teach the breadth of the discipline in the introductory course. Instead, he argued that we might deliver a course in which we focus on those areas that we know best and for which we feel the greatest passion. So, when I teach perception, I focus on visual and auditory perception. When I teach statistics, I focus on analysis of variance. Sure, we must cover some essential breadth in our courses, but whenever possible, I think that our students are best served by learning about those areas in which we are most interested. I believe that such interest is contagious.

Pay Attention to Your Course Evaluations—But Not Too Much Attention
Trying to teach in a matter that ensures positive evaluations is probably as fruitless as trying to write a hit song or the Great American Novel. I know of faculty who have deliberately given their students very high grades because they convinced themselves that course evaluations were positively correlated with grades. Even if such a strategy worked, invoking it would be selling out. Instead, I prefer the “Field of Dreams” approach. If we offer really good courses, students will come and they will evaluate the courses positively.

I realize that a good deal of controversy swirls around the topic of the efficacy of student evaluations. That said, I will always seek input from my students, because I have learned a lot over the years from student evaluations of my classes. In an atmosphere where assessment is pervasive, I think that we will eventually establish a comprehensive means of assessing faculty performance in the classroom—one in which student evaluations play a role.

Yield to Temptation

Or at least read Richard Nisbett’s (1990) *American Psychologist* article on the “Anticreativity Letters.” Trust me, you will smile and you will learn some important lessons about academic life. One lesson, I think, is echoed in the message of modern philosophers like Grace Slick and Freddie Mercury—“Find somebody to love.” A supportive partner enhances one’s personal and professional lives.

Do Not Focus on Tenure

I think that it is a poor strategy to focus on acquiring tenure, because it may lead to a real disjuncture between your pre- and post-tenure life. Instead, I encourage you to find a work style with which you are comfortable, and one you can sustain for a lifetime.

Final Thoughts

Have you thought about what your students will remember a decade after leaving your classroom? Increasingly, I wonder about the lingering residue of my teaching. I love teaching psychology, but in a decade will my students remember the intricacies of the analysis of variance? Will they remember the distinction between the parvocellular and the magnocellular systems? Some students may remember the details, but a safer bet is that most would not. What, then, should be my goals? Of course, I will continue to teach the content that is the focus of my courses, but I think that I do so in service of a broader set of goals.

First and foremost, I would like to instill in my students a love of psychology and a love of learning. Human beings are fascinating creatures and psychologists have found such creative ways to approach their various areas of interest. Surely I can convey an appreciation for the discipline to my students, but even that focus is a bit narrow. Is it not intrinsically rewarding to master difficult material? When you see the struggling student finally grasp a difficult concept, is it too hard to imagine that the concept may fade but the recollection of the
ability to grasp a difficult concept lingers? Might not that student then approach mastering difficult material with greater confidence? I would like to think that my own enthusiasm for learning can be conveyed to my students and affect them for the rest of their lives.

Second, I would like to teach my students to think more clearly (if not creatively). I doubt that I can improve their thinking skills if I do not challenge them. I try to offer challenging courses and to present my students with problems that proffer no simple solutions (or where the simple solution masks a better solution).

Third, I would like to teach my students to be better communicators. Human beings seem to be afraid of speaking in public, but we should place our students in positions where they must do so. Year after year I meet cohorts of students who do not write well, nor do they appear to be willing to work to improve their writing. The notion of multiple drafts of a paper seems to strike them as anathema. As difficult as it is to work with students to improve their writing, especially given that many faculty are not confident teachers of writing, I think that we must all make writing a focus of our courses. When they leave the confines of academia, our students will likely find themselves in positions for which communication skills are crucial. We will not have served them well if we have not prepared them for that world.

Finally, I hope my students (and you, gentle reader) find a satisfying life. For most people, it will lie outside of the field of psychology, which is fine. Scott Lilienfield (a clinician and researcher from the Emory University) uses a signature file that encapsulates my best advice: “May your work and play be indistinguishable.”

References
Since Fall, 1969 my applied experimental research at Virginia Tech has enabled me to develop, evaluate, and publish principles and interventions for improving behaviors and attitudes related to public health, industrial safety, and environmental protection. University teaching has empowered me to share profound knowledge from intervention research and to inspire many students to contribute to the welfare of others. I hope to continue for several more years this integration of research, teaching, and outreach aimed at making a real-world difference. This vision fits the motto of Virginia Tech—*ut prosim* (“That I may serve”), as well as the mission of a training and consulting company I incorporated in 1987—Make-A-Difference, Inc.

Born and raised in Allentown, PA, I graduated from Allentown High School in 1960, subsequently received a BA with a major in psychology and pre-med from The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, and then an MA and PhD in experimental psychology from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. In 1969, I joined the psychology faculty at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, VA., later renamed Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and now known as Virginia Tech.

I was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor in 1976, and received Professor status in 1979. My integration of teaching, research, and outreach has achieved recognition through multiple university-wide teaching awards and various University Alumni Awards. Specially, in 1983, I received The University Alumni Award for Teaching Excellence and elected to the University Academy of Teaching Excellence. In 1990, I was recognized with the University “Sporn Award” for distinguished teaching of freshmen-level classes. In 1999, I was honored with the coveted University “W.E. Wine Award” for outstanding teaching. Subsequently, I received the three additional University Alumni Awards: the Alumni Award for Research in 2001, the Alumni Award for Outreach in 2002, and the Alumni Award for Graduate Student Advising in 2003. Recently, in 2005, I was given the special status of Alumni Distinguished Professor.

My teaching awards beyond the university include the Robert S. Daniel Teaching Excellence award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1982, and the Virginia Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education in 2005. I am a Fellow of APA, the American

My university research has been documented in more than 350 journal articles, 40 chapters in edited books, and 25 books, most addressing the development and evaluation of behavior change interventions to improve quality of life. My most recent books address occupational health and safety, and include: *The Psychology of Safety* (Geller, 1996); *Understanding Behavior-Based Safety* (Geller, 1998); *Beyond Safety Accountability* (Geller, 2001a); *Building Successful Safety Teams* (Geller, 2001b); *The Psychology of Safety Handbook* (Geller, 2001c); *Working Safe* (Geller, 2001d); *Keys to Behavior-Based Safety* (Geller & Williams, 2001); *The Participation Factor* (Geller, 2002), and *People-Based Safety: The Source* (Geller, 2005). This latest book is accompanied by five video CD/DVDs, five workbooks, and five leader guides for industrial applications.

I am past Editor of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (1989-1992), current Associate Editor of *Environment and Behavior* (since 1982), and current Consulting Editor for *Behavior and Social Issues*, the *Behavior Analyst Digest*, the *Journal of Safety Research*, and the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*.

I have written more than 150 articles for a “Psychology of Safety” column in *Industrial Safety and Hygiene News*, a trade magazine disseminated to more than 75,000 companies. I also have collaborated with a number of media companies in the development of industrial training series, including videotapes, workbooks, and facilitators’ guides. For these widely-disseminated products, beginning with a 1995 nationally renowned seminar series—“Actively Caring for Safety”—the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis honored me in 1998 with an award for “Effective Presentation of Behavior Analysis in the Mass Media.”

I have been the Principal Investigator for more than 75 research grants, enabling more than $5 million in financial support that made it possible to educate and train numerous graduate and undergraduate students to conduct rigorous field research and produce useful scholarship. Most of this research studied the application of behavioral science to benefit corporations, institutions, government agencies, or communities. Both government agencies and corporations have funded this research, including the National Science Foundation; the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health; the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; the U.S. Department of Energy; the U.S. Department of Transportation; the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; General Motors Research Laboratories; and the Virginia Departments of Energy, Transportation, Litter Control, Agriculture and Commerce, and Welfare and Institutions.
My Early Development as a Teacher

Summarizing my development as a teacher requires the realization that teaching occurs in many forms. For example, my work at the university includes (a) lecturing daily to 500-600 students in my Introduction to Psychology class; (b) reviewing scholarship, relating consulting experiences, and facilitating group discussion in my advanced graduate course on Applying Behavioral Science for Large-Scale Change; (c) providing relevant ideas and activating critical thinking and participant involvement among 10-15 research leaders, including 6 to 8 graduate students; (d) advising graduate and undergraduate students in one-to-one conversations about their research directions, professional talks, and career opportunities; (e) helping students prepare paper or poster presentations for a professional convention; (f) lecturing and supporting group discussion at a weekly research meeting of 60-70 undergraduate psychology majors and 6-8 graduate students; (g) delivering a keynote address at a campus function or special group celebration; (h) communicating with former students via telephone and e-mail about their research, teaching, or career issues; and (i) reviewing journal submissions.

Given these varied operational definitions of “teaching,” it is difficult to identify preparatory experiences or to name a particular “teaching mentor.” Actually, most of my undergraduate education at the College of Wooster and graduate education at Southern Illinois University prepared me for the variety of teaching experiences I enjoy today. I listened to exciting lecturers and boring lecturers, experienced skilled group facilitators and unskilled facilitators, and observed caring student advisors and aloof advisors. Thus, I have observed teaching behaviors to emulate and others to avoid. Moreover, over the years I have studied thousands of evaluations of my own lectures, keynote addresses, and audio conferences. In addition, I have seen myself teach numerous times on videotape, sometimes with an unbiased observer or instructional coach.

All of these experiences enabled me to improve continuously as a “teacher,” in the broadest sense of the term. Most instructive has been the specific corrective feedback on teacher-evaluation forms from university classes and professional workshops. I also honed my presentation skills during the development of several videotape programs. At these sessions, a talented coach gave me ongoing feedback regarding my ability to make a point clearly, concisely, and with appropriate body language. Subsequently, I saw my performance on videotape and gave myself direction for subsequent presentations.
Defining Myself as a Teacher

The focus of my teaching at Virginia Tech is reflected in the Mission Statement posted in the Department of Psychology’s Center for Applied Behavior Systems, which I have directed since 1987. It reads as follows:

The Center for Applied Behavior Systems was developed to:

1. help students, undergraduate and graduate, learn how to conduct research that combines the technology of applied behavior analysis with theories from experimental, social, and applied psychology,
2. give students real-world, hands-on research experience, from designing methodology and data analysis strategies to documenting findings in professional publications,
3. teach community-based research and intervention techniques and approaches,
4. give students the opportunity to participate in leading-edge professional activities,
5. improve quality of life in the community, and
6. teach and demonstrate the value of “actively caring.”

I started my teaching career at Virginia Tech believing the best teachers get students actively engaged in the course content. I believe the wise Confucian principle, “Tell them and they will forget, demonstrate and they will remember, involve them and they will understand.” At the same time, I began my research career with the vision to conduct “make-a-difference” research. More specifically, I wanted my behavior-focused research results to be applicable to the real-world improvement of quality of life—and the larger the scale the better. Thus, as reflected in the mission statement, I have had the fortunate opportunity at Virginia Tech to integrate my visions for good teaching and useful research. That is the main reason I have been at the same university for my entire professional career.

The 50 or more undergraduate students who conduct research in our Center for Applied Behavior Systems each semester understand the true meaning of our university motto—“that I may serve.” They learn the methodology of rigorous psychological research by doing, and their doing in turn contributes to community health, safety, or environmental protection. Thus, in addition to learning the principles and methods of psychology through personal involvement, they learn the value of actively caring—or going beyond the call of duty for others. This experience makes them change agents for community service and thereby expands their concept of personal responsibility.

Involving students in community service research that puts knowledge to work enables them to experience the value of helping others. My sincere hope is that this experience is
reinforcing and memorable enough to generalize to their other life experiences, and starts a spiral of actively caring behavior feeding personal responsibility, feeding more actively caring behavior, and so on. Thus, I expect the lessons students experience when putting knowledge to work for community service to be the start of a lifetime of actively caring behaviors and attitudes.

Advice for New Teachers

I believe it is important to understand the diverse forms of teaching, some of which I specified earlier with regard to my own development as a teacher. I suggest new teachers make a list of the various types of teaching they experience in a typical week, and assess which types they feel most talented at doing and enjoy most. Chances are they enjoy most the type of teaching they do best. Some teachers, for example, are most competent at involving participants in group discussion, whereas other teachers excel at the large classroom lecture. Some teachers are stimulated by directing students in research projects, while others enjoy the challenges of academic and career advising.

Most people cannot be their best at every type of teaching. For example, I am not effective at academic advising, and thus compensate others to conduct this aspect of my university responsibilities. Face the brutal facts of your teaching interests and talents, and attempt to optimize the number of teaching opportunities you can perform best. These are the teaching experiences that provide you the most intrinsic reinforcement, motivating you to improve continuously.

Regardless of the match between your particular teaching assignment and your talents, you can always improve. So how can you improve your teaching competence? Here are five suggestions I have verified through personal experience.

Benefit From Observational Learning

I am amazed how few professors take the time to observe the teaching of other instructors. They miss so many opportunities to learn through observation. My 1982 STP award gave me an early reputation as a competent teacher, yet only once has a colleague asked to observe one of my classes. Interestingly, at that time, this individual was our department’s only other award-winning teacher.

As a graduate student, I sat in the back of many classrooms to benefit from observational learning; upon joining the faculty at Virginia Tech, I did the same. Later, as a member of our departmental teaching excellence committee (every year since 1982), I have regularly observed the teaching of non-tenured faculty in order to offer mentoring advice and contribute to annual evaluations. I also observe the classrooms of our top teachers in order to select candidates for university teaching awards.
Almost every classroom observation has been a useful learning experience for me. By sitting in the back of the classroom, I not only note the instructors’ unique style and instructional techniques, but I also see the students’ reactions to specific aspects of the class. For example, I have noted that students ask more questions when instructors ask, “Can I clarify anything?” as opposed to the more common antecedent, “Does anyone have a question?”

*Embrace the Power of Feedback*

The research literature is replete with objective evidence that behavior-based feedback improves competence (e.g., Balcazar, Hopkins, & Suarez, 1985/86; Chhokar & Wallin, 1984; Parsons, 1974). In fact, it is the only sure way to improve behavior. Outcome-feedback alone, though, is not enough. The athlete, for example, gets outcome feedback when noting the destination of the golf ball, tennis ball, or baseball. Teachers estimate their competence from students’ end-of-the-semester teaching evaluations. However, professional athletes rely on behavioral observation from coaches to learn what adjustments they need to make in their behaviors to achieve better outcomes. Likewise, teachers need to learn what they should do differently to improve the teaching/learning climate of their classrooms.

At the start of my teaching career, I passed out feedback forms periodically throughout the semester. I asked three questions: (a) What do I do in this class to benefit your learning?, (b) What do I do that inhibits your learning?, and (c) What can I do differently to enhance your learning experience in this course?

Although I no longer distribute these open-ended evaluation forms, I do encourage students to give me anonymous feedback anytime about their opinions of the class and what I could do to improve their learning. This invitation results in students handing me notes at the end class, and sending me substantial e-mail. With my smaller graduate classes, I frequently ask students in one-on-one conversations, “How do you feel the class is going?” or “Is there something I could do to improve the teaching/learning climate of our class?” I always acknowledge appreciation for feedback, and at times I can pinpoint changes I made as a result of specific feedback.

*Apply the Motivating Advantage of Choice*

A variety of research studies have shown increases in human involvement and participation following the perception of personal control and choice (e.g., Geller, 1996; Langer, 1993; Monty & Perlmuter, 1975). Asking students for periodic feedback gives them a sense of control and choice, but I have also used other strategies, including (a) asking students to suggest guest speakers; (b) encouraging students to submit questions for exams; (c) giving extra-credit points for participating in campus activities related to course content; (d) guiding students in their design, implementation, evaluation, and documentation of course-related activities.
research; (e) allowing students to select one quiz grade to drop in the calculation of a final course grade; (f) asking students for the relative weight (within defined limits) their various class activities should count toward their final grade; and (g) soliciting self-evaluations from students, including a rationale for why they deserve a particular grade.

Moreover, in my 35 years of university teaching, I have never taken class attendance, even when the administration recommended such accountability. On the first day of every class, I clarify that coming to class is a personal choice. My challenge is to make each session so interesting and informative that no student would dare choose to skip class. Some do skip class, especially in my 600-student course in Introduction to Psychology. Those who attend choose that opportunity, and I periodically remind them of that, and thank them for deciding to attend class.

Think Outside the Box

Consider this commonsense cliché when designing classroom experiences. Going beyond the norm has led to my most engaging and provocative classes. Some of the opportunities for choice listed above reflect nonconventional thinking. Here are a few more examples: In my social psychology class, I often have gay students field questions from the class. When I first used this tactic 20 years ago, it was unprecedented, provocative, and enlightening. Today, it is not a big deal.

Once I arranged for a colleague to barge into my class and fire a blank gun three times in my direction. After squeezing a Ketchup container concealed in my pocket, I fell to the floor and waited for student assistance. After counting to three, I stood up and initiated a discussion of the bystander intervention effect (Latane & Darley, 1970). Then, I solicited descriptions of the person who fired the gun. When my colleague returned to the classroom, we discovered dramatic discrepancies between perception and reality, which led to a lively discussion of stress and eye-witness testimony (Loftus, 1993).

To demonstrate the integral role of verbal communication in teamwork, I split a 60-student class into two groups and instructed one team not to talk during the next exercise. Then, I released 20 quail in the classroom and challenged each team to catch the most quail and place them safety in their assigned team cage.

I do not advocate unconventional practices just to be different or original. Rather, use techniques that work best for you. For example, I am one of few professors at my university who still uses traditional transparencies in large classes instead of the now standard PowerPoint presentation. I dart between two overhead projectors on stage, displaying transparencies to illustrate lecture points. Frequently, I put aside the next transparency in a stack, and pull another out of the middle. In this age of high-tech, computer-facilitated instruction, this dated overhead approach is unusual, but it works for me, and that is my point.
Use Relevant Personal Stories

As a student, I remember how my interest peaked when a teacher related the lesson to a personal story. Listeners readily relate to real-life examples, often visualizing themselves in the same situation, which facilitates both involvement and understanding. Indeed, the most talented teachers I have observed seem to have a knack for bringing theories and concepts to life by connecting them to real-world events.

I hasten to add, however, the personal story must be relevant. From my experience as a student and an observer of university professors, teachers often reveal life events unrelated to the course material. Why? Because it’s rewarding for both the speaker and the listener. People like to talk about themselves, and students like to hear about their professors’ personal lives. Plus, the less pertinent information given in a lecture, the less material students need to study for an exam. Indeed, I found years ago that many, if not most, students appreciate the break from a teaching and learning process provided by a teacher’s extraneous information (Geller, Chaffee, & Farris, 1975). I urge teachers to fight the intrinsically-reinforcing behavior of telling lesson-remote stories.

Final Thoughts

Emergencies attract the most attention and resources from our society, and those who react and help people handle a crisis are considered “heroes” including doctors, scientists, police officers, firefighters, plumbers, and lawyers. Proactive behavior that prevents crises attract relatively few resources, and those who address this critical prevention issue receive comparably meager extrinsic rewards for their efforts. Teachers head this list of unsung heroes. In other words, teachers do not receive the financial compensation they deserve for their vital contributions to society.

So what keeps a good teacher going? The quick answer is “intrinsic motivation,” or the “joy of teaching.” What does this mean? Perhaps it is the personal satisfaction of sharing profound knowledge and receiving gratifying reactions from students who learn. However, the make-a-difference impact of a competent teacher is more profound and far-reaching than one person can possibly fathom. Teachers need to think about this reality and internalize it for ongoing self-motivation and to be the best they can be.

The effective teacher leaves an enviable legacy, as depicted in Mitch Albom’s (1997) bestselling book “Tuesdays with Morrie.” Read this book and watch the DVD starring Jack Lemmon and Hank Azaria. You will be inspired and filled with pride that you are a teacher, learning to be the best you can be.

Epilogue
A few weeks ago, I explained the *Teaching in Autobiography* book project to the members of our University Academy of Teaching Excellence, and I challenged the group to prepare a similar volume for our university. I suggested every Virginia Tech student and faculty member should receive a copy of this proposed text. Students could use it as a standard for selecting and evaluating their teachers, and faculty and graduate students could use this book to gain insights and motivation for improving their teaching. Recently I requested support for this project from our University Provost and got it. I am reminded of the expression, “Be careful what you ask for, because you might get it.”

Now I need advice from the editors of this book. They have surely set an exemplary precedent for all universities and academic disciplines worldwide. It is likely most contributors and readers of this book have opportunities to replicate this project at their college or university. Consider the invaluable and priceless benefits of recognizing special teachers and offering techniques and inspiration for the countless numbers of both new and experienced teachers who can use the guidance and motivation. I hope some readers of this book will attempt to replicate the process exemplified by this publication.

Thank you Trish Benson, Caroline Burke, Ana Amstadter, Ryan Siney, Vinny Hevern, Barney Beins, and Bill Buskist for starting a series of books on the “art of teaching excellence.” Of course, we now need your advice for leading these replications of your exemplar. Teaching and its benefits never end.

References
I am a Professor of Psychology at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. I received a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology and mathematics at Bradley University in 1970, and then, after receiving a PhD in cognitive psychology at Indiana University in 1974, I came to the University of Florida, where I have spent my entire academic career. I was promoted to Associate Professor in 1979 and to Professor in 1985. Fortuitously, I have won numerous teaching awards at the University of Florida, including teacher of the year, honors professor of the year, instructional excellence, and outstanding undergraduate teaching awards, and was named the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) Teaching Excellence Award for 4-year Colleges and Universities in 1994 (now called the Robert S. Daniels Teaching Excellence Award). I am also one of the fortunate few University of Florida faculty members to win two state Teaching Incentives Program awards. I have served on the Editorial Board of *Teaching of Psychology* for over a decade, as an *APA Review of Books* consulting editor in charge of textbook reviews, and as an Associate Editor of *Thinking and Reasoning* since its inception in 1995. My two main research areas are human reasoning and the teaching of psychology, and I have authored over 100 journal articles, reviews, and chapters on these topics, including 30 in *Teaching of Psychology*. I am also one of the originators and developers of the STP’s on-line resource, *A Compendium of Introductory Psychology Textbooks*, the editor of Volume 3 of STP’s *A Handbook for Teaching Introductory Psychology*, and the author of the new introductory textbook, *Psychology: A Concise Introduction*.

My Early Development as a Teacher

As a graduate student, I did not receive any preparation for teaching. The psychology department did not offer a formal course on teaching. I never even served as a teaching assistant because I was either on research fellowship or research assistantship funding during my 4 years as a graduate student. In brief, my teaching experience and teacher training as a graduate student was essentially nil. On two occasions during my four years of graduate study, my research advisor asked me to cover a class for him because he would be out of town to give a colloquium. He told me the general topic for that day’s class and assumed that I could take it from there. In one undergraduate learning class I lectured on the basics of classical conditioning and in the other, a small, advanced undergraduate laboratory class, I talked about my own cognitive research. As you might expect, the conditioning lecture did
not go very well. Because my adviser did not circumscribe the topic, I tried to present everything ever known about classical conditioning in one 50 min class period without ever entertaining student questions or even pausing for them. I am sure that the students were bewildered. The details of my lecture are now a blur to me, and I am sure that at the time my lecture was a blur to the students, too.

The other class went differently. The topic allowed even more leeway—any research topic in cognitive psychology with an emphasis on its methodology. Thinking like a researcher, I used this class as an opportunity to collect some pilot data from the students in the class. Serving as participants allowed the students firsthand experience with the methodology used in my area of research and provided them with a better basis for subsequent discussion of this type of research. I was right. The students enjoyed the class and actually liked participating in and then discussing the research. These two classes comprise my entire preparation for teaching. As a graduate student, I truly never thought about teaching. My world centered on research; I was trained to be a researcher. I never discussed teaching with my advisor or any of my fellow graduate students. In sum, I had no mentoring or training for teaching.

Given my strong research orientation in graduate school, I did not make a conscious decision to become a college and university teacher. During my last year of graduate training—when I applied for academic positions—I applied for positions at research universities, and my application materials did not contain any references to teaching. I had neither teaching experience nor a teaching philosophy. I did not even think about the specific courses that I might be teaching, much less list them in my application materials. I guess that I assumed that such courses would be in my area of expertise, cognitive psychology, and that I would be able to teach them given my graduate training in that area. My final decision about a position came down to three choices—a tenure-track position at a research university (University of Florida), a research position at a private research facility in the Northeast, or a temporary visiting position at a research university in the Midwest. Needless to say, I chose Florida, having spent most of life in the cold Midwest.

In my early years as an assistant professor, I taught courses in my area of expertise, such as human information processing and thinking, and never really thought about teaching mechanics or techniques. Obviously, I prepared lectures and constructed exams, but I think I depended on my knowledge base, my compulsive nature, my need for organization and structure, and my incredible exuberance for my chosen area of expertise to carry the day. I truly loved my specific research area, deductive reasoning, and cognitive psychology in general, and this enthusiasm infused my teaching during my assistant professor years. I did not think about former teachers that I had had as a student and try to model my teaching after
them. I did not consciously think about the nature of teaching. I just did what I thought at the
time would stimulate my students’ interest and help them to learn the material in my classes.
Thus, I neither “taught” myself to teach nor was I “taught” to teach. My progression from
researcher to teacher–researcher was entirely unplanned, a natural development.

I think that good teaching arises primarily from both genuinely caring about your
subject matter and leading others to care about it. If these two conditions exist, I think that the
actual methods and mechanics of one’s teaching are not so critical to being a successful
teacher. This idea is akin to the premise upon which Parker Palmer builds his book, The
Courage to Teach: “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from
the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). Palmer goes on to explain that good teaching
depends upon teachers’ ability to connect with their students and to connect them with the
subject and that these connections depend not so much on the methods used but rather on the
teachers sharing with their students their strong sense of personal identity that infuses their
work. In brief, “good teachers join self and subject and students” (p. 11).

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I truly did not work at defining myself as a teacher, but my teaching continued to
develop, mainly as a function of the obstacles that I encountered when I began teaching
introductory psychology. Ironically, after being promoted to associate professor, I volunteered
to teach this course. Hardly anyone in the department would teach the course, so the
departmental chairperson tried offering incentives, such as providing a research assistant
gratis while you taught the course. Mindlessly, at least in my colleagues’ eyes, I volunteered.

Unlike the courses that I taught up to that time, I did not have either the knowledge
base for or research experience in the vast majority of the topics to be covered in the course. I
was about as far away from being a “general” psychologist as one can be. I knew a lot about
cognitive psychology and was relatively familiar with learning and sensation/perception, but I
was not conversant at all with the remaining course topics, such as personality, social
psychology, and development. To make matters worse, the course section size was 300
students. Most of my classes had been rather small, but I had taught a few classes with
enrollments approaching 100 students. Tripling this class size, however, truly creates
problems. Even the logistics of exam administration become more problematic.

I realized that maintaining attention with so many students in such a large classroom
would probably prove challenging. I found, however, that teaching a large section was not as
difficult as I had thought that it would be. Why? Fortunately, the answer was simple. I became
incredibly interested in learning about all of these other areas within psychology. They were
new to me, and I got immersed in learning about them. It was like I was a graduate student
again. This enthusiasm for the course content that carried me early on in my teaching served me well again in the introductory course. I truly cared so they cared. I learned as much as I could about each area and continually searched for better examples of concepts and phenomena to use in lecture. My classroom behavior also evolved to fit the new, larger classroom environment. I have always had what might best be termed an “evangelistic” lecturing style. This style played well in the big classroom, but I found that I had to cover more of the room physically, sort of play the entire room rather than the just the front.

This period of adjustment did not seriously detract from my research program and productivity because at research universities, the teaching load is much less. The normal load in my program is 2-2, two courses each term; and, if you teach a section of 300 or more students, this one course counts as two courses. However, I seemed to be working overtime on both my research and teaching. Thus, because time is a zero-sum game, something did suffer. In my case, the time for my personal life continued to be impacted. I had thought that once I got tenure and was promoted to associate professor, I would have more personal time. I did not. As such, I strongly recommend that as a new teacher, you consciously confront this time-use problem early on and do not let your personal life suffer as a consequence. You can always work on your teaching and scholarship later; but your personal life suffers far more when put on the back burner. Keep it up front; do not sacrifice it. The earlier you do so, the happier you will be and the better teacher you will be. A troubled personal life leads to a troubled teacher.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I confess that I am a contrarian with respect to examining and analyzing the teaching process. I have never truly developed a personal philosophy of teaching. I do not think teaching should be analyzed. To me, teaching is neither an art nor a science. Your teaching works or it does not work. I do not think teaching is a skill that can be taught. I perceive it to be primarily a function of one’s personality. Caring about both learning and helping others to learn is the key to good teaching. I do not think you can teach people to care in these ways. This caring, along with a penchant toward organization and a certain way with words, usually result in good teaching.

I have also never used formal class evaluation data to evaluate my teaching. I use the day-to-day class reactions of the students in my classes. How attentive are they? Do they ask questions? What is attendance like, especially in larger classes? The value of such ongoing assessment throughout the term is far greater than that of some end-of-the-term numbers from a standardized evaluation instrument. Student written comments on such evaluations might be valuable, but why wait to get the feedback until the term is over? Talk with your students
regularly and take care of problems sooner rather than later. Ask your students about the class. Be approachable, and they will give you honest feedback. Such feedback does not necessarily entail change, but it provides good food for thought.

Students’ behavior does, however, have to be put in the context of their emerging consumerist attitude. Simply put, students are not as academically engaged as they once were. Making matters worse, many are not prepared in terms of skill development for college work. The proportion of such students seems to grow each year. In my discussions with students, I have found that the number of students who view credentialing and not learning as the main purpose of higher education is also increasing. The task of teaching students to care about learning becomes more and more difficult in the face of this growing consumerist attitude about education. Early on in my teaching career, my enthusiasm worked to lead many unengaged students to care about their learning just as I did. However, I have found that my enthusiasm is now providing diminishing returns.

Given what I perceive to be a major change in student attitudes toward learning and in their skill development, have I tried to change my teaching approach significantly to combat these changes? I have not. If you have a passion for teaching and this passion does not impact your students, then changing teaching mechanics will not do so. Our most effective tool is our passion for our subject matter and for teaching itself. In my case, I have found its effectiveness has waned. Initially I thought that this change may only be for students in teaching environments like mine—teaching undergraduate courses with hundreds of students at a large public university. However, my discussions of this problem with my colleagues and teachers at much smaller schools with much smaller classes have convinced me that it is a true higher-education problem and not one only present in larger classes and at larger schools. Sadly, there is no simple answer to this growing problem.

I have, however, changed the focus of my teaching in response to this problem. I have given up trying to teach all of my students. Over the last decade or so, I have gravitated toward aiming my classes at the motivated students and not the “classroom occupants,” those students physically but not mentally present. Sadly, many of these classroom occupants have evolved to be “class roster occupants,” students both mentally and physically absent. I see this change in my teaching as the major one in looking back over my own career. In sum, my concern for students’ learning has changed to be my concern for concerned students’ learning. If they do not care, I do not care. Possibly my behavior is the product of curmudgeon development as I have aged, but I do not think so.

Advice for New Teachers
I always hesitate to give advice to teachers, old or new, but there are two points on which I would like to comment. First, if you use the lecture method of teaching, continue to do so. Do not listen to those who claim that the lecture method is “dead.” I have lectured for over 30 years and will continue to do so until my retirement. During that time I have also observed the classes of many exemplary graduate students and faculty, and over 90 percent of them lectured. The vast majority of colleagues who I have talked with at teaching conferences have told me that they mainly lecture in their classes. There will always be a new method du jour that supposedly is going to replace the lecture. One recent one is active learning. My thoughts on active learning are best summed up by saying that classes that I have observed that used active learning had a lot of activity but little learning. There is a reason that lecturing has been and continues to be used in the classroom—it works.

My second point concerns the emerging consumerist attitude among students toward higher education. I think that it is important to realize that this attitude exists and that this attitude is not a product of your teaching. You need to realize that you cannot reach all of your students. Regardless of how small your classes are and at what school you teach, you will have many disengaged students. Spend your time and efforts on those students who care. Do not waste your efforts on conversion, trying to engage those that are disengaged. Keep the focus on the subject matter and learning. You also need to realize that you will often not do as good a job as you want; time and personal problems preclude it. You should, however, strive to do your best each day. This striving is what is important and leads to good teaching.

Final Thoughts

In reading the diverse chapters in this book, keep in mind that the authors have led different lives and taken many different career paths. Thus, their advice will vary significantly. I recommend that you read each author’s introduction carefully and use the author’s biographical information as a context for understanding that author’s chapter and perspective. Find those who have taken a path similar to the one you would like to take. Their comments will likely be most valuable to you. However, remember that higher education has changed greatly during all of the authors’ careers. You will not be experiencing what we experienced in our careers in higher education, but these chapters should give you a better view of your starting point and how it came to be.

References

Being a first generation college graduate, I certainly never thought I would be a teacher, let alone a college professor. As a non-traditional, first generation college student, I was certain Dr. Stephen F. Davis was making a colossal misjudgment when he told me “Trust me, it will be good for you.” I had gone to Steve’s office to discuss applying to the Experimental Psychology Master’s program at Emporia State University (ESU). Steve insisted that I apply for a graduate teaching assistantship despite my intellectual insecurities and intense fear of public speaking. I will be forever grateful that he believed in me more than I believed in myself. Unbeknownst to me at the time, that was my first lesson in being a good teacher.

Currently, I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology and Special Education at ESU in Emporia, Kansas. In 1986, I received a BS in psychology and a BSB in business administration at ESU. After earning my MS in experimental psychology in 1988 from ESU, I entered the Experimental Psychology PhD program in the Department of Psychology at Texas A&M University (TAMU) in College Station Texas, and received my PhD in 1992. For the next several years, I worked as a postdoctoral fellow (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences award) and assistant research scientist in the Department of Medical Pharmacology and Toxicology in the Medical College of the Texas A&M University Health Sciences Center. Subsequently, I held temporary teaching positions in psychology departments at various universities in Kansas, before becoming a tenure-track faulty member at ESU. Currently, I teach three courses required for our psychology majors: Descriptive Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology, Experimental Research Methods and Inferential Statistics in Psychology, and Foundations of Psychology. Additionally, I teach Drugs and Behavior each summer and one of the following courses each fall: Sensation and Perception, Brain and Behavior, or Theories of Motivation. I also serve as faculty sponsor of the Psychology Club, faculty member of the Honors Council, faculty member of the ESU Alcohol Advisory Committee, and Chair of the ESU Animal Care and Use Committee. Very much related to my role as a teacher and mentor is my membership in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP), Council of Teachers of Undergraduate Psychology (CTUP), Great Plains Behavioral Research Association (GPBRA), Psychological and Educational Research in Kansas (PERK), Southwestern Psychological Association (SWPA), American
My development as a teacher began with Steve Davis as my mentor at ESU in Emporia, Kansas. I was an experimental psychology graduate student in the Department of Psychology and Special Education housed in the Teacher’s College. The department has 14 full-time faculty, MS and EDS graduate programs, and 200 undergraduate psychology majors. Like many graduate programs, ESU offers incoming graduate students the opportunity to apply for teaching assistantships as a means of gaining financial assistance. Unlike some programs, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) at ESU have complete responsibility for the courses they teach. The department provides a GTA training program supervised by a senior-level faculty member (Davis, Grover, & Burns, 2004). Traditionally there are 14 GTAs who teach the Introductory Psychology, Introductory Psychology Laboratory, Applied Psychology, Psychology of Adjustment, and Developmental Psychology for non-majors courses. During each of my four semesters I taught two sections of Introductory Psychology. Additionally, during the later two semesters I team taught the Introductory Psychology Laboratory. There were approximately 20-35 students, mostly freshman, non-psychology majors in my classes.

Early in the summer, prior to teaching my first class as a GTA, I received a copy of the textbook, ancillary course materials, and a model course syllabus. My instructions for the summer were to read a copy of McKeachie’s (1986) *Teaching Tips*, develop a rough draft of my syllabus, and begin developing lectures with demonstrations for my first several classes. As I recollect, I was extremely overwhelmed and at the same time exhilarated by the magnitude of the responsibility given that my first semester to teach had not yet begun. However, I also recall being thankful for the summer preparation because my first semester of teaching got off to a rapid start and seemed to never slow down.

The first semester began with 3 days of intense orientation that included presentations of university, college, and departmental policies and procedures, in-depth discussions of effective teaching strategies, a lecture presentation by each new GTA, and presentations of activities and demonstrations by second-year GTAs. Training continued with the faculty supervisor and GTAs group meetings throughout my two-year assistantship. These 2-hr biweekly meetings included discussions of problems the GTAs encountered, discussion of successful and unsuccessful classroom practices and activities, discussion of controversial teaching issues and practices, an assigned GTA’s presentation of an effective class demonstration, and the presentation and discussion of selected chapters from *Teaching Tips* (McKeachie, 1986) by assigned GTAs. Additionally, the faculty supervisor provided
constructive oral and written feedback at least once a semester after observing each GTA in the classroom. In addition, GTAs completed self-evaluation forms requiring ongoing reflection of their teaching. Finally, the department provided support for all GTAs to attend a regional teaching conference (e.g., Southwest Regional Conference for Teachers of Psychology) to present papers, posters, and participate in symposia related to the teaching of psychology.

It is worth noting that I shared an office with my fellow GTAs, which facilitated open communication and fostered a sense of camaraderie. Unlike most beginning teachers in higher education, I needed not travel far from my desk to find emotional support from several of my colleagues during the more challenging teaching incidents (e.g., a student attempting to cheat on an exam). Likewise, my fellow GTAs were within ear shot when I chose to share stories of my modest but rewarding teaching triumphs (e.g., a primacy, recency demonstration working).

My training as a teacher continued in my doctoral program at TAMU where I was assigned to be one of Dr. Ludy (Ben) T. Benjamin’s graduate teaching assistants for his introductory psychology classes. Students attended Ben’s lectures on Monday and Wednesday of each week, and on Fridays the students would meet for a “small group” session conducted by one of Ben’s two teaching assistants. As his GTA, it was my task to lead discussions, provide demonstrations, and oversee hands-on activities for several small groups each Friday. Before the semester began, Ben provided his GTAs with a complete syllabus and detailed descriptions of the semesters’ activities. Prior to each Friday’s small-group sessions, Ben would meet with the GTAs for 1-3 hrs to explain and demonstrate our small group assignment for the week, after which the teaching assistants would practice the activity for him. I can still recall the gut wrenching nauseous feeling I experienced the first time I had to practice for Ben. Here I was, a novice wannabe, presenting an introductory psychology activity to an award-winning teacher of psychology. Given the weekly practicing for Ben and his frequent unannounced visits to my small-group classes, it is not surprising that my composure while teaching is now unaffected by classroom guests. Fortunately for me, Ben was a patient, caring, man who truly is an exemplary teacher and mentor of teaching. It was always evident that he enjoyed teaching my colleagues and me to teach.

In a subsequent semester I enrolled in Ben’s graduate level seminar in the teaching of introductory psychology. The course was designed to explore topics and methods related to the teaching of psychology. Texts used included several books (Benjamin, Daniel, & Brewer, 1985; Diekhoff, 1987; McKeachie, 1986) and articles dealing with issues and research on the teaching of psychology. Weekly seminars consisted of oral presentations and discussions covering a wide array of topics related to teaching methods (e.g., class management,
evaluating students using non-exam procedures, use of multimedia) and psychology content (e.g., states of consciousness, motivation and emotion, abnormal psychology and therapy). Over the years, I frequently have referred to the collection of teaching materials I acquired in this course, and often use the methods I learned from Ben.

As a final note on my training as a teacher, I am uniquely fortunate to have been trained by two outstanding psychologists and award winning teachers of psychology, Stephen F. Davis at ESU and Ludy T. Benjamin at TAMU. Both Steve and Ben genuinely cared about my development as a teacher, and I continue to value their advice about teaching long after having been their student. My eclectic teaching style is the result of close observation of several of my wonderful psychology teachers, including but not limited to Cooper B. Holmes (ESU), Teresa Mehring (ESU), Jack Nation (TAMU), Kenneth Weaver (ESU), and Paul Wellman (TAMU). Without each of these individuals, I simply would not be the teacher I am, and continue to become.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Once I experienced the thrill of watching the “light bulb turn on” for one of my introductory psychology students, I was forever hooked on teaching. Rarely does a week go by when I do not experience an emotional high because of my students’ accomplishments. Recently, after handing back an exam for students to look over (I keep their exams) one of my students asked if she could have a copy of the front page of her exam so she could take it home, frame it, and hang it on her refrigerator. She had been struggling with statistics until recently when I was assisting her with a correlational problem in class and the “light bulb came on.” Her increased enthusiasm and motivation for learning statistics was clearly evident the very next class period. I can only hope that the zest for learning that she experienced extends beyond this course into her other studies.

Unfortunately, teaching has not been without its challenges. My greatest recent challenge has been teaching students who have increasingly busy lives. The majority of my students work 20 hrs each week, take full-course loads, are active in one or more student organizations, and either commute and/or have families, leaving them little time for studying. I find balancing my belief that they need to do course work outside of class and my empathy for their complex lives to constantly be at odds. Similarly, another challenge has been finding enough time to be both the best teacher and the best researcher I can be. Thus far, I have learned to be demanding but flexible of both myself and my students.
The Examined Life of a Teacher

As a teacher of higher education, my ultimate goal is to encourage my students to be lifelong learners. As such, I believe they must be able to learn by listening to others (e.g., professors, supervisors, clients), by observation (e.g., watching me doing a problem on the board, watching an employer), by reading (e.g., textbooks, manuals, scientific and popular reports), and by actually attempting to do a novel behavior (i.e., just do it). I try to incorporate all of these methods of learning in my courses. For example, I try to add interesting relevant material not covered in the textbook to my lectures to encourage students to listen in class. In classes such as research methods and statistics, I write out statistical problems on the board or write sample results sections in APA format on the board so students can observe the process step-by-step. I encourage them to master the art of reading for understanding by not including all the important information in their textbooks in my lectures, and have half of the exam questions cover information found only in the textbook. I also try to reference frequently the assigned reading in my lectures, especially tables and figures relevant to the topic. Finally, I have class activities in all of my courses that encourage my students to apply the knowledge and skills they are acquiring in their reading and lectures.

In Foundations of Psychology (history of psychology), I have groups of students “do” by developing a Jeopardy-type review game. I assign each group one or two chapters for which they must develop several “Dr. Grover” type exam questions, and host the game in the class immediately prior to the exam. One benefit of this type of review has been that because students want to do well in front of their peers they come almost as prepared for the jeopardy games as they do for the actual exam (i.e., they do not procrastinate studying). In Theories of Motivation, the “doing” component of the course is the required term paper in which students must explain a behavior of their choice (e.g., self-mutilation, masochism, volunteering at Big Brothers Big Sisters) using any four theories of motivation, and provide empirically-based evidence via published studies for the theories they have selected. Allowing students to select the behavior gives them the opportunity to think critically about a topic in which they have a genuine interest and one that I rarely have time to cover in lecture. Carrying this idea of learning by “doing” to the extreme, my students in Experimental Research Methods and Inferential Statistics classes conduct a simple “true” experiment that includes doing a background literature search, designing their experiment, submitting a completed APA format proposal to the university IRB for approval, collecting and analyzing data, writing a final APA format manuscript, orally presenting their findings to the class, and finally preparing a poster that they present at the end of the semester department-wide Luncheon and Research Display Day. This project is extremely time consuming for both my students and myself, but
the reward of seeing them proudly explain to faculty and students their experimental project at the end of the semester makes it all worthwhile.

Reflecting back on the changes that have occurred in my courses and my teaching, I realize that I have learned as much as my students. For example, when I first came to ESU undergraduate psychology majors completed a statistics course prior to enrolling in experimental psychology. As the instructor of the experimental course, I was delighted that the four-credit course met four days each week allowing plenty of time to impart my wisdom on my students via lecturing and hands-on activities in class. However, prior to my coming to ESU, the psychology faculty had decided that the statistics and experimental courses should be merged to two three-credit hr sections of research methods and statistics courses. The faculty believed that students might better understand and retain statistical information if they were learning it while doing research.

I initially perceived this change to mean less class time to teach more material. Nonetheless, I was determined to do my best because I agreed with the faculty’s motivation behind the change. This endeavor required serious rethinking regarding the best ways to spend class time. By the middle of the first semester of the combined course, I realized I was not going to be able to continue to lecture extensively and have time for the hands-on activities in class. Fortunately, the books that I chose to use for the two courses were very readable, so I decided to lecture less. This choice clearly put more of the responsibility for learning directly on my students, and they quickly rose to the challenge. Immediately, it appeared to me that the quality and extent of their participation in the in-class activities improved because they were now reading the text as assigned rather than waiting for me to impart my wisdom to them in lecture. I am now on my fourth semester of teaching the combined courses and I believe the combined method is more effective. Thus far, the largest benefit has been that students are enrolling in the combined course sooner in their program. Prior to the conversion to the combined courses, many students postponed taking Statistics until their senior year, thereby leaving Experimental Psychology to their last semester. It was common to have those students tell me that if they had taken it earlier they would have done more research before graduating. Now, more students are enrolling in independent study to conduct improved versions of their experimental research projects. As a result of this change in courses, the most important lessons for me have been to continue to be willing to do my best no matter how challenging the new teaching endeavor may be and that my students truly are capable being responsible for their own learning by listening, reading, and doing.
Advice for New Teachers

If you are truly interested in becoming a good teacher, listen to good teachers, observe good teachers, read about teaching, do teaching research, and do not be afraid to try new things when teaching. Be passionate about what you teach. Challenge yourself and your students to do the best they can do, and be the best they can be. Model the behaviors you want your students to adopt. Have fun teaching and never stop learning!

Final Thoughts

In summary, I want to continue to develop as a teacher. Thus far, not a semester has gone by without my modifying my lectures (some more than others), trying new activities and demonstrations, updating my supplemental information, and looking for new ways to “turn on the light bulbs.” I hope my persistent growth and learning serves as model for my students. Clearly, I believe learning should be lifelong! Teaching: Trust me it will be good for you. It has certainly been good for me, and hopefully for my students!

References


I am currently chair of the Department of Psychology at Prince George’s Community College. In 1990, I joined the faculty as a Professor of Psychology. I have held faculty appointments in the Departments of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Psychological Sciences at Purdue University, and Human Development and Psychoeducational Studies at Howard University. I developed and taught graduate and undergraduate courses in life-span human development and in psychology in a variety of instructional formats, including weekend format, one-week format, face-to-face, and online. Presently, I am an adjunct faculty member at Howard University and I teach courses in adult development and aging.

I earned my doctoral degree in developmental psychology at The Ohio State University. My specialty area within the developmental psychology program was educational psychology. I also earned a master’s degree in developmental psychology at The Ohio State University. I completed my undergraduate studies in psychology at Morgan State University. As an undergraduate student, I was invited to participate in a Summer Research Program at the University of Delaware. While a student at the University of Delaware, I initiated a summer research project that culminated in my undergraduate thesis.

In graduate school, I received a fellowship from The Ohio State University and the American Psychological Association (APA) to complete my graduate studies. I also received a teaching assistantship that afforded me an opportunity to earn the equivalent of 2 years of full-time teaching experience upon completion of my degree. This accomplishment was noted on my transcript so that I could verify my teaching experience. During my senior year of college, I was recognized as the Roger K. Williams Departmental Honor Scholar.

As an active member of the APA, I have been appointed to the Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) and the Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention and Training in Psychology (CEMRRAT). I chaired the Technology Working Group for BEA and the Teaching and Training Awards Committee. I was also an External Participant to BEA for the Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges Committee (PT@CC). I am a core team leader for APA’s grant from the National Institute on General Medical Sciences. I am also Executive Co-Director of Diversity 2000 and Beyond, a national mentoring and leadership program for
ethnic minority community college honor students who want to pursue research careers in psychology.

I served on the National Council of Psi Beta, the national honor society in psychology for community colleges, as the Eastern Regional Vice President and President. I have been faculty advisor for our college’s chapter of Psi Beta for more than 15 years. In 1997, I received the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) Teaching Excellence Award for teachers at two-year colleges. In 1998, I received the Faculty Senate Teaching Excellence Award from Prince George’s Community College.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I was afforded an opportunity to teach as soon as I finished my master’s thesis. From the start, I knew that I wanted to teach and that I enjoyed interacting with students. My advisor was the coordinator for teaching educational psychology. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to teach my first section of this course. Armed with a departmental syllabus, guidelines for instruction, senior teaching assistants from whom to seek advice regarding course management, and a textbook, I was off and running. This experience was excellent in that I learned the joy and pitfalls of teaching from my peers and my major professor. We met regularly with the doctoral candidate assigned to serve as coordinator for the teaching assistants, and we met with my advisor on a quarterly basis to discuss course management issues. I received a wealth of information and guidance, so I navigated through my first course fairly easily. Subsequent courses taught me how to pace my lectures, manage my classroom, and create assessment tools.

My department provided both human and teaching resources that made my initial transition into teaching a good experience. On any given day, I had ample opportunity to have my questions and concerns addressed. In short, I had a great deal of support.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Teaching has always been my top priority regardless of the type of educational institution where I have been employed. I also enjoy giving back to others what has been given to me. Like most college professors, I had wonderful role models who were animated and connected to students in the classroom. I wanted to live and feel this same experience. As a high school student, I began to recognize the importance of modeling as a tool for transforming behavior. By the time I finished my undergraduate studies, it became clear to me that college professors were in a unique position to shape the future of the nation.

I carefully watched the instructional styles of my graduate professors. Each one brought something different to the teaching experience that I admired—humanity, scholarship, precision, opportunity, and engagement. I began to formulate a scheme for good
teaching based on these impressions. I also recognized how their individual differences made them effective in their own way. I knew then that if I wanted to be an effective teacher that I needed to be eclectic in my teaching style.

Since beginning my teaching career more than 2 decades ago, I have found the classroom to be the most intellectually stimulating environment in the universe. Every semester is accompanied by new challenges and endless possibilities. Students select classes to take and professors are given teaching assignments. Because neither group has complete control over this encounter, it makes for an interesting adventure.

Teaching is one of the professions that affords you a venue to create your own environment. Of course you develop lectures, assessment tools, and activities that are invigorating, but you can also design classroom settings, teach in virtual classrooms, and extend the educational experience beyond the classroom. In other words, you are not limited physically or intellectually as long as you are functioning within the code of conduct for the institution where you are employed.

I do not feel limited as a teacher because I adopted the and philosophy many years ago. The and philosophy is simply stated as: I can do this and that at the same time. I just needed to find a way to merge both demands. Thus, I do not think you have to choose to spend more time doing research than teaching or community service. I think you have to find a way to integrate these three activities even if the educational institution where you are employed does not reward you the same for each category of work. I also think you have to decide where you want to make a difference. If you really want to work with students and if you enjoy teaching, I think you need to seek an employment opportunity that allows you to do so. Ultimately, you have to decide where you want to invest the bulk of your time—researching, teaching, or working in community service. Once you make this commitment, then you find mechanisms for contributing to the two other areas. For example, a college professor employed at a teaching institution could conduct research on the scholarship of teaching. This professor could also serve on the board of a local community agency or create a partnership between the teaching institution and the local businesses in surrounding communities.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

When I began my teaching career, I spent considerable time working on lectures and worrying about how much content to cover in class. I really was the proverbial “sage on the stage.” During the next phase of my teaching career, I became more interested in facilitating the learning process, so I became the “guide on the side.” I attended every active learning teaching conference that I could, and I organized numerous workshops and conferences on
I still believe in active learning and I do embrace this philosophy of teaching, but I have made a radical shift in how I see my students.

I now see education as a partnership and I am just one of the parties that engages in negotiations. I present a syllabus that outlines the expectations for the course, but I accept the notion that students in my course need opportunities to grow and reflect on their own experiences. I always ask my students about their expectations for the course, and I revise my core learning outcomes for the course based on my students’ expectations. I tell my students that I am committed to assisting them in getting the core knowledge and skills they need in order to be successful students. I define successful students as individuals who know how, when, and why to use the knowledge they have acquired. My job is to help my students understand that education is a partnership that requires them to take partial ownership for the learning process.

To facilitate this partnership, I create a learning environment that encourages students to share their life experiences, to work cooperatively in groups to get their assignments and projects completed, to evaluate each other’s work and to reflect on what they have learned from each other’s experiences. I seek feedback from my students about how they perceive the learning environment. I listen more, and I want to hear my students’ voices in the classroom. I am more accessible after office hours because I use technology, such as email, the Internet, and voicemail, to communicate with my students on a regular basis.

My assessment tools have changed over the years to include authentic assessments and other evaluation measures. For example, students enrolled in my educational psychology course must now demonstrate how they use the knowledge they have learned to meet the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards. Students demonstrate this knowledge by submitting an e-portfolio. They are also required to demonstrate their knowledge of various instructional strategies by conducting a teaching demonstration.

In sum, I recognize that there is a great deal of knowledge in the classroom and that my students have been to places and have seen things that are of value to others the classroom. I also recognize that my students need to see themselves as partners in the educational experience and that they have to take ownership for some of their education. As the professor, I, too, must take responsibility when my students are unsuccessful. I need to re-examine my goals, expectations, and criteria for grading on an ongoing basis if I want to be an effective educator.

My philosophy of teaching is based on a core set of values that I developed during the past decade. At the heart of these values is my mission as a classroom instructor. I firmly believe that part of my mission in the classroom is to transform lives so that students can
reach their full potential. This transformation occurs as we examine the course content, interact, seek new and exciting opportunities for growth, expect positive results, and conduct personal reflections. I also believe that students are successful when their teachers believe that they can succeed. Thus, I begin instructing every class from the perspective that my students can and will succeed. I set high standards for my students and I expect them to measure up to these standards. Invariably, I tell my students that everything in life is about choices that we make. They can choose to be successful or unsuccessful. As their instructor, my job is to make certain that they have the resources that they need to be successful. Their job is to use the resources provided in order to be successful students.

I value my students and I expect them to achieve their goals and aspirations. I give them access to the most current information available to me, and I use my professional networks to get additional resources and insights about the knowledge that they seek. I turn student questions into opportunities to conduct research. I value honesty and integrity, so I tell my students to come to me for help when they need it. This approach almost always eliminates their need to cheat and plagiarize. I promote diversity in terms of opinion and experience. I engage students by exposing them to new ways of thinking about facts and ideas so that they can beyond their own experiences. For example, I present material in class that requires them to consider cross-cultural perspectives.

The most rewarding part of my job is experiencing the growth and development of my students. When a student has been struggling in my course for a while and finally has a positive moment (e.g., the student has successfully completed an assignment or passed an examination), I am excited for him or her. Experienced teachers know that success builds upon success. Students who feel they can accomplish their goals soar educationally. It is important to provide a forum for students to feel success. I like seeing students achieve—their success is the greatest source of motivation for me as a college professor.

My greatest teaching challenge is finding the time to spend with my students outside of the classroom. Technology is great, but I prefer to meet with my students face-to-face. Many of these students just need guidance or someone to listen to regarding their concerns. It is important that they have a warm, friendly person with whom to interact so that they can get their questions answered quickly. They also need a person who can help them chart a career path.

I constantly reflect on my role as a teacher and solicit feedback regarding my teaching every semester. I ask for input from my students, my colleagues, and my dean. I conduct informal evaluations in each course. As an adjunct faculty member at Howard University, I am evaluated every semester I teach a course. As a full-time faculty member at Prince
George’s Community College, I am evaluated formally every 2 years. I use the results of these evaluations to inform my teaching.

I attend at least two teaching conferences each year, and I coordinate an annual teaching conference that is held on my campus. I attend and plan these conferences with one goal in mind: To improve my teaching ability. The best way to become a good teacher is to observe expert teachers and to learn about what expert teachers do. I joined APA with this goal in mind as well. I attend many of the meetings sponsored by STP. As a department chair, I encourage my colleagues to attend teaching conferences as well. I also observe my colleagues teach and I evaluate their performance on a periodic basis. This administrative experience is enlightening and informative. It also affords me a yardstick by which to measure my own strengths and weaknesses.

Advice for New Teachers

The best way to become a good teacher is to observe good teaching. Although career counselors stress the importance of having a mentor in your profession, I think it is good to have several mentors to observe and with whom to exchange ideas on a regular basis. Observing several models of good teaching will assist you in developing your own teaching style. In addition to finding good mentors, I would strongly recommend that you attend teaching conferences so that you can develop a professional network that will be invaluable to you as you embark upon your career.

From a personal perspective, I think it is important for new teachers to be flexible because things do not always go as planned in your in life and career. Even the most organized classroom teacher must confront this dilemma. Invariably, things that can go wrong in the classroom will go wrong.

It is equally important to be strategic so your teaching and research go hand-in-hand. In other words, get a lot of mileage out of the energy you expend by working smart and using your time wisely. If your primary job function is to teach, then find ways to use your teaching to demonstrate your scholarship. If your primary job function is research, then find ways to link it to your teaching. Spend quality time investing in your goals and desires so that you have time for students and other demands on your work schedule. Focus on perfecting two or three activities rather than trying to be good at 10 activities at a time. Enjoy what you are doing so that you can feel fulfilled.
The Path of Less Trouble

Jane S. Halonen
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It’s noble to be good.
It’s nobler to teach others to be good, and less trouble.
~Mark Twain

I got snagged into teaching. I intended to become the world’s best clinician when I began my graduate training at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. However, I was unprepared for how fulfilling the classroom would turn out to be. Simply by adding a few active learning strategies to my six assigned developmental psychology discussion groups, my classes began to hum. What most of my peers regarded as a necessary evil—their obligated 20 hours per week teaching assistance chore—quickly became my wellspring.

There was one small detour. I was not able to get an academic job during the bleak economic period of the late 1970s that followed the completion of my internship. As a consequence, I took a job as a school director at Shore School, a special school in Evanston, Illinois, for children with significant emotional and physical handicaps. It was an arduous job from which I extracted many lessons about both the delicacy and exuberance of the human spirit. The job also provided an unusual introduction to the importance of using behavioral objectives in guiding pedagogical design that would serve me very well in my next adventure.

I was truly blessed to begin my teaching career at Alverno College, a gem of liberal arts college for women in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that provided an extraordinary beginning to my academic career. By the time I began teaching at Alverno, the college had already abandoned traditional grading practices, having adopted instead a performance-based curriculum. Students achieved success by meeting performance objectives that grew out of a shared vision about what students should be able to do upon graduation. It was a perfect match. I loved thinking about education from the standpoint of building student competence and quickly became a strong advocate of this revolutionary approach. I stayed at Alverno for 17 years, along the way completing service as a department head and a division coordinator.

After spending so much time securing clinical credentials, I also felt incomplete not exercising those skills. After establishing an academic routine at Alverno, I started a private practice on the side. That enterprise occupied my Monday and Wednesday afternoons and evenings for 12 years. I enjoyed clinical work but even the best clinical sessions did not generate the powerful feelings I had at the conclusion of a great class.
Soon after starting at Alverno, I became active in national leadership in the psychology of teaching. I joined the Council for Teachers of Undergraduate Psychology (CTUP: lifetime membership $5!–even I could afford that on my Alverno salary). I became the regional coordinator for the Midwestern Psychology Association where I had the opportunity to build the teaching program at their annual convention at Chicago’s Palmer House. When I attended the national planning meeting for CTUP at an American Psychological Association (APA) meeting in Atlanta, I had the great fortune of meeting many new colleagues who have become enduring friends through the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; only back then it was simply “Division 2”).

STP members were remarkably generous and open, sharing friendship with teaching strategies. I began to work in special roles, such as convention program chair, and eventually won the presidential election for STP, one of my proudest accomplishments. STP activities also led to some fascinating opportunities to help national curriculum issues. I served as a faculty advisor to the National Standards for Introductory Psychology at the High School Level. Subsequently, I chaired the National Learning Goals and Outcomes for Undergraduate Psychology. I am proud of both collaborative efforts and the contribution they have made to the learning of countless students.

Although my years at Alverno were rewarding, I decided to pursue administrative opportunities as an avenue to begin a new adventure. I moved to James Madison University as the Director of the School of Psychology. Although many of my colleagues teased me about sacrificing the classroom for administration, I was actually able to expand in new teaching directions with this move. In this context, I taught an ethics class for aspiring PsyD students. Ironically, shortly after I made the move from Alverno to James Madison, changing my dominant profile from teacher to administrator, I heard that the American Psychological Foundation named me as the 2000 Distinguished Teacher. The standing ovation I received when I delivered my lecture, “Teaching as Alchemy” remains one of my most cherished memories.

My current primary role is as an academic dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of West Florida. At the conclusion of my obligatory “job talk” during my interview at UWF, I was legitimately asked by one of the interviewers, “If you love teaching so much, why would you want to become a dean?” My response was equally candid: “Why would you want to settle for a dean who does not care about what happens in your classroom?”
My Early Development as a Teacher

My preparation for the teaching profession is perhaps best described as haphazard. To most of my peers my enthusiasm for teaching seemed like an aberration. Why would you want to teach when there was a fortune to be made in clinical work? Simply because it has been the most gratifying experience I had ever had. I was hooked on having students excited about psychology and could not pursue a path that did not involve that peculiar blend of risk and reward offered by teaching.

Of course, any child coming through a public education is going to experience a variety of teachers—the good, the bad, and the indifferent. All teachers offer lessons about how to teach whether they intend to or not. In my college years, I had some spectacular teachers who were virtually unapproachable outside the classroom. I had some teachers whose classroom performance was lackluster but they sparkled in informal “teachable moments.” I tried to extract lessons from both good and bad practices.

Alverno more than fulfilled the faculty development obligation that comes with breaking in a new faculty member. Two individuals stand out in this period. Austin Doherty, the remarkable, energetic dean who hired me, taught me a great deal about the value of listening and paying attention in solving problems both in and out of the classroom. In the early days at Alverno, I discovered Bill McKeachie’s *Teaching Tips* on the library shelves. Bill seemed to have experienced everything I could imagine and offered great advice. *Teaching Tips* remains my key reference. It is one of the great pleasures of life that I now collaborate with Bill on that exceptional volume with my own chapter on “teaching thinking.”

My teaching style evolved due to trial and error. Before I understood the formal concept of learning styles, I understood that I was a more effective learner when I could try out ideas, when I could wrestle with things I didn’t understand, or when I felt safe to ask questions. I simply tried to recreate the learning climate in which I fared the best. I have been lucky to have very candid students throughout my career to provide corrective feedback. The vast majority of my students have been generous and encouraging with their feedback.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

One of the joys of being a teacher is the crispness of seasons of teaching. We regularly get to start over. A bad semester can stop at the end of the semester. A good one can facilitate future good semesters. Not many professions allow so many opportunities for a “do over.”

There are substantial obstacles that challenge any good teacher. A primary challenge is helping students understand the role that their education will play in developing their character. It is easy to become jaded when some students—really a minority—will exploit situations by cheating on exams, downloading Internet papers, or otherwise disappointing us
with their academic short-cuts to real educational growth. I am always surprised by how much emotional pain discovering academic misconduct causes me. Not only do I feel a personal violation of trust, but I am saddened by the whole process that has produced such defective decision-making on the part of the student.

I have used several strategies to deal with student academic misconduct. I do all I can to prevent academic misconduct. I talk about why character development is so important. I ask students to sign integrity pledges and re-verify with each exam or project. I change my tests every semester. I assign writing projects that would be hard to download. I carefully observe due process and try to listen to the student’s explanation before the drawing and quartering. And most of all, I try to remember most people under stress will take steps to make their lives easier.

My scholarship of teaching research and my professional service have all been geared to the improvement of psychology learning. Not until I discovered teaching scholarship at Alverno did I truly understand how seamless this arrangement could be. I was not as excited about research as a professional obligation until I began to see the classroom as a lab. I think this approach allows educators to follow bliss and to move gracefully through promotion and evaluation processes rather than simply having a focus on doing what you need to be promotable.

The Examined Life

At this stage of my teaching career, I think there are some consistent principles of good practice that I think characterize my craft:

Be Overprepared Rather Than Underprepared

It is probably laughable how much time I still put into course preparation. No matter how many times I have taught a class, I keep trying to assemble the perfect combination of lecture and activities and I never get it just right. I bring too much support material to class. I sometimes shuffle through overheads to find just the right flow chart or cartoon. More than once I have had the experience of “esprit d’escalier,” (the spirit of the staircase), a term I recently learned that I think captures what happens to you as you trudge up the stairs to your class and abandon the plan and go with a spontaneous idea. Those classes almost always are more lively and interesting.

Go Deep Rather Than Broad

I confess to being amused by faculty members who are driven to “cover the content” of a course when such a motivation seems oblivious to principles of effective learning. Stanford Ericksen (1983) likened the process of exposing students to the light of the discipline by trying to cover the field to a good sunburn. It is uncomfortable in acquisition and decidedly
temporary in its impact. Unless the content of a course has personal relevance or the course provides opportunities that facilitate meaningful connections, the minutiae of what we teach will fade away like a suntan. The gift of great teachers is the ability to help students find meaning in what we ask them to learn. For their long-term learning, I prefer to examine fewer content areas in depth than more content areas in the shallows.

*Engage Rather Than Entertain*

The one circumstance that I am troubled by as a dean is when I get repeated comments from students about how entertaining a faculty member is. These remarks are often accompanied by an inflated grade distribution. If students are not moved to talk about their learning in evaluations, I worry that they have been bought off by charm and high grades. Their meaningful learning may be microscopic.

*Provoke Rather Than Appease*

I concentrate on gentle provocation of students to engage them to think critically. I try to design critical thinking challenges that knock students off balance (cf. Halonen, 1986). They will work to right themselves again to make sense of the world. The challenge is figuring out how much to push.

*Admit Ignorance Rather Than Pretend That You Know It All*

You are in front of a class and a student lobs a question at you that is practically disorienting. What to do? Students genuinely appreciate a robust, “Beats me!” than a meandering attempt to cover for what you do not know. An even better response in such circumstances is to congratulate the student for coming up with such a good thought-provoking question and then engage students in some speculation about possible answers. That kind of class activity will be more memorable, producing greater potential for meaningful recall, than showing off your expertise (and I thank Bill McKeachie for teaching me this elegant strategy).

*Be Explicit Rather Than Mysterious*

In virtually every assignment I develop, I answer the question—“What exactly do you want in this assignment?”—by providing a list of performance criteria to guide students’ work. Prior to submitting an assignment, I typically ask them to grade their own work by telling me how they met the criteria. Their responses are refreshingly candid. Many students have spontaneously encouraged me to teach other people how to teach this way because, although initially challenged, they felt comfortable with my expectations and empowered to meet them.

*Measure Rather Than Speculate*

Good assessment strategies have the power to teach as well as to provide the feedback that you need to chart your direction. I think it is important to gather evidence of student
learning. It is important to look at the patterns of performance and extract guidance from them for improvement. I think it is especially helpful to measure student attitudes about how the course is going long before the course is over.

*Trust Rather Than Suspect*

With so many episodes of student misbehavior under my belt, it would be easy to feel quite jaded about students who attempt to take advantage of situations by cutting corners or generating other kinds of disappointment. Yet I think the wiser course is to trust students until they prove they can not be trusted. It is better to trust and be disappointed than live in a world where you suspect students of the worst behavior.

*Respect Potential Rather Than Predict Failure*

If you expect bad behavior, you will surely not be disappointed because students will always live up—or down—to your expectations. Students will thrive, though, when they experience your belief in their abilities. To those ends, I like to find out from students what dream they are pursuing. Knowing the dream can help me extract examples that will keep them motivated to learn what I have to offer. Knowing the dream reminds me of my role in helping students realize the dream.

*Be Friendly Rather Than Familiar*

Students cannot be your friends. I know that many who read that statement will quarrel with it. Unfortunately, many faculty see themselves as being able to transcend the boundary regulations that most universities suggest for the mutual protection of student and faculty. Faculty judgment can be compromised when students get too close. Even if judgment is not impaired, the appearance of affectionate relationships with a select group of students destroys the level playing field. At worst, friendships can spiral into other kinds of relationships that have the potential to undo both the lives of the student and the faculty member. This principle is an important one that you should trust rather than learn painfully through personal discovery.

*Be Prepared Rather Than Surprised That the Profession Does Not Get Easier Over Time*

My cherished mentor, Bill McKeachie, once confided that he thought teaching got harder every year. I thought, “That can not be right!” After all, with each passing semester one accumulates more experience and wisdom about how classes operate, what students are like, and what the discipline has to offer. Fully confident that I had caught him in his first and only bit of misadvice, I rather smugly looked to the future thinking things would get easier. Of course, he was right. The chasm that looms between students and faculty enlarges each semester. Popular culture recedes from our grasp so we risk being seen as out of date, fueled by the ageism that is pervasive in our culture. It becomes harder and harder to be sufficiently “cool” to capture student enthusiasm.
Most of my frustrations about teaching relate to having insufficient time to pursue all of the information I feel I need. I would like to be well-rounded in my understanding of the discipline as well as the glories of the profession. Frustratingly, there is so much to learn—and especially with the time sink that is e-mail—so little time in which to pursue more background to instill a greater sense of accomplishment. It seems the older I get, the less discretionary time I have.

No matter how pinched for time, I always try to make room in my professional life for the incredible teaching conferences that enrich our lives as psychology educators. We are quite rare among the disciplines in the number of opportunities that we provide to help faculty at any stage of their careers to update their skills. My love of teaching conferences began in 1985 when I attended my first regional conference at the MidAmerica Conference on the Teachers of Psychology (MACTOP). Not only did I learn many new techniques for enlivening class, but I met and fell in love with many colleagues who have remained life-long friends. I have had similar good fortune in connecting to important teachers at the National Institute for the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP), Midwestern Psychological Association’s teaching program, and the annual teaching program at the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. I had the pleasure of serving on the steering committees for both the historic St. Mary’s Conference on Enhancing the Undergraduate Major and the Psychology Partnerships Project (P3). My affiliation with the “Assessment All-Stars”, my assigned group at P3, has been particularly gratifying. That group continued to collaborate well beyond the original conference to write an article, mount the first “best practice conference,” and develop an edited book on assessment. Obviously, I am an addict.

Another source of joy has been my involvement in the Advanced Placement reading every summer sponsored by the Educational Testing Service. I am currently serving as the Chief Reader for this event as well as serving on Test Development Committee. Perfecting multiple-choice and essay questions, building rubrics, and enacting secure test protocol has been very professionally enlightening. In addition, the community that we have been building creates great opportunity to learn through endless informal discussions.

I also have been fortunate to develop teaching internationally. About a decade ago, Bill McKeachie (here he is again!) facilitated my invitation to speak at an international conference—the Improving University Teaching (IUT) Conference, formerly run out of the University of Maryland University College. Not only did the conference provide the opportunity to look at cutting edge ideas in higher education, but it facilitated having a whole new interdisciplinary network to develop new ideas. I have stayed active in the conference and several years ago assumed organizing responsibilities with my friend and colleague Peter Seldin. My participation has allowed me to visit and learn about Hong Kong, Australia,
Brazil, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland. The commonalities in character of good teachers truly cross international boundaries.

My writing activities also continue to hone my teaching skills. There is nothing quite like writing an introductory textbook to embed you in the discipline, but other writing in the scholarship of teaching also contributes to better performance in the classroom. When I do not have a writing project underway, the old restlessness returns.

Advice for New Teachers

Find someone who speaks to you as a role model and mentor. I was lucky. I found Bill McKeachie in the library stacks and had the good fortune to get his wise counsel and valued friendship throughout my teaching life. I have never been in his presence when I have not learned something new. I could only hope to emulate that kind of impact as a tribute to all he has done for me. Whether you find support in a text or from a real live person, that special person can help to set the standard you will strive to achieve.

There is simply no better career than the one we have chosen. We are paid reasonably well for our thinking. We have the opportunity for constant renewal. We can constantly recharge in the company of energetic young people. We truly can touch the future. How could anything be better than that?

References


That Aha Moment When Understanding Happens—That Is Why I Teach

Diane F. Halpern
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Everyone who has ever communicated something complicated to another person has seen it. It is a troubled expression framed with quizzical eyebrows. As the teacher, the face you are looking into is clearly providing nonverbal cues that your eloquent explanation is not having its intended results and the learner is not learning. Then, sometimes almost magically, sometimes after considerable effort, sometimes after intervention from others, the facial muscles on the learner relax, and you can literally “see” the learner crossing to the other side. Something new is now understood. Mission accomplished. You really are a teacher—at least for this moment. Even if what was learned was as mundane as how to get around the new detour to your home or as deep as the premises of democratic systems of government, the magic of learning is the same. The learner is a changed person (okay hyperbole is allowed in informal writing like this, maybe the change is small), and teachers can help to direct that change. With one thought leading to another, who can predict what chain of thought a good teacher can start in an intelligent and motivated student? There is always the hope that even a small link will be added onto the long links of thoughtful students as they weave their world and create their future.

I have many opportunities to interact with the future in my current position as professor of psychology at Claremont McKenna College, which is one of the colleges in the Claremont University Consortium. I know that the students in our classes will be leaders in all sorts of positions after they graduate, so I take special care to bring in multidisciplinary perspectives whenever possible, so that they consider how psychological theory and research influence public policy, law, economics, values, business practices, international and multicultural interpretations, across the life span, and so on.

I am also the Director of the Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children, whose mission is to advance education and research about the ways these variables interact to promote family-friendly work policies and work-friendly families. I have been fortunate in having a very public platform for many topics that are important to me, such as better integration of work and family life, reducing prejudice, and achieving a better understanding of changes in the process of retiring because I served as president of the American Psychological Association in 2004.
My Early Development as a Teacher

Although I have always cared about quality teaching, I have not had any formal instruction in teaching. I recall the excitement and terror of being assigned my first college-level class to teach when I was still a graduate student. I felt fairly confident about my ability to handle the content matter, I knew that I was clueless about how to “give it away” to others. I recall thinking that I should write a syllabus and keep track of grades and do those things that were “done unto me” in my role as student. I modeled myself after those teachers who inspired a love of learning in me and tried to stay away from the practices of those that did not, but it all turned out to be harder than it looked. I soon realized that I had no idea how to grade an essay (oops, is there some trick to this?) or how to handle student sob stories (not all of which are legitimate), or cheating, or egads, this was not as much about love of learning as I had thought!

Fortunately, semesters pass and I always come back to that moment when understanding happens, and over time I learned from many other colleagues about the need to have policies to deal with cheating or late papers and those other aspects of teaching that get in the way of understanding. I continue to learn from good colleagues both on my own campus and those I have met at conventions and through professional work, and my students continue to guide me through these rougher spots. Every time I leave the classroom for an administrative assignment for a year or so, I always return because the classroom is where understanding happens.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

By training (a word that many psychologists really dislike—I was once told that students are educated, monkeys are trained), I am a cognitive psychologist, with specialized interest in how people learn, remember, and use information. Because of my cognitive background, I have a particular obligation to teach in ways that promote good learning, learning that lasts a long time, and that is easily recalled in situations where the information that is learned is needed—in other words, out of school. I need to teach for long-term retention and transfer, and I should be using the principles of cognitive psychology when I teach. Not surprisingly, I try to live what I preach. (For those of you who are interested, I have additional information about these principles at my Web site: <http://Berger.ClaremontMcKenna.edu>. From the home page, scroll down to “Applying the Science of Learning for more information.) I briefly present here some of the guiding principles that I use in every class.

Applying the Science of Learning

Learners need to practice “remembering” the information I want them to know, and they need to practice retrieving it from memory under the different contexts where it might be
needed. Consequently, they need to recognize when to recall the information they learned. This desired learning outcome translates to applying what is learned in college classrooms outside of class in a variety of contexts, where it actually is intended for use. So, my classes always involve many assignments that involve applying the principles we are learning and some reflection on the how well students’ own experiences reflect the theories and research we discussed in class and read about in the text. This sort of assignment incorporates many principles for good learning—active involvement, spaced learning, and connected learning, which forces learners to connect what they are learning with information they already know, whether from other classes or other life experiences.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Over time, I have become less ambitious in the quantity of information I attempt to cover in any single course. Unfortunately, this change does not sit well with other forces in the field, as I must be sure that my students are prepared for Graduate Record Examinations and the next course in course sequences; students must also meet the expectations of others for whom I am preparing them. Course “coverage” is an apt term because it conjures an image of a veneer of knowledge—not the sort of knowledge metaphor that I want to promote for those to whom I am entrusting the future. Sometimes, a veneer is enough, as long as the learner knows the limitations of her or his knowledge and knows where to go for a deeper understanding. For example, I have only the thinnest veneer of understanding of how my car works. If it breaks down, I take it to someone who knows more; I do not attempt to fix it myself. I think we need to be more honest about the level of understanding we are providing in any course and be sure that students know the level of understanding we think they have.

If I want to ensure a deeper level of understanding, then I cannot just talk in front of a class or assign textbook or other reading. Students need to engage the information to be learned (unless it is very simple). Consider this example: It is difficult to conceptualize the number of statistics courses being taught every year or the number of students learning statistics every year, yet we are always surprised at how few “people” understand basic concepts when they are applied outside of class, such as the fact that confidence intervals around the means of large samples are smaller than those from small samples (and what the concept means and why this information is important). Students can write the correct answer on an exam, yet not understand the principle when they encounter it in slightly different language or in an applied context. There are many similar examples we could all provide. The idea is to teach with a learning goal in mind that extends beyond getting a good grade on the exam at the end of the term.
When I teach I try to keep this guiding question in mind: What do I want students to know one year after graduation and beyond? The grades students get on tests at the end of the semester are not the reason they attend college, and grades on college exams should not be the goals to which I teach. I need to have a clear teaching goal, and I need to share this goal with students as their learning goal. As readers can probably see, my own teaching philosophy grew from my academic background in cognition and in the assessment of student learning. If I want to assess what students are learning, then I need to give careful thought to what I think they should be learning and then see how well we are jointly meeting that goal. Again, the idea is not realized because I cannot routinely assess learning one year after graduation. Few students see this goal as something they are willing to participate in and few are willing to put themselves through the stress of assessment a year after graduation. (Testing has taken on a negative connotation—assessment suggests more useful feedback, although there is no reason why either word should be more or less negative or positive.) Despite the fact that I cannot (yet) actually assess student learning one year after graduation, I still find thinking about learning for a long-term goal to be a good way to think about teaching and planning for teaching and learning interactions.

The Teaching-Learning Continuum

It is unfortunate that the English language has separate words for teaching and learning as though one can teach without learning happening. It is not unusual to hear professors complain that they did a great job teaching, but the students, unlike those in the “good old days,” would not learn. It makes me wonder where the learning went. Other languages have a single word for the teaching-learning continuum or teaching-learning interaction. Once I started to think about teaching and learning as a reciprocal unit, I also changed how I viewed my role in my half of the equation.

Assessing Learning Outcomes

Perhaps the biggest change over the decades since I received my doctorate and began my career as a college professor is the emphasis on learning outcomes—what students know and are able to do when they complete a portion of their education. I was active at the beginning of the outcomes assessment movement (it sounds so radical to call it a movement, but it really was radical at the time—we wanted to know what students actually knew.). The shift away from what professors did to what students know and can do is a good move as it moves along that teaching-learning continuum and acknowledges the connections between the two. It also caused faculty who care about student learning to look more critically at what they wanted students to know and do and how they were promoting these outcomes.
There is an old saying in psychology that when we care about something, we measure it. I still believe that this saying is true. By assessing learning outcomes, we are publicly saying that we care about what and how much students learn. For many, maybe most, faculty, it was the first time they heard that learning really mattered to anyone on their campus. Despite glossy views that tout great teaching on every college campus, most faculty are rewarded for the research they publish, grants they receive, book contracts they sign, and other more easily counted currency of faculty achievement. The shift toward learning outcomes was welcome for many of us who genuinely care about student learning, even if it falls short of its promised goals.

Advice for New Teachers

My lack of formal instruction in the science and art of teaching soon caught up with me, as it did not take me long to realize that there probably was something to know about how to teach beyond “do what I saw others do.” New teachers can avoid this awkward period of realizing their own limitations and can seamlessly continue with their own education. Even though I did not have formal class work, I was able to catch up after graduation by attending teaching seminars and learning from many of the great teachers at teaching conferences all over the country, and more recently, in other countries. I still attend teaching conferences regularly because there is always something to be learned that I can apply to the class that I am teaching that semester. I have been fortunate in being able to join the great group of teachers in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, and I read teaching journals and the American Psychological Society (APS) teaching column on a regular basis. Students give me frequent feedback, and I always try to listen carefully and to make the modifications and changes that they suggest will help them learn better. So much keeps changing as technology changes how we get and use information and the way we need to use information. There is a greater need for cross-cultural understanding, or perhaps I am just more aware of the need that always has been there. It is as essential to keep current in the field of teaching and learning as it is in one’s substantive area, if that area if something other than teaching and learning.

Final Thoughts

Advice is easy to give and hard to take, except perhaps in the abstract, when there is no implied deficiency going along with the advice. Every time I teach, I leave the classroom feeling up, even on bad days. (Okay, so maybe every time is too strong, almost every time.) I feel better after I teach than before. For me, the emotional component is the test that I made the right career choice; it is as close to the creative idea of “flow” that I will probably get. How will you know if it is the right career choice for you? There are many individual factors and there are good and not as good days, but I hope that you will have some vision of a
greater good and a feeling of having found your career path. Over the years, in my positions of department chair and other administrative roles, I have had to suggest that maybe some people were not best suited to be teachers. It rarely happened, and it is just a matter of thinking about where your talents best fit. Do not take a less than great day in class to make this decision, but consider an overall pattern that extends over more than one semester and an honest effort to be your best.

*Keep Learning*

Come sit down next to me and the others who are contributing to this e-book as we all continue to attend learning institutes and workshops because we know that there is much more to know and that we can learn from you and from each other. We listen to our students and to newcomers to our field who know how to see old problems with new perspectives and can help us all become better learners. Try to imagine a group of dedicated teachers who did not keep learning!

*Get Involved*

Be a joiner. I wish I knew earlier in my career that there groups of professionals who cared enough about teaching and learning to write about it, study it, and support each other. Now you know and there is no excuse to not get involved early. We need you to write the next volume of this book.
Personal Patterns Pervade the Path to Positive Pedagogical Performance

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I am currently professor of psychology and a CU President’s Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center (UCDHSC). I earned my BA from Haverford College and my MA and PhD from the University of Kansas. I spent one year at Central Missouri State University before moving to UCDHSC in 1982.

I have been the recipient of several national awards, including the CASE Colorado Professor of the Year Award from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education in 1992, and the Teaching Excellence Award from Division 2 of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1995. I was elected to Fellow status in APA in 2002. Part of my approach to teaching was featured in Kuther (2003).

My Early Development as a Teacher

My parents gave me many gifts, among them a sense of humor, introversion, sensitivity to others, and just enough self-esteem to take some risks, but not enough to waste people’s time or to be satisfied with my performance. My sense of humor and sensitivity combined to form my ability to impersonate people—not so much famous people, but teachers, family members, and Irving, the kid on the next street over in my old Philadelphia neighborhood. My ability to impersonate others in a funny way helped me overcome shyness. I have always had trouble negotiating relationships—their ambiguity and complexity is exhilarating and lots of fun to explore, but daunting and often intimidating. Getting a laugh was (and still is) easier than walking up to people and introducing myself, which is difficult for me.

My attraction to teaching may be related both to my difficulty in relationships and to my aversion to appearing imperfect. Teaching, especially classroom teaching, has built-in relationships, authority, and power. It has much clearer role expectations than fields such as business, politics, psychotherapy, entertainment, crime, or research. As a teacher, I am automatically presumed to know more than the students, and I wield power by virtue of a little specialized knowledge. My relationships with students are relatively confined, safe, defined. Even when I admit I do not know something, I know how to find out.

Another profound gift from my parents was my undergraduate education at Haverford College. I was able to interact with and observe amazing professors who taught me what it meant to be inquisitive. I learned a lot about teaching by watching them carefully (rather than by asking questions, of course).
One day I attended a review session for a Social Psychology class taught by Mr. Perloe. (We addressed all professors either by their first name or as Mr./Miss/Mrs.—it did not seem to impede our learning.) He stood at the front of the small lecture hall, without notes, and answered questions. In my usual awkward and flippant way, I asked something like, “What is this stupid study they describe in the book about paying people 1 dollar and 20 dollars?”

I remember Mr. Perloe smiling and wincing at the same time. Raising his voice a little, he said, “This is a classic study in psychology!” I could see him taking his and Festinger’s intellectual pursuits seriously and personally. At the same time, however, he showed great respect for the question and the questioner—he defended the study without attacking me. He went on to explain the study in detail, in a very patient way. I remember this incident every time I teach cognitive dissonance, every time I hold a review session. Every time my students challenge what I say, they are challenging psychology, which is a really good idea (even though my own first attempt was pathetic). They are challenging my ability to know and explain concepts, which is also a good idea. However, they are not challenging my right to exist or to teach, or my choice of profession, or my personhood. I learned from Sid Perloe that I can respond to students’ concerns without disrespecting them.

As a sophomore, I took Theories of Personality from Doug Heath, who has been the single most influential person in my intellectual life. Doug showed me how much fun it was to plumb the intellectual depths. He also taught me that teaching is a humanistic and creative enterprise (Heath, 1971). I can still picture and feel the day I was on the way from the dining center to my dorm, and he was walking (in a great hurry, as usual) in the opposite direction, coming from his office. Without stopping—I am not sure he even broke stride—he reached out his arm as we passed and just tapped me on the upper arm as he looked me in the eye and smiled. I was merely a student, and he simply, silently, and unmistakably treated me as a human being.

Doug was always trying something different. In class, he routinely had us form small groups, introduce ourselves, and discuss some issue. As part of one test, he asked us to write a question of our own and answer it. (My question was so bad he substituted a question of his own.) He had us grade ourselves at the end of the semester. He had optional “experiential” sessions after class. Back in the days before the Internet, he used technology by taping a lecture on Freud’s life and having us listen to it in the library. Through it all, he shared with us why he was doing all these things.

Doug, in fact, gave me my first teaching experience during the fall of my senior year, inviting Keith Neuman (another student, now a successful psychologist) and me to be teaching assistants in his Theories of Personality course. We held review sessions, we assisted
in small-group exercises, and we even taught one class. Thus, my first classroom teaching was co-teaching. Keith and I met with Doug on a regular basis in his office. Although the meetings consisted mostly of him answering the phone, he served tea in a little corner of his office where there was a little rug under some padded chairs and a small couch.

I remember being attracted to some of the students for whom I was a TA. They were my peers, and they were coming for review sessions in the living room of my dorm suite. I think I knew that it was not right to act upon those feelings. However, it could also have been that I was too introverted to act. Either way, I experienced for the first time some of the complexity of teacher-student relationships.

Doug gave me my first official feedback on being a teacher when he let me read the letter of recommendation he wrote for me when I applied for graduate school. After three pages of wonderful stuff, he wrote that I needed to learn to become more involved, rather than taking a “more detached, ‘teacher,’ role.” I did not understand fully at that time what he was talking about, but he identified an issue that I have been struggling with ever since. Being a teacher is not only about engagement with knowledge or technique, but engagement with students.

During my last semester at Haverford, Doug taught a course called Psychological Issues in Education. In that course I read Rogers’s (1969) *Freedom to Learn*, which helped me understand that teaching and learning are about relationships as much as the material being learned. A good model for these relationships was Joel Perlish, a second-grade teacher at a local school. As part of Doug’s course, I spent one morning a week in Joel’s class. Joel’s students never sat in rows, never folded their hands, called him Joel, listened to Mozart during class (20 years before it became a fad), and learned a whole lot. I still imitate Joel’s wry mock-seriousness when he made a joke, with his little squint that accentuated the twinkle in his eye. I still have a tape of “Trash Can Blues,” recorded one day when I brought my trumpet and Joel spontaneously started banging on a trash can and marching around the room. I thought of the Trash Can Blues years later at a teaching workshop when Len Baron, the workshop leader, said, “The problem with most college teaching is that the professor knows exactly what’s going to happen.”

My next mentor was Rick Snyder, the program director and my graduate advisor at KU. On the first day of graduate school, Rick immediately demonstrated his respect and support for the students when he said, “The hardest thing about this program is getting in.” Today, I try to imitate (with inconsistent success) Rick and several other teachers from KU. I try to emulate Rick’s respect for students, his willingness to see education from students’ perspectives, his mentoring techniques, and his ability always to keep student goals in mind. I try to imitate Erik Wright’s permissive and inviting approach. I try to imitate Michelle
Edwards’s penetrating questions into students’ clinical technique. I try (with virtually no success) to imitate Larry Wrightsman’s encyclopedic knowledge combined with a conversational teaching style.

After graduate school I chose teaching rather than clinical work mostly because psychotherapeutic relationships were too complicated. Teaching allowed me to have relationships that were intense without being too intimate, multifaceted but with pretty clear boundaries, and helpful and fun at the same time.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

The good news is that I had lots of great teachers, and imitating them was very helpful. However, I still needed to broaden my impersonation from copying mannerisms and behaviors to adopting attitudes, strategies, and justifications for all the fun techniques.

I can still imitate Doug Davis’s hand gestures from way back at Haverford. I have not yet been able to talk in such eloquent and complete sentences the way he did. When he spoke, I could almost see the semi-colons, subordinate clauses, and parentheses. My attempt to imitate his speech is really an attempt to think as deeply and as carefully as he.

For a long time, I imitated Doug Heath’s use of small groups. Twenty years later my understanding of cooperative learning reached a new level. Ed Nuhfer, who was the director of teaching excellence at CU-Denver, invited Karl Smith (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991) to campus to conduct a workshop: a whole-day workshop of cooperative learning, all done cooperatively—the best workshop I have ever experienced. Karl taught me about cooperative learning, and about practicing what you preach.

In my better moments, I was able to use what I had observed for my own purposes. Back at Haverford, Professor Wyatt MacGaffey came into our sociology class one day, and just sat silently at the table in front of the class. After a few uncomfortable moments, one student tentatively started the conversation, and other students joined in. Mr. MacGaffey never told us why he had started class that way, but I always remembered it. Years later I was casting around for some experiential exercise to teach students about assertiveness. I adapted MacGaffey’s behavior—and wound up sitting silently through entire class periods in four different personal adjustment courses (Handelsman & Friedlander, 1984).

Some habits and behaviors I copied whole, because my models were so strong. In my first week at Kansas, Rick Snyder had me sit in on mock orals for one of his doctoral students. Now I routinely have my students practice their oral exams and conference presentations in front of me, other students, and whomever else we can round up. I also learned from Rick that mentoring—as he put it when I asked him for yet another letter of recommendation 15 years after I had graduated—is a “lifetime deal.”
The Examined Life of a Teacher

For a while, teaching accentuated my strengths and hid my weaknesses. By imitation of a range of my professors and other teachers, I was able to generate good evaluations, win awards, and stay out of the way of good students. All the skills that got me into teaching continually need to be adjusted and augmented to make me better. From the beginning I knew that the teacher-student relationship is more complicated than it looked. If I wanted to imitate the impact of my professors and not just their mannerisms, I needed to work on relating more to my students as human beings, and not to worry so much about appearing perfect.

For help with the teacher-student relationship, I turned to my clinical training, especially regarding the complexities and boundaries of the psychotherapeutic relationship. I started thinking about ethics, which has been the focus of my research for the last 20 years. Ethical issues and principles provide a good framework for me to understand the dynamics of therapy, teaching, and all professional relationships. I spent 10 years studying informed consent (Handelsman, 2001), which deals with making the rules of professional relationships explicit. I applied this ethical doctrine to my course syllabi (Handelsman, Rosen, & Arguello, 1987), which I use to help clarify the nature of my relationship with students in my classes. Ethical principles, combined with the clinical theory of Rogers (1959), forms the basis of my philosophy of teaching (Handelsman, 2005).

Recently, my colleague Carl Pletsch and I were talking about growing older and how that affects our teaching. He mentioned that teaching is a developmental process, and we cannot teach now the way we did before. This is good news and bad news for me. On the bad side, it means that in a few years all the insights that I have now (which I think are wonderful) will be obsolete, at least for me. The good news is that there is always something to work on and improve.

These days I am trying to increase the range of students I can inspire, students with a wider variety backgrounds, academic achievements, and strengths. I am lecturing fewer times per semester, and never for more than 18 minutes at a time. I am also trying to have more authentic relationships with students (without getting unethical)—hearing their stories as I reflect on my own. Years after I heard a presentation by my colleague Mike Cummings, I’ve developed the guts to take his suggestion and meet individually with each student in my class. Last semester I started introducing myself and shaking hands with every student as they entered class the first day. This semester I am trying out what we (my students and I) are calling the “bottoms up” discussion, in which students sit ON the tables rather than on the chairs behind the tables. The first time we tried this bottoms up discussion the atmosphere in the room immediately became more informal and students reported feeling more comfortable expressing their ideas.
I am trying to expand my horizons by hooking up with colleagues whose attitudes, principles, ways of being-in-the-world and being-in-the-classroom I can imitate. Working closely with colleagues Bill Briggs, Ed Nuhfer, Carl Pletsch, and Margie Krest has meant that I have had to show my imperfections to a much greater extent than before. It has been worth it, though. I spent a year sitting in on a liberal arts mathematics class taught by Bill Briggs (Briggs, Sullivan, & Handelsman, 2004). He inspired me profoundly—not to be like him, but to be more like myself. I help train teachers every summer, and I watch Ed Nuhfer design and run a week-long, intensive training experience. At these workshops I co-teach with Carl Pletsch, who reflects (and inspires me to reflect) on every bit of teaching we do to see what happened and what can be improved. I observe and learn from Margie Krest—an expert in scientific writing and the best teacher I have ever seen—how to help students learn how to think by learning to write and revise (Handelsman & Krest, 1996/1999).

One of the most effective ways I have found to assess quickly how my new efforts working is by using a Student Management Team, about which Ed Nuhfer (2003) taught me. In one course just about every semester, I regularly meet with a group of current students who give me suggestions about what can be done immediately to improve the course. The team keeps me thinking about why I do what I do in a course, and it keeps me honest by assuming my imperfection.

Advice for New Teachers

This is a short and pretty basic list, because I am not confident that my more specific advice will be good for anyone but me, or even that in five years it will still be good for me.

Know yourself and know your students.

Use your experience as a student as a guide, but only a rough one. Remember, your experiences are incomplete and do not prepare you for everything.

Do not mistake giving high grades for being nice or caring. Likewise, do not mistake being mean or sarcastic as having high standards. Standards and respect are two different things. We can have high standards and be respectful of students at the same time.

Get a life. Do not think of yourself as, and do not be, only a teacher.
Final Thoughts

I make a habit of handing out course evaluation questionnaires at the midpoint in the semester. One comment/question I received several years ago in an introductory class was something like, “I don’t understand how you can be so enthusiastic and energetic every day!” I read the question out loud, and then improvised this answer, which I had not thought about in these terms before:

College changed my life. The professors I had inspired me and made me a better student and a better human being. There’s a possibility that sometime during this semester one of you will be inspired in this class and your life will be changed forever. The problem is: I don’t know who it’s going to be and I don’t know when it’s going to happen. So I have to be prepared.

My work as a college teacher is my way of showing my gratitude to my Haverford professors (including many not named in this essay) by trying to inspire my students the way they inspired me. Someday, Doug, I will get closer to the right teacher role for me and for more of my students. Promise.

References


I received my Bachelors degree in psychology in 1972 from the University of Georgia (UGA). A few months later, I was invited, otherwise known as drafted, to spend 2 years in the U.S. Army, where I served as an enlisted personnel psychologist, a fancy title for administering aptitude tests to potential recruits. Returning to UGA after my tour of duty, I received my Masters (1977) and PhD (1979) degrees in experimental psychology.

I accepted an assistant professor appointment in 1979 at Kennesaw State University (KSU), and have remained there throughout my career. I have been a teaching faculty member, department chair, associate vice-president for academic affairs, and acting vice-president for academic affairs. Currently, I am the Director of the KSU Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning.

My professional interests and research have primarily revolved around teaching-related issues, such as applications of technology in teaching, grading practices and strategies, and incorporating cross-cultural issues into the psychology curriculum. I founded the annual Southeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology (SETOP), which was recognized in 2001 with the University System of Georgia Regents’ Award for Excellence in Research in Undergraduate Education for fostering the scholarship of teaching. I have also served as a steering committee member and onsite coordinator for the Best Practices in Teaching Psychology Conference series, which is cosponsored by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP, Division Two of the American Psychological Association [APA]) and the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology.

I have been involved in service and leadership roles in STP, including its APA Program Chair, Chair of the Long Range Planning Committee, and STP President. In 2003, I was appointed as STP Director of Programming and began to expand STP-sponsored conferences and workshops. I have served in APA governance as a member of the APA Board of Convention Affairs (2003-2006), chairing it in 2004-2005. I was also appointed to the APA Board of Educational Affairs task force that developed suggested learning outcomes for the undergraduate psychology major and the accompanying online Assessment CyberGuide (Halonen et al., 2003).

I received the 1985 KSU Distinguished Teaching Award and the 2004 American Psychological Foundation Charles L. Brewer Distinguished Teaching Award. I was elected as
an initial Fellow of APA by STP in 1993, and have subsequently been elected as a Fellow in Divisions 1 (General Psychology) and 52 (International Psychology).

My Early Development as a Teacher

As long as I can remember, my career interest was teaching, a goal that was inspired and reinforced by a series of master teacher mentors and role models. My earliest mentor was a high school history teacher, Ms. Anne Timmie. Not only was she an engaging and creative teacher, she was the first teacher I had who interacted significantly with students outside the classroom. Her approach to mentoring on a more personal level ultimately influenced many aspects of my career. Although I admired my pre-college teachers, I realized that my personality and interests were not suited to a K-12 setting. I preferred the greater freedom associated with college teaching as well as the opportunity to work with more mature students and to avoid the focus on classroom management issues common to K-12 classrooms.

Like many faculty, it was the introductory course that attracted me to psychology. At the same time, it also further stimulated my teaching interests. I was fortunate to take it as a small honors section taught by a master teacher, Richard (Dick) Hazen. Dick’s teaching was engaging, and it encouraged students to go beyond the text through use of activities and demonstrations that embodied active learning. The connections that Dick made between teaching and learning also contributed to my early research interests in human learning and memory. Because his primary focus was on teaching, advising, and mentoring undergraduate and graduate students, Dick was also unique in a largely research-focused department and he became a life-long mentor and role model for my teaching and service.

Although I wanted to teach, my first teaching experiences occurred late in my graduate training. My initial assistantships were solely research focused. To acquire teaching experience, I requested a teaching assistantship in my final year. Unlike today, with many graduate programs incorporating courses and mentoring programs on teaching, at that time no formal programs existed at UGA. However, I was fortunate to get some “on the job” training and mentoring by two master teachers. In my first quarter of teaching, I was the instructional lab assistant for a learning theory course taught by Dick Hazen and a graduate section of statistics taught by Milton Hodge. These two mentors taught me many of the basic principles I still use today: clear communication through well-developed course materials; developing innovative activities to enhance learning; the importance of availability to students; organization and preparation combined with accepting that the unexpected happens and is the best part of teaching; enthusiasm for your material, even when students are less than enthusiastic about it; the importance of conducting research, but the primacy of working with
and helping students learn; and the importance of mentoring new teachers. Being a good teacher takes a lot of work and is a never-ending commitment.

Despite waiting until my final year of graduate school to teach, I was fortunate to have a wide variety of teaching experiences crammed into a single year. In addition to experiences as an instructional lab assistant, I taught several sections of introductory psychology and the first month of a graduate statistics course when the professor took a medical leave. I also had the unique experience of teaching a learning theory course one-on-one to a homebound disabled student.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

The Early Years

With my first, and ultimately only, academic position, I came to an institution that actively encouraged and honored innovative and creative teaching. When I arrived at KSU, it had just converted from a 2-year to a 4-year institution. Because KSU was primarily a teaching institution at that time, there were few resources for research. In addition, my teaching load (15 courses in three academic quarters per year), combined with multiple new course preparations, made developing a traditional research program extremely difficult. Finally, the reward system emphasized teaching and professional and community service, reflecting KSU’s earlier history as a 2-year college.

Because there was no psychology major when I arrived, its development in 1981 provided me with the unique opportunity to familiarize myself with the literature on undergraduate curriculum development. With the addition of new courses to the curriculum, I again found my time consumed by course development. Although I missed the support for traditional discovery research, I began to find a research outlet through developing and assessing new approaches to my teaching. For example, because there were no lab facilities, I had to be creative in my approaches to teaching research methods, which led me to incorporate computer technology through using early simulation and data-gathering programs. As a result, my earliest scholarship of teaching presentations focused on our experiences in implementing computer-based instruction in teaching research methods (Noble & Hill, 1990).

Another early teaching challenge I faced at KSU was its students. Given that KSU was a commuter college and essentially an open-enrollment institution, many students arrived with inadequate academic preparation. In addition, because the average student age was 28, I had students who were my age or much older. I learned that through one-on-one tutoring, detailed feedback, and engaging classroom activities, I could help these students succeed. I also came to value the life experiences and perspectives that older students could add to class
discussions. As KSU continues to evolve, it is increasingly attracting traditional-aged students and I find I miss the dynamic of the older student.

I also had exceptional mentors at KSU who contributed to my continuing development as a teacher. In particular, my department chair, Ruth Hepler, found resources that enabled me to expand my teaching repertoire through attending faculty development experiences and conferences on teaching. Ruth also encouraged my interest in cross-cultural psychology through providing funds for international study and travel and supporting the development of a cross-cultural psychology course in 1987. I discovered, however, that there were relatively few resources for teaching a cross-cultural perspective at that time. In fact, the only undergraduate cross-cultural psychology text was out of print. Therefore, I had to identify readings, work with the library to obtain journals and books, and create activities to engage students. As interest in teaching a cross-cultural psychology increased, I began to publish resources and teaching activities (Hill, 1992, 1998, 2002, 2004). Once again, a teaching-related interest and a mentor’s support led to scholarship focused on teaching.

The Undiscovered Country—The Broader Community of Teachers

In 1984 my teaching and professional life changed when I attended the Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology (MACTOP), which was organized by Joe Palladino at the University of Southern Indiana. Attending this conference enabled me to go beyond the confines of my institution, making connections with psychology teachers who shared my interests in innovative teaching and curriculum development. I established a network of colleagues across the country who, in many cases, became mentors and collaborators on my scholarship of teaching.

A major lesson I learned from MACTOP was that there is a large number of faculty who are dedicated to teaching but who may have limited opportunities to connect with faculty outside their home institutions, either because they are unaware of opportunities or have limited travel funds to attend large meetings. Because they have teaching as their primary responsibility and interest, they often see larger conventions (e.g., APA) as oriented more to traditional discovery research and less relevant to their day-to-day responsibilities. As a result, I became committed to developing conferences and workshops that would bring such faculty together to discuss teaching.

Administration—Maybe It is Not the Dark Side

Although I loved the classroom, in 1988, I found myself drawn to academic administration. Over the next 15 years, I accepted a series of administrative positions, resulting in a career shift to mentoring colleagues. I believe that my central role as an administrator is identifying and providing opportunities for the faculty to “be the best they can be” in the classroom and in their research. To that end, my administrative focus has been
directed toward facilitating a strong institutional commitment to teaching through funding and support of the scholarship of teaching.

Using resources and opportunities available to me as an administrator, I have focused on developing campus programs and regional conferences that provide practical and research-based ideas, while at the same time recognizing and mentoring faculty to reach beyond their institutional borders in sharing their scholarship. In addition, I expanded my mentoring and faculty development initiatives to include new faculty development and the acquisition of resources to foster the scholarship of teaching on the campus.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Fostering learning communities, whether composed of teachers or students in the classroom, has been a central theme of my career. To me, these communities are about shared learning. Teaching, and for that matter administration, should not be about the individual teacher or administrator. Neither should it be structured as a one-way experience with the teacher or administrator simply supplying information or directing a student to do some task. There must be give and take and, as a teacher or administrator, you have “to go with the flow,” focusing on the needs of the particular community you may be with at the moment. Effective teaching and learning communities are open to and respect new ideas and perspectives. Everyone must have the opportunity to contribute and learn together. Whether students, teachers, or administrators, our shared learning experience should result in individual change and growth.

I have tried to approach my classroom teaching and administrative roles in similar ways, always staying true to the basic tenets of my teaching philosophy. Whether you are facilitating a class or a department meeting, the group needs to have some shared values, but also a respect for diversity of values. Because diversity brings a more dynamic quality to the curriculum and our teaching, I believe it is critical to bring a diversity of perspectives to the table.

Whether it is classroom teaching or an administrative role, I try to make every effort to involve students or faculty as active participants. I try to accomplish this goal through an enthusiastic and positive attitude toward the work, encouraging students and faculty to participate, helping students and faculty make connections among themselves and the material, and attempting to establish an atmosphere where everyone may freely express their thoughts. I challenge students to use the course material as a foundation for life-long learning. Similarly, I challenge and facilitate faculty to be life-long learners, whether it be through traditional discovery research, the scholarship of teaching, or simply adopting new teaching methods. With students, I attempt to accomplish this goal through the development of creative
projects and exercises designed to stimulate their interest in the course content and relate it to future career goals. With faculty, I focus on developing learning opportunities through conferences and workshops that bring teachers together to talk about teaching, and I advocate for increased funding for classroom resources and faculty travel to present their scholarship of teaching or simply attend a teaching conference.

Advice for New Teachers

Teaching is hard work and not for the faint of heart. You must have a calling, because to do it well involves long hours, low pay, and often more complaints than compliments. Teaching also operates on a large variable-interval reinforcement schedule, with reinforcers that are rarely monetary. However, an unexpected note of thanks from a student or faculty member about a class or faculty development program is a powerful reinforcer. You will find pleasure in students who ultimately get the concept they have struggled with long and hard or students who demonstrate progressive improvement in their writing. At the same time, you need to learn to pay more attention to the forest than to individual trees. Try to avoid obsessing over those few negative comments among a chorus of positive ones or that one student who tries so hard but never really totally grasps a concept.

Becoming an effective teacher is not a solitary enterprise. As a student of teaching, seek mentors and take advantages of the opportunities that they offer you. As a mature teacher, do not be selfish, but rather seek and offer opportunities to the teachers of the future. Through both your classroom teaching and mentoring of colleagues, strive to be a role model and facilitator of excellent teaching.

You may wish that every student would share your enthusiasm about psychology and that every faculty member would share your enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. Alas, it is not to be. You must accept the fact that there will be students who find every aspect of psychology boring and colleagues who have no desire to be creative in the classroom. However, do not ever let it stop you from trying to stimulate enthusiasm about teaching and learning with your students and colleagues.

Early in my career I had the fantasy that I would achieve a steady state of competence, maybe even excellence in teaching. Boy, was I ever wrong. For example, I did not anticipate that content areas in which I was trained would disappear (who remembers verbal learning?). Nor did I anticipate desktop computers, PowerPoint, the Internet, or developing policies to prevent cheating with cell phones. Change will be the norm, and you should be prepared to embrace it.

Always try new approaches to teaching. It can be easy to fall into a rut, repeating those approaches that have been successful. Challenge yourself and take risks. Sometimes you will
fail, maybe miserably, but you will also succeed. Technology has been one driving force for changes in my teaching and I expect it will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

Teaching about teaching is not done enough. All too often we fail to share our teaching successes and failures. Avoid letting teaching become too much of a private relationship between you and the students in a class, often shared only with an administrator reviewing your performance through student evaluations. You should make presenting and talking about teaching to other teachers a central part of your teaching life. I encourage you to attend and present at teaching conferences or make opportunities to talk about teaching through attending campus workshops or encouraging departmental conversations on teaching. All of these can provide needed renewal, feedback, and development of new ideas essential for keeping you teaching fresh.

Go to graduation ceremonies. Watching your students receive their diploma, congratulating them afterwards, and meeting their families provides an opportunity to join them in celebrating their accomplishment. It also provides you with the chance the give them a send off for the next stage of their professional journey.

Final Thoughts

I think the friendships and experiences around teaching with students and colleagues are the best part of an academic life, or for that matter, any line of work. The personal satisfaction of helping a student achieve his or her goals or a teacher becoming more effective are deeper than any other career accomplishment. Most of our publications will probably fade into history, but our potential impact on students through our teaching can last through generations.

References


I am currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont. I received my PhD in 1997 from the Combined Program in Education and Psychology at the University of Michigan, along with a certificate in Culture and Cognition. I also have an EdM in Human Development from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. My dissertation adviser, colleague, and collaborator was Paul Pintrich (Hofer & Pintrich, 2002) with whom I worked on issues of epistemic understanding, motivation, and self-regulation. I also worked with Harold Stevenson at the Center for Human Growth and Development on cross-cultural investigations of the psychological correlates of achievement, and with Bill McKeachie and Paul Pintrich, who coordinated a college teaching research group. With Pintrich I was awarded the 1999 Research Review Award from the American Educational Research Association (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). In 1997, I received the Outstanding Graduate Student Award from the University of Michigan and the McKeachie Early Career Excellence Teaching Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division Two of the American Psychological Association [APA]). Other awards from APA have included dissertation and travel funding, and most recently, a grant from the Science Directorate. I am an active member of APA Division 15, Educational Psychology, currently serving as Secretary of the Division, on the Publication Committee, and on the editorial board of Educational Psychologist. I am also active in the American Educational Research Association. In 2002, I was a Faculty Fellow at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan.

My broad interests in epistemic understanding, motivation, college student learning, and culture and cognition were honed through an inverse career path that involved working in faculty development prior to becoming a faculty member. As a staff member at a university teaching center, I ran workshops for faculty members and teaching assistants, provided instructional consultation, and conducted research on instructional innovation and curricular change. Throughout those years, I became increasingly interested in learning more about intellectual development, how students learn, and what constitutes effective teaching. I also wanted to develop research skills that would enable me to address pressing questions in this realm, which led to my application to the doctoral program at Michigan, a naïve but life-changing decision.
My steps toward that decision were far from the linear career moves that I watch my current students planning. Prior to the years in faculty development, I had worked at three different universities as a coordinator of service-learning and experiential education programs, teacher of English as a second language, program evaluator, ethnographer, and trainer of international teaching assistants. For a 4-year interlude away from higher education, I was the director of an educational conference center and summer camp, a job shared with my husband while our children were young. As disparate as these roles may seem, all contribute to what I currently bring to teaching courses such as Educational Psychology, Adolescent Development, Research Methods, and Cultural Psychology. These experiences not only provided me with rich examples, but also with a sense of the applicability of course constructs to the variety of roles that my students may someday assume.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Growing up in a relatively remote island community, I turned to books early on, read intensely and broadly, and developed scholarly ambitions appropriate for my era, gender, and socio-economic status: I wanted to be a high school math teacher. Awarded a competitive teaching scholarship at any university in the state, I chose the University of South Florida, a fairly new institution designed as a liberal arts college within the state university system. I had small classes, engaging seminars, and models of good teaching and close student-faculty relationships that remain my models to this day, but interest in my chosen profession waned, and I began to explore other possibilities. Fascinated by a required behavioral science course in which I volunteered to help with research, I then enrolled in Introductory Psychology, the only large lecture class in my undergraduate career. Unfortunately, the rote memorization of details and transmission model of education were an unappealing contrast to the complex intellectual challenges and interdisciplinary excitement I found that same semester in the new American Studies Department, where I subsequently chose to major, along with a secondary concentration in English. I found many of the education classes even less enticing and made a decision to relinquish my scholarship and take on a second job (college was cheap in those years!). My interest in psychology and education never diminished, however, and I am grateful that admissions committees at both Harvard and Michigan were able to overlook early transgressions in the two fields I chose to combine for graduate training.

Thus, my formal development as a teacher and psychologist was delayed, but both were nurtured during the years that led to doctoral work, as I continued to read and contemplate psychological questions related to education. Early on, as director of a service-learning program at the University of Kentucky, I received a grant from the Lilly Endowment to initiate a program that coupled internships and an interdisciplinary seminar to foster ethical
development and investigate the outcomes. These experiences led to coursework at Harvard with Lawrence Kohlberg, the design of several other studies examining development during the college years, and a leave of absence to pursue the master’s degree. In the following years, through various jobs, each professional role played a part in furthering my interest in teaching and learning.

By the time I returned to graduate school at the doctoral level, my ambitions were not to become a college professor, but to become a better researcher who could bring more of a knowledge base to faculty development. That plan began to fade quickly; walking across the Michigan campus with Bill McKeachie on a brilliant fall day, just a few weeks into graduate school, I was stunned and flattered when he asked if I would be interested in being a teaching assistant (TA) for his “Learning to Learn” course. Thus began an exhilarating upheaval in my career plans, as I discovered from the first day in the classroom that teaching really was what I had wanted to be doing all along.

The privilege of apprenticing to the master of college teaching was an extraordinary one. Bill does everything he espouses in *Teaching Tips* (McKeachie, 2002); he also makes the process transparent to his TAs and provides opportunities for practice. He expected us to guest lecture in his class, included us in test construction, and encouraged us to conduct research on student outcome measures of the course (Hofer & Yu, 2003; Hofer, Yu, & Pintrich, 1998). Throughout it all he was patient, responsive, supportive, and remarkably available.

By my third year at Michigan, I had fellowship and research funding and was still involved in faculty development, but was eager to continue teaching, and split an appointment in Developmental Psychology, teaching one section. I had just completed a graduate seminar on motivation and now watched Scott Paris put these ideas into practice. He used criterion-referenced rather than normative grading, constructed grading requirements with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in mind, fostered a mastery approach to motivation by offering students the opportunity to take an exam again (a new version, of course) if they were unhappy with their first scores (posted immediately), and designed novel and creative assignments for research papers that mitigated against potential plagiarism. He ran a weekly meeting with TAs during which he encouraged sharing of ideas and resources, initiating a culture of collaboration that has continued among several of us who taught together at that time.

The following year, as a grader for Cultural Psychology with Harold Stevenson, I learned about the intellectual pleasures of creating a course that was not textbook-bound, as the previous two had been, in a novel area with growing interest for me. As one of the initial students in Michigan’s new Culture and Cognition program, I was eager to read as much as
possible in this area, and assisting with Harold’s course pressed me to know the material well enough to evaluate student essays on the topic. We had lively discussions of the course constructs, laying a foundation for future discussions in his lab and our writing together (Stevenson, Hofer, & Randall, 2000), an invaluable model of how research and teaching can be intertwined.

What also stands out in these years was the modeling available in my doctoral courses. Paul Pintrich was particularly skilled in facilitating graduate seminars. He promoted a pattern of talk that was student-to-student and yet he knew just when to jump in, leaping to the board and diagramming everything he had heard, and then elevating us to higher levels of conceptual complexity for the next round of discussion. Observing Paul, I also learned how to help students prepare for such discussions and how to design paper assignments that fostered autonomy, choice, and creativity. I still find myself trying to channel him when leading my own seminars, especially when I want to leap in prematurely, and when I know I need to listen more deeply in order to validate, challenge, and synthesize students’ ideas. Most importantly, I learned what I know about one-on-one teaching from having Paul as a mentor. He fostered high self-efficacy, knew just where to set the bar for each student, and when and how far to raise it; he also helped set both proximal and distal goals, provided constructive and timely feedback, was generous with his time and attention, and made time-to-degree ambitions realistic and attainable.

Although several other courses stand out, the Advanced Social Psychology Seminar, team-taught by Hazel Markus and Pat Gurin, offered a rare opportunity to witness two women, outstanding scholars and longtime friends, share responsibility for a course, and provided exemplary modeling of both interactive lecturing and mentoring of discussion groups. Students took turns leading weekly discussions, and the leaders of the small groups met first to discuss the readings. We each wrote weekly response papers that these two unusually busy individuals critiqued in such a way that each week’s writing became better than the last. I continue to pattern many of my classes after aspects of that particular course.

I was interested in trying team-teaching after this experience, as was one of the members of my cohort, Kim Edelin, and the following fall we team-taught Educational Psychology. Observing a colleague at a similar stage in the process and being observed by her; getting to plan and debrief from teaching with a colleague; and collaborating with someone with ideas, energy, and enthusiasm made this an invaluable learning experience--one that should be available to more new teachers.

Finally, Dick Nisbett taught me just how much fun teachers can have in designing courses around topics they want to discuss, the intellectual pleasures of learning with colleagues, and how learning continues for faculty members. My last semester in graduate
school I simply could not resist attending his new seminar on “Evolution and
Epistemology”—nor could 15 other individuals, all either faculty members (from half a dozen
disciplines) or doctoral candidates, none of whom actually “needed” course credit.

Defining Myself as a Teacher

The University of Michigan is renowned as a place that fosters interdisciplinary
thinking. At Michigan I was able to combine education and psychology for the doctorate,
participate fully in the Culture and Cognition program and pursue anthropology coursework
through a fellowship from the program, while investigating a dissertation topic (personal
epistemology) with origins in philosophy. The Combined Program in Education and
Psychology, my intellectual home, was a place to tie these ideas together, discuss them with
colleagues, develop related research projects, and talk about teaching among a supportive
community of colleagues who knew and applied the empirical evidence for best-teaching
practices. Entering the job market aware that there are no other places quite like Michigan, I
was not clear about the type of institution where I might be a good fit or where I might
continue to pursue multiple interdisciplinary interests, so I was glad to have interviews at
diverse institutions, both research universities and liberal arts colleges.

Passionate about both teaching and research and hoping not to sacrifice one for the
other, and eager to continue combining education and psychology within a cultural context, I
was pleased to be offered a position at Middlebury College, where a new position had been
created in the Psychology Department to bridge psychology and education. Middlebury is a
liberal arts college in Vermont with a commitment to internationalism, connections to the
Salzburg Seminars, a famed summer language program, and students from 70 countries.
Middlebury was also attractive because the Psychology Department was young and growing,
and the college had a range of opportunities for creating new courses, for example, an
intensive winter-term where faculty invent courses that might not fit in the regular curriculum,
first-year interdisciplinary seminars, and senior seminars in our research areas. A new science
building was under development, and we were each promised lab space; further, there were
students eager to do research with faculty members.

As a highly selective liberal arts college with excellent students and a faculty
committed to both teaching and research, Middlebury is a demanding and rewarding place to
be a faculty member. To outsiders, the teaching load and student ratio seem generous; only
those at similar schools understand the intensity of the nature of teaching at such an institution
where students expect outstanding teaching, detailed individual feedback, and accessibility to
faculty members at a level unheard of in research institutions. Classroom visits by senior
faculty and an elected committee are part of an ongoing review process. Teaching is openly
valued, faculty members talk about teaching, and continual improvement and self-reflection are normative.

The primary obstacle in this environment is simply time. My image of academic life was one that offered more reflective, contemplative time than I have managed to find so far, and I always seem to have half a dozen studies I would like to get up and running, data sets begging for analyses, and writing I hunger to complete. Sometimes knowing as much about teaching as educational psychologists do is an obstacle in this profession (e.g., frequent assessments are better for the students, but more grading is bad for the instructor) and I am often my own worst enemy, compromising in ways that err on the side of good pedagogy. What I am trying to learn is to make wise investments in teaching with worthwhile payoff, and to achieve a balance between teaching and research that works best for me. Meanwhile, through an elected position on the Faculty Council, I continue to work toward systemic change (e.g., lower teaching loads) that make the desired balance more attainable for all, without sacrificing the excellence in teaching for which the college is renowned.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Teaching is a process of constant renewal, with no two days—and no two classes—ever the same. I thrive on that novelty, and also try to learn from experience, as well as from my students. At midterm, I distribute simple forms seeking open-ended feedback, and address students’ suggestions in class; this formative feedback often seems more helpful both to students and to me than the summative feedback from end-of-term course evaluations. I try to make notes following each lecture, reminders for next year about what seemed to work and what did not, and where I needed to allow more or less time. I think often of Lee Shulman’s ideas about pedagogical content knowledge and recognize that my ability to understand how to teach particular complex constructs is evolving, with a growing repertoire of relevant techniques and the capability to anticipate student difficulty. I design courses in areas in which I want to advance my own understanding, and I take full advantage of Middlebury’s support for teaching improvement projects, which has financed a trip to China and a seminar at Harvard on “Mind, Brain, and Education.” On a less formal level, I learn about teaching by continuing to put myself in the role of learner. Whether in elementary Japanese or ice skating class, I have learned humility and appreciation for the affective aspects of learning and gained a window on teaching from another perspective.

In general, my philosophy of teaching is one that is informed by cognitive science, developmental psychology, and educational psychology, with a focus on the constructivist nature of the learning process. I apply my own research as well, helping students understanding how they know what they know and why, helping them become critical
thinkers and self-regulated learners, and fostering a mastery-oriented approach to motivation in my classes. My goal as a teacher is to set high standards for student learning and to craft conditions for students to meet them. I continue to experiment with pedagogical processes, and more than 20 years after running service-learning programs at a university-wide level, I am now putting these ideas into practice in my own courses.

Advice for New Teachers

In an ideal graduate program, students would have opportunities to apprentice with master teachers who provide regular mentoring, time to focus on teaching, concurrent workshops from a teaching-learning center, knowledge about teaching and learning, and a progression of pedagogical responsibilities that culminate in a stand-alone course prior to graduation. Exigencies of graduate funding sometimes mitigate against this process, but typically at the cost of good teaching, which not only negatively affects the undergraduates being taught, but can erode the confidence and self-efficacy of the teaching assistant, an expensive proposition with long-term consequences. Fortunately, many universities have begun to recognize the mutual benefits of fostering teaching development, and various programs to prepare the future professoriate have been beneficial in this regard.

On an individual level, I encourage graduate students to participate in such programs wherever they are available and to become involved in the work of university teaching centers. Enroll in workshops, invite consultants to observe your classes, and assist in preparing those a few years behind you in the pipeline. Equally importantly, create a culture of support within your own graduate program. Talk about teaching, share syllabi and lecture plans, trade ideas for lab activities, and foster a climate where teaching can be made more public. This network will also sustain you during early years as a new faculty member, especially when asked to teach a course for the first time; former graduate student colleagues can be an invaluable resource. As graduate students, take courses from the best teachers possible and observe their teaching carefully. As a faculty member, learn to balance your time effectively between teaching and scholarship, and decide what balance meets both your own needs and fits within your institution’s expectations. Find allies who care about teaching, utilize campus resources for teaching improvement, and observe other faculty members’ classes. Enjoy!

Final Thoughts

The invitation to participate in this volume arrived on the last day of the fall semester, a year to the day when I had been awarded tenure, thus at the conclusion of my first year of post-tenure teaching. At lunch that day, a colleague about to be reviewed for tenure in the coming spring asked what was different now, and if teaching took less time, or if I felt more
comfortable cutting back on my preparation. I laughed, knowing how internalized the motivation to teach and to engage in scholarly development seemed to be, and how little either had been affected by tenure. I doubt that I ever worked hard at teaching or research to please someone else or for extrinsic reward, and I suspect that is probably true for many contributors to this collection of autobiographical narratives—chosen, ironically, on the basis of having been extrinsically rewarded for their teaching. Teaching is a calling, a passion, a way of life, and we are privileged to get to teach and be paid for it, and to intertwine it with our scholarly lives.

References
Are you wondering why I, along with all the other contributors to this volume, agreed to write these teaching autobiographies? At this moment, sitting at a hard desk, in front of a cold computer, facing a sea of blank pages waiting to be filled with a concise summary of my entire teaching life and philosophy, I am asking myself the same question. However, when I recall my own early years of “trial and error” teaching, I am reassured that a text of this sort, and a chapter of my own teaching reflections, may serve as a valuable guide to beginning teachers. It also might work as a “comforter” and potential inspiration to experienced teachers.

I am currently a full-time professor of psychology at Palomar College, a two-year community college in San Marcos, California. I completed my undergraduate and graduate studies at San Diego State University (SDSU), and taught for 2 years as an adjunct faculty member at three local colleges before obtaining my full-time teaching position at Palomar in 1980. Reflecting on my teaching honors and awards, I am most pleased by the Teaching Excellence Award for 2-Year Colleges, which I received from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division Two of the American Psychological Association [APA]), and the Distinguished Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching from Palomar College. I was also a recipient of the Outstanding Teaching award from the University of Texas at Austin.

My authorship of three introductory texts: *Psychology in Action* (Huffman, 2004), *Essentials of Psychology in Action* (Huffman, Vernoy, & Vernoy, 1995), and *Living Psychology* (Huffman, 2006), might also qualify as teaching-related awards because my work as an author is directly related to my teaching. Students are the foundation of my textbook writing—as well as the joy of my teaching life.

I have also learned a great deal about teaching and writing from fellow teachers, and I am honored by their invitations to speak at conferences and on their college campuses. My special interests are in active learning and critical thinking. I have presented workshops and invited addresses at several teaching conferences, including the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP), Midwest Institute for Students and Teachers of Psychology (MISTOP), and the Texas Community College Teaching Association (TCCTA). In addition, I have presented critical thinking and active learning seminars at colleges and universities throughout the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.

My Early Development as a Teacher
Why did I decide to become a college teacher? Ironically, I was once an extremely shy child who stuttered and never dreamed that she would one day voluntarily stand in front of a group and make her living by speaking. During graduate school, I considered several career options, but never teaching—until two college professors intervened.

The first professor unknowingly started me on my teaching career with one offhand remark. After attending several classes of an advanced statistics course, the professor walked up behind me while I was working with a group of students, gently touched my shoulder, and said, “That was a very clear explanation. You should become a teacher.” I think this is the one, and only, time he spoke directly to me during the entire class, but I still remember his exact words. They prompted a remarkably transformative moment in my life.

The second professor played a much larger, and more dramatic, role in my life. Dr. Herbert Harari was my teaching mentor and hero. He was widely considered the best and most popular teacher on the SDSU campus, and I sat through his entire class as a quiet, front row, star-struck fan. At the end of the semester, when he asked me to become his teaching and research assistant, I was so surprised and elated that I may have momentarily returned to my childhood stuttering!

Despite my intense shyness, nervous giggle, and initial reluctance to teach, Dr. Harari persevered with his continual encouragement, reassurance, and guidance. Working alongside this great teacher, I began to discover the hidden joys and rewards of teaching. Dr. Harari was a true friend, mentor, and a master of the art of teaching.

Once I began full-time teaching at Palomar, I continued my teaching preparation by seeking out and working with more “master teachers.” Through my ongoing contact with these highly gifted colleagues, I continue to fine tune the “art and science” of teaching by watching and modeling their skills and interactions with students. Isaac Newton once said that his accomplishments were the result of having “stood on the shoulders of giants.” My teaching has similarly benefited from the gifts of several “teaching giants.”

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

What teaching obstacles or sacrifices have I faced? I work at a community college where good teaching is the primary mission, and I have experienced few outside, administrative obstacles. My teaching problems fall under two personal categories: shyness and time.

Despite years of help and modeling by great teaching friends, I still find that my shy personality often interferes with my teaching—or at least my enjoyment of it. For example, even after almost 30 years of teaching, I still feel awkward and self-conscious on the first day of class and the first moments of each class. I also frequently have nightmares at the
beginning of each semester—I cannot find the classroom, no one signs up for my courses, I forget what to say, or I am in front of the class in my bathrobe (or naked).

Fortunately, I have discovered ways to cope with my shyness. For example, rather than lecturing on the first day of the semester, I start with several ice breaking, get-acquainted exercises. (Getting students involved with one another and with their own learning takes the focus off me and gives me time to warm up and relax.) I also begin most class meetings with a brief (5-10 minute) “real life” review, where I ask students for examples of how this week’s topics have applied to their own life or the world around them. This activity has become a favorite feature of my classes, and it has several important side benefits. In addition to helping me cope with my shyness, it increases student participation and practical application of psychological principles. It also helps discourage late arrivals.

When it comes to day-to-day classes, I sincerely admire and envy teachers who give full-length outstanding lectures and seem to transform into first rate Hollywood actors on stage in the classroom. I attempt to emulate these teachers by presenting brief “great lectures” followed by focused activities, interaction, and participation from the students. In a typical 50-minute class, I generally present one or two of these brief lectures, followed by one or two active learning exercises, for each class session. Although I have had moments of wondrous delight after presenting a good lecture, I find that being a “guide on the side,” rather than a “sage on the stage,” works best for me. I feel most comfortable and relaxed when my students are actively discussing and participating in exercises. Establishing an interactive, respectful climate in the classroom helps with my shyness, while simultaneously relaxing my students and reawakening their Piagetian innate need to know. Luckily, this approach has a name—active learning—and some research finds it to be one of the best ways for students to learn.

In addition to my personal obstacle of shyness, I also share every educator’s problem of “too much material and too little time!” Around the globe, time seems to be our most precious and limited commodity. College faculty are no exception. Unfortunately, just as our time resources are declining, scientific research and intellectual output are expanding exponentially. Never before in history have we seen such an information explosion. With a few keystrokes on a laptop computer, faculty and students alike can access hundreds or thousands of pages on even the most obscure topic.

In addition to this information overload, Community college teachers are generally required to teach five classes per semester, normally without the help of teaching assistants. Our student body also includes a wide range of talents, ages, motivation, preparation, and ethnicities. This diversity is truly exciting, challenging, and rewarding. However, it requires a large number of constantly evolving assignments and methods for assessment—all of which take time.
How do I cope with these time pressures? First, I try to reuse the skills I developed as a busy and overwhelmed young mother. By default, I learned early on how to multi-task and make every moment count. At the same time, I also attempt to honor my most beloved mantra—“Be here now!” I believe that one of the chief dangers of our multi-tasking, modern, fast-paced society is that we too often forget to stop and enjoy our “moments.” To guard against this problem in my teaching, I remind myself before each class to breathe deeply and mentally say to myself, “Be here now!” This reminder (or stimulus cue) helps me to focus my attention on my students and on the most important things they need from me—and from psychology.

I know that this sounds rather “hippie dippy,” but I am a baby boomer. I believe it is important to multi-task and accomplish a lot when you are working with “things.” However, people generally need our full attention and we should not be looking at the clock counting the moments.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

*I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.*

Chinese Proverb

*The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.*

Mark Van Doren

*Education is what survives when what has been learnt has been forgotten.*

B. F. Skinner

What is my philosophy of teaching? As you can see from these quotations, along with my classroom activities, I am a strong advocate of critical thinking and active learning. “Active learning” has become almost cliché in education, but its popularity is increasing because research shows that it is based on sound scientific and educational principles. Being an active participant in the learning process clearly improves understanding, mastery, and retention of information. As most teachers and students know, true learning and education are much more than memorization of terms and concepts to be retrieved during exams—and then quickly forgotten. To master psychology or almost any other subject, you must question, debate, experiment, and apply the core principles to the world around you.

I also believe that an active learner is by definition a critical thinker. To process and understand information, we must employ a type of metacognition, or critical thinking, which requires watching and evaluating our thought processes. In other words, we must think about our thinking. Throughout my teaching, I present psychological science as an intellectual
detective story in which the student is the detective. In my role as a facilitator, or guide on the side, I try to model the analytical, questioning mind-set of science, and the personal values and rewards of critical thinking. In turn, my students must become metacognitive detectives who adopt, adapt, and apply these skills to real-world problems.

In line with this emphasis on the outside world, I find that adopting the “application of psychological science” as my mission statement, or highest goal, of my day-to-day teaching also helps save time and frustration. Rather than attempting to “Dance (and Talk) as Fast I Can” while covering all the major psychological principles, I try to slow down and focus on application—my one simple, overarching goal. My lectures, activities, assignments, and exercises are all devoted primarily to helping students understand and appreciate how the basic concepts and research of psychology can be used to improve their personal lives and the world around them.

When students ask what psychologists think about the war in Iraq, or voluntarily bring in newspaper clippings, cartoons, or magazine ads that demonstrate psychological principles, I know they are mastering core concepts, learning new ways to process information deeply, and developing application skills that they can carry with them long after they complete my course. They have become true “life-long learners.”

A final component of my teaching philosophy is my belief in the self-fulfilling prophecy. I believe that students will live up or down to our expectations. When I create high standards and express high expectations for all my students, they generally live up to them. Although it sometimes helps to discuss student problems with my teaching colleagues, I try to minimize simple “gripe sessions.” Focusing on the possibilities and success of my students helps me remain optimistic and fully committed to teaching.

As I near the end of this autobiography, I hope I have conveyed my deep joy and satisfaction with my life as a teacher. I love my career choice and my day-to-day interactions with students. I am also pleased that I made the decision to spend my life teaching at a community college. I respect and fully support our “open-door policy.” Education is the surest route to personal and material success in our culture, and I am pleased that my teaching career has contributed to such a democratic system.

Advice for New Teachers

Years ago, as part of his presidential address to the American Psychological Association, George A. Miller urged psychologists to “give psychology away.” Because psychological science has accumulated such a wealth of practical and valuable research about the human condition, Miller believed the public had the right to (and need for) this type of information.
I believe today’s students are more in need of critical thinking, active learning, and applied, psychological science than ever before. Our political, economic, and academic worlds have all undergone enormous disruptions and challenges. We need teaching that reflects those changes.

What is my advice for teachers who want to “give psychology away?”

1. **Focus on Themes and Core Concepts.** Rather than attempting to force-feed students with all the facts and theories of psychology, I think we should first identify what we believe are the most fundamental, core, psychological concepts that no student should live without. Then we should look for a common theme among these core concepts. This theme and personal list of core concepts can then be used as a big picture map for all our lectures, activities, and assignments. Although there is considerable disagreement over the core concepts in psychology, the “simple” act of examining and identifying them for yourself can be helpful in your teaching. Also recognize that your list will likely change from year to year, but over time, you will see a pattern to your choices.

2. **Have Fun and Be Here Now.** As psychologists, we know that burnout is one of the greatest threats to our successful lives as teachers. Reminding ourselves to relax and have fun with all parts of our teaching (and personal) lives can help prevent burnout. I have also found my personal mantra to “Be Here Now” helps make each class session more enjoyable—and sometimes even magical!

3. **Choose Passion over Money.** Teaching is not a good career choice for anyone seeking high financial rewards. The rewards are enormous, but not economically so. Perhaps it is rationalization (or cognitive dissonance) on my part, but I believe career choices should never be based solely on money. From what I have observed, the surest route to happiness is to choose a career that you almost would do even if you were not being paid for it! As my 101-year-old granny once reminded me, “Sister, if you marry a man for money, you’ll earn it!” I believe the same can be said about a career.

References
Having taught 140 iterations of the introductory psychology course, I now think I could get it right if given the opportunity to teach just one more time and, perhaps, justify the two-year college teaching award I received from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology in 2004. To do so, however, would mean giving up the luxuries of retirement: no 8 a.m. classes, no papers to grade, and no judgments to make about the veracity of reports on the recent passing of relatives and the concomitant impossibility of the grieving students’ presence at the last exam. It would also require that I apply the two most important pedagogical lessons that I have had to learn and relearn during the nearly three decades that I served as the entire psychology department at Umpqua Community College, a small school in southwestern Oregon.

The first of these lessons is this: The worst approach a professor can make to a new topic is at its logical beginning rather than starting with how our students already understand an issue. The second lesson says that students always become more interested when we involve them with the course content than when we tell them about the course content.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I did not set out to be a teacher. In fact, for most of my undergraduate career at the University of Oregon, I studied to be an economist—not realizing that continual napping in class should have been a warning sign. By happy chance, it was an introductory psychology course taken from Lou Goldberg (of Big Five Traits fame), taken to fill out my schedule during my junior year, that made me rethink my career plans. Unlike the succession of economics professors whose names I do not remember, Dr. Goldberg kept me on the edge of my seat, whence I realized that human behavior and mental processes were far more interesting to me than were monetary theory and the Invisible Hand of the market.

Fortunately, I made the decision to switch majors just in time to earn the psychology credits required to graduate on schedule. At that point, I must have known less about the discipline than any other psychology major since 1879.

Despite these meager credentials, I managed to slip into a graduate program in counseling psychology, which led to a master’s degree and an educational hiatus filled by a stint as a juvenile corrections counselor. Then—within days of acceptance into a doctoral program—I received a job offer from Selective Service, resulting in a three-year stint as a counselor in the Norfolk Navy brig, an assignment that, at least, kept me out of Viet Nam.
Then, upon return to less structured life, I resumed graduate work, for which the University of Oregon awarded me yet another degree, this time a PhD.

A job search ended at Umpqua Community College, located in the town where I had grown up. Alas, no counseling positions were available, but the college did need a psychology teacher—a post that I decided to take until something in counseling opened up. To my surprise, teaching psychology was so much fun that I did not apply for the counseling position that became available 2 years later. The decision to stick with teaching must have been the right one, for I continued to teach five sections of introductory psychology each term for 28 years. (You see, I always thought I could get it right the next time!)

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Regrettably, I had no mentor to take a personal interest in my career. Nevertheless, I did have some provocative and dynamic professors whom I used initially as my models for teaching—as I suspect most beginning teachers do. Gradually, however, my own style emerged, as I experimented with techniques borrowed from colleagues and from sundry instructor’s manuals accompanying the texts I had adopted. The early editions of Bill McKeachie’s marvelous little book (1999) helped, too.

There were two other sources of teaching ideas that had even more impact on my development as a teacher. One occurred in the summer of 1978, when I attended a Great Teachers Seminar in Illinois. It was an interdisciplinary gathering of community college folk for a week of talking about problems and innovations in teaching. The Seminar had leaders, but no “guest experts.” Instead, we were all instructed to come prepared to share a teaching innovation that we had attempted. Thus the Seminar grew out of the group’s own expertise. Applied to the classroom, the Great Teachers Seminar model made perfect sense to me. Teaching was not about the teacher as the expert. Rather, it was about seeking collaboration between teacher and student. I was so captivated by what I experienced that summer in Illinois that I returned to Oregon and founded the Pacific Northwest Great Teachers Seminar, which continues after 25 years.

The Western Psychological Association’s (WPA) annual convention became my other important source of teaching ideas. In fact, WPA was a professional lifesaver for me as a one-person psychology department—with no one else for 75 miles to whom I could talk about the teaching of psychology. WPA not only offered stimulating programs, but it afforded a chance to meet the big names—for example, Phil Zimbardo, Elliot Aronson, Beth Loftus, Gordon Bower, Carol Tavris, Christina Maslach, and Diane Halpern—whom I found to be friendly people who did not mind talking with Bob Johnson from Umpqua Community College. Even
more important, I found kindred spirits at WPA among community college teachers of psychology, who have long since become dear friends.

Once I gave up my identity as a counseling psychologist, defining myself as a teacher of psychology was natural, because that is what I did—full time. At a community college, everything centers around teaching. That is what we are hired to do; that is what we are evaluated on; and that, I discovered, is what I loved. Moreover, because no one expects us to perish if we do not publish, I had no sense of obligation that I should be doing research in some psychological specialty, such as perception, memory, or development.

By contrast, professors at the university level, I am told, are typically hired with the expectation that they must engage in research and publication, along with their teaching duties. Even though they may have lighter class loads than we at the community college, teachers at the university must decide how to allot their time between instruction and research. For them, the conflict is between developing an identity as a teacher and an identity as an expert in some psychological specialty.

For community college psychologists, on the other hand, the conflict between teaching and research does not exist. A typical teaching load at a two-year college is 15 to 20 contact hours each term, plus the usual faculty committees, office hours, and requirements for community service. For those who require some sleep, that schedule leaves essentially no time for research and publication. Nevertheless, it is important to note that we have not turned our backs on our specialties in psychology. We who teach at the community college see the teaching of psychology as a specialty in its own right. Rather than comparing us with university teacher/researchers, a more useful model for community college teachers might be that of clinical practitioners.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

One of the great impediments to good teaching is a compulsion to “cover” everything in class. Instead, I believe, it is the text’s job to cover the subject; it is the teacher’s job to focus on the core concepts and to facilitate learning. Any residual guilt feelings have been alleviated by my conviction that, at the introductory level, there is only one concept that students must learn in order to succeed in more advanced psychology courses or in life as a critical consumer of psychology in the popular media: Good psychology is based on good science. If students fully understand that concept, they will be well prepared for both psychology and life—even if they remain clueless about the James-Lange theory, the process of transduction, or the real meaning of negative reinforcement.

Once teachers get beyond the need to cover everything and begin to focus on just a few core concepts, they can begin to experiment—guilt free—with class activities that involve
students and get them thinking critically. Eventually, teachers develop their bags of tricks—often borrowed, as I have noted, from instructor’s manuals, how-to books, *Teaching of Psychology*, conferences, and conventions. At some point, though, the bag overflows, and it becomes apparent that teaching is not about finding the right pedagogical gimmicks. Development of a broad teaching philosophy, then, becomes a way of simplifying one’s approach to instruction and also finding new directions and renewed energy.

I believe that I can capture the most important elements of my pedagogical philosophy by describing the two main lessons about teaching to which I alluded at the outset. First, I have learned that the best place to begin teaching a new concept is at the psychological beginning: with the ideas, right or wrong, that students already have in their heads. Usually this point is not the *logical* beginning from the point of view of the professor, who wants to begin with the fundamentals and build up to general principles.

Second, I have also learned that students are more interested—and so are more likely to learn—when we *involve* them than when we *tell* them. Any cognitive psychologist will testify that active learning is more effective than passive learning.

For example, in the introductory course, a logical approach to the chapter on the nervous system might begin with the properties of the neuron, move on to essentials of axonal and synaptic transmission, and culminate with a model of how the various circuits, modules, and lobes of the brain interact. Taking a more cognitive approach, one might capture students’ interest with a story that is vivid enough to implant itself in episodic memory. Accordingly, ever since my father’s brain tumor was discovered and removed, I have begun the study of the nervous system by telling his story. I always followed that by asking for the students’ own stories about people they knew who had suffered brain damage. These shared experiences, then, became the departure point for our discussions of neurons, transmitters, lobes, and all the rest.

I can illustrate the second important pedagogical lesson by describing a class session that, despite my initial enthusiasm for the topic, fell utterly flat. I had been reading about Pidgin and Creole languages and could not wait to tell students how these amazing hybrid tongues support Chomsky’s nativist theory of language. Unfortunately, my enthusiasm was not as contagious as the students’ yawns. So, after some serious reflection and the re-inflation of my self-esteem, I began the next class period by teaching students the rudiments of Pidgin grammar, following this by an exercise in which they generated their own Pidgin sentences. This much more active approach then led easily to a discussion of commonalities among Pidgins and Creoles and the nativist view of language.

Such little victories, I suspect, are what keep us excited about teaching from one day to the next. However, I also suspect that the greatest reinforcer comes from being present at
the moment of insight—when the light goes on—and knowing that we helped make that happen. In the longer term, another source of teaching reward, of course, comes from seeing students go on to be successful professionals in their own right.

What makes it work for students can be the counterparts of our own reinforcers: the thrill of insight and the reward of using what they have learned in their own professional lives. The foundation that supports those reinforcers, however, is sound pedagogy that is congruent with learning. One of the most exciting trends in modern psychology involves the development of knowledge about teaching and learning. Today we are in a better position than ever before to use psychology to teach psychology.

For one thing, we know something about getting information into long-term storage by making it meaningful. For another, we have a broad-brush understanding of concept formation, which says that we build new knowledge on old knowledge. We also know a bit about how cognitive development occurs in college students—for example, that they begin their academic careers with the naïve expectation that we will teach them the “Right Answers” (Perry, 1970, 1994). We also know that learners respond much better to a meaningful lesson that grows out of their own experiences than to a lecture that proceeds relentlessly from basic principles to grand conclusions.

We also have some new research on college teaching with which we should all be familiar. Specifically, I would call your attention to the work of Bill Buskist (2004) and of Ken Bain (2004). In parallel studies, both found that the best teachers, those who were identified by students and colleagues as the most outstanding teachers on their campuses—with no exceptions—spent most of their class time engaging students in solving problems. Now, when I look back on those classes that went exceptionally well, I realize that I was usually doing exactly what Bain and Buskist recommend. Conversely, when things went poorly in class, I was usually telling students, rather than involving them.

How do we know when our teaching is successful? A good class response is obvious—although that may be too subjective to serve as a proper dependent variable. Test results, peer evaluations, video taping, and end-of-course student evaluations can provide valuable feedback, too, but if you suspect that something is wrong—something you cannot identify—the single best method of evaluation for a mid-course correction is the SGID: Small Group Instructional Diagnosis. It is a brief evaluation process, led by a colleague, whereby students are asked, in small groups, to identify the factors that helped and hindered learning in your class (Center for Academic Excellence, 2001; Center for Instructional Development and Research, 2005; Floren, 2002).

Advice for New Teachers
Unfortunately, perhaps, I will never have the opportunity to teach introductory psychology again, because I have retired from the classroom. You might think I would be sad about not being able to teach anymore—and I could be, if I were to dwell only on the remembrance of classes past—but retirement has actually presented an opportunity to become even more involved in teaching, although in different ways. My new career path involves writing an introductory text (with Phil Zimbardo and Ann Weber). In retirement I have also had the opportunity to help lay the foundation for PT@CC (Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges), a new APA affiliate for 2-year-college teachers. I also have recently taken on the responsibility of editing the Division One (Society for General Psychology) newsletter, *The General Psychologist*. In my spare time, I pursue an interest in what Shakespeare had to say about psychology—which I hope to turn into a book. In all of these activities I see opportunities to contribute to the teaching of psychology in different ways.

What advice might I have for other teachers—especially those at the beginnings of their careers? I offer the “to do” list that I wish someone had proffered on my first day as a teacher of psychology. It begins with the two principles that I designated earlier as the most important:

- Spend as little time as possible *telling* students and as much time as possible *involving* them with problems, projects, and demonstrations.
- Resist any obsession with making lessons excessively logical. Rather, design classes *psychologically*, so they connect with students’ interests, beliefs, goals, and developmental level.

Attend workshops, conventions, and conferences where you can pick up new teaching ideas. I particularly recommend regional psychology conventions and conferences and any of the Great Teachers Seminars held across the country every year. And do so as an active learner: Present a poster, volunteer to help with the teaching program at the next year’s conference, write an article on your best teaching innovation.

Read books and journals on teaching. You might start by reading the books I have mentioned in this chapter.

Join groups, such as PT@CC and STP, that promote the teaching of psychology.

Try some new techniques in your classes, and see what works for you and your students.

Make yourself available to mentor some of your best students.

Evaluate your teaching in multiple ways, such as peer reviews, videos, end-of-course evaluations by students, and SGID.

Final Thoughts
Beyond those recommendations I can’t resist one more: Don’t spend your whole life on psychology or the teaching of psychology. Devote some of your time to extending your reach across disciplines and leisure activities, where you will nurture relationships, stay mentally and physically fit, and perhaps find that Shakespeare, Van Gogh, and the people you meet at the gym can teach you something about psychology that our field has not yet discovered.

References
I am the Arts and Sciences Centennial Professor of Psychology at West Virginia
University. I received my PhD degree in Psychology from the University of Alabama in 1969. I have authored 100 research articles and chapters and have edited 5 books and special issues
of professional journals. I served as President of Division 25 (Behavior Analysis) of the
American Psychological Association and am a Fellow of Divisions 2, 3, and 25. I also have
served as President of the Association for Behavior Analysis, the Southeastern Behavior
Analysis Society, and the Society for the Experimental Analysis of Behavior. I have served in
different editorial capacities for several professional journals, including as Editor of the
Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior. In addition to receiving the Society for the
Teaching of Psychology’s Robert S. Daniel award for excellence in teaching, I received the
Division 25 Distinguished Contributions to Basic Research award, and my University’s major
awards for teaching and for research. My international activities include teaching and research
appointments at universities in England, Brazil, Mexico, and France. I also am the curator of a
museum at West Virginia University for preserving historically significant behavioral
research equipment. Recently, my classroom teaching has included courses in the
experimental analysis of behavior, behavior theory and philosophy, and the history of
psychology. I have chaired 36 MA theses and 30 PhD dissertations.

My Early Development as a Teacher

From my earliest graduate study, I wanted to work in a university. I was attracted by
the dynamic cutting-edge qualities of its research, its openness to ideas of all sorts, and the
amazing freedom to explore those ideas, both conceptually and empirically. Teaching
certainly was part of the attraction because it embodies all of these things. It furthermore
provides the occasion to learn both for the teacher and for others. Teaching, however, was not
my raison d'etre. Rather, it was, and is, an essential component of the larger intellectual
environment afforded by institutions of higher education.

Coming of intellectual age in the mid to late 1960s, a period before the development
of systematic accountability for teaching, I received no formal instruction in teaching. A 3-
year fellowship initially relieved me of the teaching duties normally expected of graduate
students. My first teaching experience was in my fourth year of graduate school, as an
assistant in the “rat lab” course (Learning) and thereafter as a bona fide instructor for
Introductory Psychology. My preparation was “hands on” and trial and error. I was given the textbook and told to “teach.”

Fortunately, I had excellent role models for teaching in and out of the classroom. Paul S. Siegel was a Hullian learning theorist who taught several of my graduate courses in learning. Paul, a seasoned classroom teacher, epitomized teaching excellence: knowledgeable, thorough, reflective when asked questions, excited about the subject, a commanding presence in and out of the classroom. My first research mentor, as both an undergraduate and a graduate student, was Stephen B. Kendall. Steve was young and full of enthusiasm, intellectual vigor, and a wealth of research ideas. He created the Southeastern Behavior Analysis Center, which is an exceptional research environment for his students, and a masterful stroke of teaching innovation on his part. Steve was always available to engage in dialogue over the latest journal article or new idea that someone wanted to try out. His style was *lassiez faire*, which reinforced my own sense of working independently. My clinical psychology mentor was Charlie Rickard, with whom I also collaborated on a number of research projects. He modeled for me how to work closely and effectively with students. His thoughtfulness, kind and supportive ways, patience, and wonderful personal qualities are ones that I could, and can, only hope to emulate in my own work with students.

Paul, Steve, and Charlie were exceptionally positive role models for me. I cannot leave this topic, though, without also commenting on some negative role models, for sometimes it is just as important to know how you do not want to do things than to know exactly how you do. As an undergraduate I occasionally experience awful classroom teaching. I had (only a few) professors who did not provide syllabi, leaving students in the dark about exams and assignments until the last minute, even the day before; and others who were unapproachable, negative, bitter, sometimes rude, and generally unconcerned with their own teaching or with students’ learning. As a graduate student, I had one professor who was disorganized to the extreme and so uncomfortable (whether best described as indifference or anxiety was never clear) in class that he could not solve the problems in class that he had just given on the examination. Another professor was an intellectual bully in both the classroom and the laboratory, always trying to put students in their place and keep them there. My point in bringing up such sloth-like behavior is to note what I learned from them about how not to behave as a teacher, in whatever teaching environments I found myself.

The teaching environment itself, both the classroom and the laboratory, combined with my personal experiences and role models, positive and negative, shaped my behavior as a teacher. The content part was easy, for I was well trained in the areas of psychology that I was asked to teach. For my methods, I drew from my own research on the techniques of arranging suitable learning environments. Processes like response shaping, positive reinforcement,
stimulus control, and their derivatives to this day serve as the foundation by which I create the conditions for student learning in both classroom and laboratory. Good learning environments also involve openness to ideas. Such ideas seem likely to me to be evoked under circumstances that encourage dialogue and cooperation among students and discourage competition for both resources and professor time.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

My own teaching and research have been inextricably linked. My most satisfying teaching has been the one-on-one teaching that I have done with both undergraduate and graduate students in my laboratory. It is there, to borrow from an old tire manufacturing jingle, that “the rubber meets the road.” Concepts are no longer a sterile graph or a terse paragraph, but an outcome of palpable environmental factors impinging on a living, breathing creature. Equally in the classroom, what is taught comes from what we and our colleagues do as our research. If there were no empirical research and only classroom teaching, it would not be long before our discipline would be reunited with philosophy. Every exceptional teacher of psychology need not be an exceptional researcher, of course, but in the long run, teaching in the absence of research would signal the demise of the science of psychology. Furthermore, students need to learn the importance of contributing to the data base of psychology. Nor should these close ties between good research and good teaching be lost on those who administer our colleges and universities.

The biggest obstacle to quality teaching for me has been achieving a balance between the many competing demands so common in all workplaces. Such demands come from within the university itself, the larger professional community, and personal sources. Aging increases the competing demands of time geometrically, for one successful task completion often leads to further invitations for other activities. Teaching is often the most vulnerable in the face of these demands. After all, having taught the course before, knowing the material by heart, it is tempting to just go in and “wing it.” In the long run, however, such benign neglect is the death knell of effective teaching. Students expecting the best from their teachers do not get it, resulting in poor learning at best or their abandonment of our discipline at worst. This type of neglect by professors also can set the occasion for the kinds of behavior that characterized my negative models for teaching, from indifference to downright hostility to students.

The very environments we have helped create determine our time allocation, including where teaching fits in. There are two solutions to competing demands in a temporally closed environment: keep adding on activity and spend less time on each, which means on either becomes more efficient or sloppy in the work, or triage and thereby reduce the commitments. From time to time it seems essential to re-evaluate how one’s present activities fit into broader
goals as a teacher, a researcher, a person; and then to houseclean. The area of self-behavior management is the subject of volumes in both behavioral and popular psychology. I cannot digress to its many details here, but certainly acknowledge its value to me as I have worked to balance my teaching and other responsibilities.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I am fortunate to have learning as my specialization in psychology, for that area defines the very purpose of teaching. The overriding principle that I take from my specialization is that environment determines behavior. Create the right environment and the behavior will occur. I have already described my view of the right environment, including circumstances that facilitate dialogue and cooperation. Dialogue further implies accessibility to both resources and time of the teacher and of other students. Cooperation implies that teachers and students, as well as students and students, work together as well as independently. Ideas and concepts are stimulated when subjected to the evaluation of others. Organizing the learning environment, whether through a clear syllabus or a clear research plan, even if the latter is nothing more than a series of “if...then...” scenarios, is important in helping students understand not only what is expected of them but also their subject matter and its relations to other issues. Teachers also need to recognize how the student’s environment changes as they learn and, as any good shaper of behavior would do, to “reposition the bar” in terms of both expectancies and level of discourse with their advancing junior colleagues.

Years ago, when I told my post-doctoral mentor of my offer of a faculty position at West Virginia University, his advice was “get a bunch of good students around you and leave them alone.” The core of that advice is solid. It is important for students to have the opportunity to develop their intellectual lives according to their own interests and proclivities; however, such advice can be taken to the extreme of total benign neglect by a faculty member (which, I have seen, does happen). The behavior that we define by “intellectual or conceptual or thinking skills,” like any other behavior, requires a lot of guidance and direct reinforcement in the beginning, a lot of control by the natural contingencies at the end. Over the years I have learned better to accommodate and nurture independent work by talented students. As our perspective broadens with experience, so does our focus on what is important, be it a method of analysis or an area of research. One of the most enjoyable challenges in my teaching has been that of incorporating broader and broader issues into the world view that I offer students.

There are so many satisfactions in good teaching, but my top two are students “getting it” and students going on to successful lives in part as a function of our interactions. Few
things are quite as rewarding as a student coming to a new level of understanding as a result of an interaction with me. The light bulb illuminates and I am always reminded of the jolly scene in George Cukor’s film “My Fair Lady” when Liza Doolittle finally articulates “The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain” to Professor Higgins’s satisfaction. He immediately breaks into a happy song, noting “I think she’s got it. I think she’s got it” as he dances excitedly around the room with her. That is what I feel like doing when students come to an understanding of a difficult, complex concept over which they have been struggling. My second satisfaction follows from the first: It is most satisfying to know that such interactions with students have contributed to their intellectual and personal development. I have described three teachers who deeply influenced my life, and my aspiration is to similarly positively influence the lives of my students.

Satisfaction in teaching comes from the feedback received from students, both verbally and through their actions. The student-teacher dialogue I described previously has a strong element of feedback, which is a powerful consequence for both parties. In addition, good teachers appreciate the fact that only through carefully assessing their teaching, both formally and informally, do they know whether they are, in fact, teaching effectively. Assessment must cover both content and method. With respect to content, professors presumably are hired because of their expertise in the content area to be taught. It is important to be confident, but not arrogant, about one’s knowledge of the subject matter. Faculty need to stay abreast of research developments in the substantive areas that they teach. I have already suggested that one stays abreast of research most easily by participating in it. This ideal, however, is not always possible. In the latter cases, staying contemporary with the field by reading journals, attending professional conferences, and working with students on individual research projects may compensate.

In evaluating teaching methods, the goal is to find methods with which one is comfortable that also lead to good student performance. Finding such methods is a big order and often requires experimentation. Like most teachers, I have experimented with different formats in my classes for many years and still continue to fine tune them as student populations, and, with them, needs and expectations change. Many universities are probably like mine in providing useful workshops and teaching forums dedicated to improving faculty teaching. Only a negligent teacher would fail to take advantage of such opportunities.

When it comes to student feedback, a teacher has to be prepared to receive both the good and the bad, and then objectively appraise it. Such receptiveness to feedback holds as well for formal evaluations. Student feedback is important in assessing the content and methods that are used, but it is only one of several factors that must be considered in evaluating teaching effectiveness. Many colleges and universities put significant weight on
“consumer satisfaction” in terms of students’ ratings of courses. High ratings often are, erroneously, taken as de facto evidence of successful teaching. Excellent teachers often do receive excellent evaluations; however, excellent teaching is not necessarily manifest through high ratings by students. Of course, much has been written this topic, and the interested reader may peruse those many sources.

Over my years as a teacher, I have become increasingly sensitive to and appreciative of the academic freedom afforded me in a university. Academic freedom underlines the importance of individuals establishing their own standards, and the institution respecting the integrity of those individual standards in assessing teaching quality. The issue arises when I hear younger colleagues discussing ways to achieve higher classroom ratings by modifying standards, testing less, and so on. There is nothing inherently wrong with these things so long as they are done to improve teaching effectiveness.

My concern surfaces when the context of such actions seems more a direct response to improve student ratings or in response to promotion and tenure committees’ reactions to student ratings of teaching, which in turn often reflects the philosophy of the institution. Teaching simply to get high ratings is like taking only easy courses to make all As. Both can be done, but neither shows much. The exclusive or even majority use of student ratings to evaluate teaching undermines the concept of academic freedom for it forces all teaching into a predefined mode around the questions asked of students about the teaching. Ratings have to be taken in perspective of other measure of teaching effectiveness. Faculty must be responsive to student feedback, of course, but faculty evaluation committees and higher administrators also must help by facilitating the development of more effective evaluations of teaching than a simple mean score on a series of items, rated 1 to 5, intended to summarize an entire semester’s activities.

Maintaining and even improving teaching effectiveness, however measured, is an ongoing process throughout one’s professional life. As the research base of the discipline changes, so must the teaching of it. The continuing evolution of my research interests in psychology and my more general intellectual interests contribute significantly to what I have to offer to students in both the classroom and the laboratory. With time, individual teaching styles of faculty members evolve, but as I have noted, teaching demands constant reassessment and renewal as students and circumstances change. Sometimes it is a matter of a tweak here or there, but other circumstances require radical reconstruction of what and how we teach. The best example of evolving teaching methods is that of the assimilation of the wonderful bounty of the digital revolution into higher education. One big challenge of that revolution is that it is one more demand on an already full schedule. Computer technology is but a small example of developments outside the discipline that impacts the methods and
content of teaching in psychology. One of the many pleasures of teaching for me is the endless opportunity to assimilate ideas from many other disciplines into my teaching of psychology. This assimilation helps provide students a broader framework in which to view their often highly specialized work and also to help me place my own teaching and research into the larger world of ideas.

Advice and Final Thoughts

My advice to new teachers is imbedded in all that I have said above. Succinctly: Become and then stay current in both content and methods, reassess constantly, and expand your world view and the implications of your own work with students while remaining grounded in your discipline. Develop short and long term goals for teaching and other aspects of academic life. Revisit and reassess them regularly.

I end this essay where I started, with a few thoughts about teaching in a university. A lifetime of association with academe has not only reinforced the correctness of my nascent impressions of all of the wonderful things that universities were, but it has also shown that they are so much more than I even imagined at the onset: vibrant, ever-changing, multifaceted, open, intellectually free, stimulating places of excellence and possibility for all involved. Rare places where mistakes are not only expected but are actually tolerated and often encouraged by those in charge of the “manufacturing,” we, the teachers. It is hard to conceive of arranging a more suitable environment for learning and all that it has to offer the world.
I graduated with a BA degree in psychology from the University of Denver in 1964 and received an MSEd degree in higher education (student services) from Indiana University in 1966. I received my MA in 1972 and my PhD in 1973 (in personality and social psychology) from the University of Arizona.

Upon receiving my master’s degree in higher education, I served as Assistant Dean of Women at Carroll College in Wisconsin from 1966-1968. After returning to graduate school and completing my PhD, I joined the Psychology Department at Suffolk University in Boston, where I remained for 16 years (1972-1988). While there, I was promoted from Instructor to Professor; I also served as department chair (1980-1988). I taught a wide range of courses, including Social Psychology, Experimental Social Psychology, Psychology of Adjustment, Psychology of Women, Psychology of Adolescence, and the Psychology Honors Seminar.

In 1988, I moved to Georgia Southern University as Head of the Psychology Department. I remained in that position for 5 years, at which time I returned to full-time teaching. I taught Social Psychology, Personality Psychology, Psychology of Adjustment, Psychology of Women, Psychology of Gender, and Careers in Psychology.


Some of my most rewarding professional experiences stem from my involvement with the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division 2 of the American Psychological Association [APA]). I am a past president of the Society (1994-1995), a former Executive Director of the Society’s Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology (1996-2001), and one of the Society’s representatives to APA’s Council of Representatives (2003-2005).

Other noteworthy professional activities include membership on the APA’s Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies (2001-2003), chairing the Advising Committee at APA’s National Forum on Psychology Partnerships (1999), and being invited to participate in APA’s National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology (1991). I also value my work as Founding Chair of the Council of Undergraduate Psychology Programs (the national organization of chairs of undergraduate psychology programs) and my service on its Steering Committee (1987-1992).
I am a Fellow of the APA (STP), a Charter Fellow of the American Psychological Society (APS), and a member of Psi Chi. I am a recipient of Georgia Southern University’s Award for Excellence in Contributions to Instruction and the Ruffin Cup (outstanding teacher-scholar in College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences). I am listed in *Who’s Who in America*, *Who’s Who in American Education*, and *Who’s Who of American Women*.

I retired from Georgia Southern University in June 2004 as Emerita Professor and Chair of the Psychology Department. I continue to be professionally active through revising a co-authored textbook, maintaining my Web site, and remaining involved in STP.

**My Early Development as a Teacher**

At the time I attended graduate school in psychology (1968-1973), there was little, if any, emphasis on preparing future faculty to teach. What was valued was learning to do research. Thus, I had no formal training in teaching nor did I have a teaching mentor. My teaching preparation consisted of serving as a teaching assistant (TA) for large introductory psychology courses that were taught in the campus auditorium. My TA responsibilities included attending all of the lectures, meeting weekly with my small group of students to clarify course concepts and answer students’ questions, and giving one lecture to the entire class. These experiences were dramatically different from having responsibility for an entire class.

When I obtained my first full-time teaching position, I wanted very much to become an effective teacher. Some of my motivation came from wanting to excel at my work, but most of it stemmed from my fascination with psychology and with my enjoyment of interacting with college students. I relied on a number of strategies to become an effective teacher. I used my former instructors as positive and negative exemplars. I incorporated classroom behaviors that I appreciated in my instructors, and I avoided those classroom practices that I did not like.

Because I wanted to know how students felt about my courses and about my style and methods of instruction, I asked them for feedback. When I received what seemed to be good suggestions, I heeded them. I also read books on teaching. I particularly like *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips* (2002) and *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching* (Lowman, 1984, 1995). I also found the articles in STP’s journal, *Teaching of Psychology*, to be excellent resources. My strong interest in teaching led me to become involved in faculty development activities, and I led teaching workshops for my colleagues. These opportunities to share information and perspectives with colleagues were another way to learn more about teaching.

I came to college teaching through a circuitous route. Since high school, I had always been fascinated by psychology, but I had no idea how a psychology major would translate...
into a job—except for clinical psychology, which did not particularly interest me. I was very clear that I did not want to teach elementary or high school, and it simply never occurred to me to consider teaching at the college level. (At that time, very few college faculty were women; I can recall having only three women as college instructors.) My experiences in student government allowed me to interact with competent professional women in the Dean of Students’ office. Because I was really drawn to working on a college campus, a career in student services at the college level seemed like a good match for me.

Because working in student services required a master’s degree, I started down this educational path. My experiences in graduate classes demystified graduate school and boosted my academic self-confidence. I soon assumed that I would return to graduate school for a doctoral degree after I had worked for several years. After receiving my master’s degree in 1966, I accepted a position as Assistant Dean of Women and Instructor at Carroll College in Wisconsin. Demonstrations against the Vietnam War were occurring, and over time, I came to realize that my role as a student services administrator placed me in the uncomfortable position of what felt like discouraging dissent and keeping order on campus rather than encouraging students to ask difficult questions of authority figures. I also knew a number of faculty members, and I felt very comfortable in their company. The idea of becoming a faculty member had increasing appeal. Consequently, I applied to graduate programs in psychology, was accepted, and started down a different professional path, a decision that I have never regretted.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

One of the most difficult times I experienced as a teacher occurred about 20 years into my career: I lost (and, thankfully, later recovered) my passion for teaching. My experience persisted for several years and was painful enough that I seriously questioned whether I should leave the profession.

My “teaching doldrums” coincided with my return to full-time teaching after having served as a department chair for 13 years. Now freed up from administrative responsibilities, I was eager to put more time into my teaching. Ironically, the more time I devoted to my teaching, the less satisfaction I gained from it. I also had come to believe that students did not really want any involvement with faculty and that few of them appreciated how much time and effort I expended on my classes. Although my teaching evaluations were still above average, they were not what I was used to or where I wanted them to be. This combination of circumstances made for a painful and self-perpetuating situation.

In retrospect, I believe that two things enabled me to recover my enthusiasm for teaching. First, I had the opportunity to establish closer connections with a few students when
some of them confided to me dramatic personal difficulties that were interfering with their academic performance. These experiences helped me realize that some students were definitely in need of a willing ear, advice, and support.

The second thing that put me back on track was reading *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education* (Willimon & Naylor, 1995), a treatise on today’s college students and contemporary (college) culture. This book enabled me to see all of my students more sympathetically, not just those who shared their problems with me. So I began to express my interest in them more openly. The return of sympathetic feelings toward my students enabled me to enjoy both my students and my teaching again. My student evaluations improved, so I once again felt appreciated, which reinforced my good feelings about my students. Thus, a positive self-perpetuating cycle came to replace the earlier, negative one.

Balancing the time given to teaching, research, and other professional activities is a challenge for academics. In many respects, I was lucky that my first academic position was at an institution that, early on, emphasized teaching and placed no emphasis on publication. Thus, I was able to devote my early years to developing my courses and improving my teaching. When I felt competent at those things, I branched out and became more active professionally. I kept quite busy during the first 10 years of my academic career, but I did not experience the intense time pressures that I later experienced.

Time pressures increased dramatically when I decided to write a textbook. Although this form of scholarship (vs. conducting empirical research) proved to be a perfect match for my inclinations, I always found it difficult to write intensively while carrying a heavy teaching load and keeping up with other professional involvements. Thus, I worked long hours, made adjustments when I absolutely had to, and learned to live with the frustration of always being behind in my work.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My teaching philosophy and practice can be characterized by five principles.

1. *Regularly seek students' suggestions for improving the course.* Since I first started teaching, I have always asked for student feedback on my courses in addition to the end-of-term student ratings that are required by the institution. Among other things, I assess students’ perceptions of textbooks, course activities, and written projects, especially when I am testing out new ones. Through their comments and suggestions over the years, students have served as “mentors” for me regarding effective teaching. In addition to end-of-term feedback, I also ask for feedback after the first two exams because this early feedback gives me the opportunity to make changes in a course while those who made the suggestions can still benefit from them.
2. Actively involve students in the course material. I try to involve students actively in the course material not only to motivate them but also to help them understand how to apply the course material to their own lives. To involve students, I develop and use a variety of class activities (exercises, videotapes, questionnaires, out-of-class observations, and small group discussions).

Although this approach is popular today, it was relatively novel when I first started teaching.

3. Design and deliver well-organized and interesting lectures. I make an effort to include in my lectures applications of principles, theories, and studies that I believe will be of interest to students. I develop lecture outlines that are projected overhead to help students understand how information fits together and to keep track of the flow of information. I revise lecture content and outlines regularly as I see what works and what does not and to keep content up-to-date.

4. Convey enthusiasm about the course material and an interest in students. I believe that an essential aspect of teaching is motivating students to be interested in the material. To motivate students, I use examples that are relevant to students' lives, employ humor, and get students to participate in class. I also make a point of learning each student's name in the first few weeks of class, I distribute hand-outs on study strategies, and I facilitate students' studying together by circulating a "study buddies" list.

5. Provide opportunities for students to practice thinking and writing skills. I assign written work in all of my classes because I believe that it is mainly through writing experiences that students learn to think and write clearly. Writing opportunities take the form of essay questions on hourly and/or final exams and course projects.

During the first 16 years of my academic life, I taught at a private institution of about 5,000 students; in the next 16 years, I moved to a public institution of 16,000 students, and I adapted my teaching to these different academic environments. At the private institution, the size of my classes was smaller, most students were reasonably well-motivated, and I had fewer professional involvements than I would later. Thus, I could devote more time to my teaching, and I experimented with different course formats. I taught my Behavior Modification course using behavioral principles (Keller Plan or the Personalized System of Instruction [PSI]), and I had students conduct both group and individual experiments in my Experimental Social Psychology course. In Psychology of Adolescence, I used small group discussions on topics of interest once a week (and trained students to lead the groups). In my Social Psychology, Psychology of Adjustment, and Psychology of Women courses, I employed many in-class activities to demonstrate course principles and I utilized projects to help students understand how to apply psychological principles.
In the public institution, class sizes increased dramatically and students wanted more structure in the classroom. In response, I developed lecture outlines that are projected overhead in every course, an activity that consumed considerable time and also led to my teaching all of my courses according to the lecture-discussion format. Of course, the course content varied and I developed course activities and projects that were unique to specific courses. I also had a number of other professional obligations at this time in my career, which meant that I had less time to devote to teaching than had been the case.

The most rewarding aspect of teaching is to know that I have made a difference in a student’s life. My greatest satisfactions come from interacting with a particular student over several years, observing him or her grow both intellectually and personally, and knowing that the information and support that I provided enabled the student to get into graduate school, to obtain a good job, or to deal with a personal difficulty.

The most distressing aspect of teaching in my experience is students who do not come to class on a regular basis. I strive to view this behavior as a choice that students make and let go of my annoyance with it. Another source of frustration is students who perform poorly in class and who fail to seek assistance until just before the final exam (and, sometimes, not even then). To encourage students to deal with these problems sooner rather than later, I encourage those who have performed poorly to see me. I also write what I hope are supportive notes on their exams encouraging them to stop by my office. I am gratified when some of these students stop by or contact me by e-mail, but not all do.

I regularly use a number of methods to evaluate my teaching. First, I rely strongly on student feedback. I use the information both from the required university student evaluations as well as that from my own forms that contain questions of specific interest to me. Second, I pay attention to students’ performance on exams and on written assignments to provide me with helpful insights about how and where my teaching can be improved. Third, I keep a sheet of paper in each of my course folders on which I make suggestions about teaching the course when issues arise during the semester. At the end of each term, I review all of this information, and I develop a list of changes to make the next time I teach the course.

Evaluation methods that I have used less frequently include reviewing videotapes of my teaching and asking other faculty to observe my classes and provide feedback.

I believe that instructors should develop their own informal methods of obtaining student feedback on classroom issues of particular interest to them. In response to demands by the public and accrediting agencies for “accountability,” most universities now require formal assessments of teaching. Because many institutions use this information in determining faculty promotions and tenure as well as salary increases, it is essential that the formal assessment instruments be valid and reliable.
To discover new ideas on how to improve my teaching, I regularly read books and articles on teaching, attend regional teaching conferences every year, attend sessions on teaching at annual national psychology conventions, and talk with my colleagues about teaching. I have also participated in classes at the university’s Center for Excellence in Teaching.

Advice for New Teachers

My advice for anyone who aspires to become a fine teacher is to stay connected to students and to seek feedback from them (and others) on their teaching. Teachers also need to keep current in their subject matter, to read about teaching, to talk with their colleagues about teaching, and to seek out and experiment with new approaches to teaching. I would also encourage them to join STP, which provides many teaching resources through the Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology and the *Teaching of Psychology* journal.

Final Thoughts

I encourage teachers to cultivate a positive attitude about their students and to give them the benefit of the doubt. Most students will appreciate this approach and will respond in kind. Teachers’ efforts in this regard can facilitate positive teacher-student interactions and make their courses more enjoyable for both teachers and their students.

References

Random Error: An Appreciation of the Chance of Teaching

Neil Lutsky
Carleton College

If “men are seldom blessed with good fortune and good sense at the same time” (Titus Livy, *Annales*, c115), then the odds of finding value in this essay are low indeed. For mine is a tale of immense good fortune. At its heart are three remarkable institutions and a series of arguably random influences that led me to them. The first institution is Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, a gem of a liberal arts college where I have taught for over 30 years. The second is the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP), that extended collection of dedicated and talented teachers whose virtual and occasionally face-to-face meetings have enriched my professional career. The third is Harvard University, where I had the opportunity to work with outstanding graduate colleagues and undergraduates and where I first cut my teeth on teaching.

My association with Carleton began in 1974, where, having left the social psychology program at Harvard and, at age 25, fairly fresh out of the womb, I assumed an appointment as Instructor in Psychology. That was a humbling experience. Carleton has had an outstanding teaching faculty and for generations has attracted eager, talented, and caring students who take to academic challenges like wolves to a pre-global warming Minnesota winter. I was forced to adapt quickly, move fast, work prodigiously, invent imaginatively, and forsake sleep. I take the fact that I am now a full professor as evidence that I have survived (so far). However, these skeletal facts leave much unsaid about how being in this place has nurtured and shaped my teaching career, and that is a rich part of the story I will tell.

The other major strand of that story originates from STP. For me, being exposed to people who approached the teaching of psychology in so dedicated, respectful, and considered a way was an inspiration, even a revelation. This group provided a professional anchor and constant stimulation, and, perhaps most importantly, an entertaining and loving network of friends. How someone as dispositionally disagreeable as I am could find a home in such a place is one of the mysteries of the story.

This story is an essay about what my curriculum vitae does not say, but I am obliged to summarize pertinent background material. I teach Social and Personality Psychology, laboratory courses associated with those topic areas, Introductory Psychology, Statistics, and advanced seminars. Over the years, I have had research interests in gerontology, the cross-situational consistency of behavior, attitudes and actions, personality traits, and self-perception, but my professional life has centered on what we now call the scholarship of
teaching. That scholarship has been supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Department of Education FIPSE program, the Mellon Foundation, Carleton College, and other sources. I have been active in STP, serving as President in 1998-99, and have participated in professional activities (conferences, reviews, American Psychological Association [APA] and American Psychological Society [APS] groups) related to teaching. In 2001, I received the Walter Mink Outstanding Teacher Award given by the Minnesota Psychological Association. The late Walt Mink of Macalester College was an exemplar of all that I hold dear in teaching and was a generous role model. I have, as I said, been most fortunate.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Both of my sisters and I became teachers, which suggests shared environmental influences or genetic ones on our career choices, but what the former influences might have been is not clear. We invested considerable time watching television shows like the Mickey Mouse Club; we read few books about something other than *The Hardy Boys* or *The Bobbsey Twins*. My parents were bright and hard working, but neither had college degrees. My father was fiercely independent, realistic, and waggish; my mother more fluent, well-read, and informed. I would like to think that some of those qualities rubbed off on me.

I would locate my roots in teaching (or see a resonance of those roots) in the impact of three childhood teachers. One, a school principal, Miss Hartman, organized occasional sessions on arithmetic for a small group of pupils behind the heavy stage curtains of our elementary school auditorium. Miss Hartman taught us how to play with numbers, how seemingly complex mathematical problems could be addressed using deft strategies. I found it both satisfying and useful to develop the cognitive flexibility she demanded. Another influential teacher, Rabbi Newman, led classes I attended after school at a local Jewish Community Center. In contrast to other teachers who emphasized the memorization of religious stories and rituals, Rabbi Newman enjoyed sparking discussions about moral issues and opened up a more philosophical vein for serious intellectual play. A third teacher, Mr. Grossman, introduced my junior high school classmates and me to theories of history that yielded fresh and sometimes startling contrasts to conventional understandings of our civic heritage. What I was beginning to appreciate, and what blossomed further during my time as an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, was that I loved ideas, the insights and possibilities they could raise, and the careful and critical evaluation they required. So I applied to graduate school, less out of keen desire to contribute to psychological science and more because I believed graduate school to be the most intellectually open of the other
possibilities—law school (the parentally endorsed path), the military, or secondary school teaching—before me.

I do not think I would ever have been accepted to graduate school if it were not for *Esquire* magazine. At Wharton, I majored in political science, and so I had a weak background in psychology when I applied to PhD programs. What I did have was a gift: designation as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. Selection for this fellowship, awarded by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation to students considering careers in college teaching, required an interview with a panel of faculty. My committee included a local liberal arts college faculty member who had read about Stanley Milgram’s research in a recent *Esquire* magazine article. I could handle a credibly intelligent conversation about research on obedience at the *Esquire* level; I doubt I could have done more than that. I received the fellowship, and off I went to study social psychology and eat Elsieburgers in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I wish I could convey adequately the gratitude and wonder I felt and still feel for having had the chance to go to Harvard for graduate school after being the first person in my family to have graduated any college or university. I do know the experience left me with a keen sense of our responsibility to maintain and widen educational opportunity.

Harvard’s Department of Psychology and Social Relations offered little in the way of systematic training in teaching at the time, but it is clear to me that the foundations of my life as a teacher were established there. Major courses at Harvard, like Personality and Social Psychology, were taught by prominent faculty lecturing once or twice a week and by graduate students, like myself, who met with smaller sections of 20-30 students regularly. The 6-10 graduate students involved in any one course worked together to swap ideas and handle responsibilities, but each of us had his or her own syllabus and led individual sections under the umbrella of the main course. In this setting, with the help of creative peers, conscientious faculty, and eager students, I learned how to organize a lecture, lead a discussion, and write a syllabus—and, perhaps, most importantly, I was not only beginning to learn how to teach; I was discovering how intellectually engaging and personally rewarding I found teaching to be.

My passion for teaching, however, was not enhancing my conventional prospects for an academic position, because my publication record was standard deviations below the norms for aspiring social psychologists. In an odd way, struggling with the belief that my efforts as a teacher would have little impact on my fate in psychology helped gird me for my career. I persevered despite my deviance from the research prototype, and that, eventually, gave me the chance to discover that the research prototype is itself unrepresentative of the varied ways in which academics make professional contributions. At the time, it came as a surprise to me and, perhaps, to my advisors as well, when I happened upon an institutional (and geographical) outlier. I had never heard of Carleton College before seeing a notice for a
job there, but when I visited, I felt as if I had fallen into Eden, a “Harvard of the Midwest” solely focused on excellence in undergraduate education. If Carleton College had not sought to add a social psychologist to its program in 1974, I am not confident I would be in academia today. It was one of the great fortunes of my life to have been given the chance to settle a career in teaching on the prairie plateau.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Establishing myself as a teacher at Carleton was a daunting and exhilarating challenge. I was surrounded by legendary professors and a highly supportive staff. Every day in class, I stood before the most intense, conscientious, and inquisitive students, eager to learn and think and to figure out the relationship between what they were now doing and the lives before them. I faced high expectations and extraordinary possibilities. What fertile soil! My teaching and career were also beneficiaries of a colleague’s NSF grant designed to promote student involvement in empirical social science research. I was able to use some of that funding to support research with students and to develop research modules for my courses. The former resulted in empirical contributions to psychology (e.g., Mischel & Peake, 1982), the latter in my first involvement in the scholarship of teaching (Lutsky, 1986) and an associated exposure to the keen mind and sharp pencil of Charles Brewer, then the editor of *Teaching of Psychology*.

What turned out to be the central struggle of my teaching career was defining myself as a psychologist. How can someone committed to teaching psychology in a local context develop an identity as a psychological scientist? I held such an identity locally and personally. I believed teaching to be central to public understanding of science and to the future development of science and to be an inherently scholarly activity, but I lacked a confirming social identity as a scientific psychologist, especially when attending national conventions or in social comparison to many peers. Eventually I forged that social identity as my participation in the teaching of psychology community became recognized in its own right and as it meshed with the growing appreciation for teaching by academics in scientific circles. For the former, I would blame a lapse in judgment by the otherwise good people of STP. I was introduced to STP because John Bare, a Carleton colleague, happened to be active in it, but it did not take long for warm, thoughtful, and committed colleagues like Jane Halonen, Charles Brewer, Maureen Hester, Bill Hill, Drew Appleby, Wayne Weiten, Ginny Mathie, Randy Smith, Marky Lloyd, Jim Korn, Sam Cameron, Diane Halpern, Joe Paladino, Bill McKeachie, and many others to capture my respect and love. I had not only gained a reference group for upward comparison and rich lodes of teaching stimulation to mine; I had found a home in psychological science as supportive and challenging as my home at Carleton.
The Examined Life of a Teacher

I have found it renewing to reflect on my teaching over the course of my career but equally important to have had the time and resources to make these examinations productive. In my circumstances it would have been difficult to avoid the hall of mirrors decorating my travels, ranging from required self-assessments at Carleton (e.g., annual reports addressing teaching, periodic senior faculty reviews) to automatic social comparisons to those outstanding teachers I was exposed to locally and nationally. I found it particularly humbling to encounter heroic colleagues at institutions with meager resources, often when I visited to assist in department reviews. Most such faculty are unrecognized, and they give their time, creativity, and even personal funds in order to maintain high level psychology programs for their students. *Teaching of Psychology* has also been a constant source of ideas over my career and represents a host of resources (e.g., books on teaching and education, teaching conferences, electronic networks, discussion groups at Carleton, grant-funded initiatives, the APA Education Directorate) that have prompted my thinking about teaching.

In addition, I have had a crucial luxury, the freedom to play with teaching. I have not been subject to rigid teaching requirements or monitored by constant student or institutional evaluations, so I could experiment with teaching and continue my education. I could play with how I teach (e.g., developing laboratory courses, using new technologies). I could develop new areas of teaching expertise (e.g., statistics) and new seminars (e.g., Positive Psychology, Cross-National Psychology, the Psychology of Endings) as I pursued questions of interest or literatures I wanted to read. I have even had the opportunity to teach a course on the Theatre of London as part of Carleton’s off-campus program there. I have had room of my own and opportunities to be enriched by teaching.

My goals as a teacher were well-articulated—as most things are—by Charles Brewer: “The fundamental goal of education in psychology, from which all the others follow, is to teach students to think as scientists about behavior” (1993, p. 169). Above all else, I have wanted to engage my students in thinking, which is what they were eager to do. My job was to hone that thinking, to help it become more critical and systematic, to anchor it in evidence and reason, and to highlight its meaning and significance. Psychology has proved to be a rich, important, and challenging venue within which such work was possible.

Over my 30 years in teaching, the surface content of psychology as a field has changed significantly, and I have come to believe that our greatest potential impact on students is not via the content that students retain but through the intellectual values we might affect. For my senior faculty review in 1999, I sketched out my values as follows:
After my classes, do my students think more coherently and systematically? Do they appreciate the insights and perspectives of various historical and contemporary traditions and communities? Are they more likely to evaluate claims on the basis of argument, evidence, and reason rather than authority, stereotype, and popularity? Do they seek to voice and test their ideas? Do they recognize and challenge what is spurious and injurious? Do they respect uncertainty? Do they express themselves more clearly, effectively, and engagingly? Do they appreciate quantity, complexity, time, and beauty? Are they better prepared to lead grounded, honest, responsible lives? Do they leave with a deeper sense of perspective and a richer sense of humor? Are they any more likely to rely on sober and expansive reason, despite its frailties? Do they find pleasure and value by engaging life in thought?

That agenda has kept me busy over the years. Whether I have been successful in making some contribution to the remarkable students I have been given remains one of the uncertainties I have learned to respect.

Advice for New Teachers

The singer John Prine wrote a delightful piece about advice columnist Dear Abby (Prine, 1975). I recommend listening to it before taking any advice, mine included, too seriously. What I will offer are two sets of suggestions, one relevant to the immediate teaching situation and the other to careers in teaching.

A teacher in a classroom faces a continual nemesis—lack of student attention. A necessary but not sufficient condition for effective teaching is getting and recovering that attention, repeatedly. I use a variety of means to attract attention: an engaging introduction to a topic, a well-structured presentation that builds understanding, arguments highlighting the significance of literatures or findings or values being addressed, questions to the class, quick student-to-student discussions, demonstrations, video clips, cartoons, and a coherent summary of the progress made in a class session. I believe, most of all, that student interest can be captured by powerful ideas, compelling phenomena, and well-grounded arguments. What students do not need are lists—of famous names, concept definitions, or findings. They do not need their time occupied. They need meaningful and stimulating arguments, data, and examples that get them thinking; they need us to respect their minds. What happens next—what we do with the opportunities attention brings us—is crucial. We have to help students work to organize, temper, ground, and question their thinking. Eager activity (e.g., vigorous discussion) does not always accomplish this; a structured and directed task or purpose (e.g., involvement in research) often does.

I also believe pleasure is infectious. I enjoy being in class, talking about psychology, and thinking about arguments and evidence, and I hope students see that. I am manifestly
happy in class if I share an enjoyable (and provocative) cartoon, present a stimulating literature, make a connection between psychology and other fields of study or endeavor, or begin to think about something in a new way based on student responses and questions. I also take pleasure in discussing with students how what they are doing in psychology (e.g., writing, thinking quantitatively, learning about a specific topic) may have broad value in their lives. What I convey in class reflects what has always been personally true: I am a teacher first and a psychological scientist second.

I was drawn to a career in teaching because I anticipated it would provide an intellectually challenging and invigorating life, and it has done so for me. What has enriched my work as a teacher, first of all, is engagement with students. An almost equal source of stimulation is that old standby, reading, including reading beyond psychology. I have also treasured the opportunities I have had to play, for example, with new teaching responsibilities, professional roles, technologies, and ideas in education. Finally, I have stolen from the best, the finest teachers, and most thoughtful work on teaching I could find. (Carleton, after all, is in Northfield, Minnesota, the site of a famous Jesse James bank robbery.) STP and *Teaching of Psychology* have been rich sources of such wealth, and they are lightly guarded (i.e., easily available to all).

There is no guarantee that a random variation will survive in academia; I almost did not. Moreover, the opportunities and constraints that I experienced as a confluence of career random errors are unlikely to be replicated—but, if my story suggests anything, it is that blind investment in a loving pursuit of teaching does have a chance of survival in supportive and freshening environments and that we all need to invest deeply to make such environments available to others.

References
As district/lead/high school science department chair for the past 18 years in the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District on Long Island in New York, and as an educational consultant, I have enjoyed the privilege of working with thousands of students, hundreds of teachers, and scores of supervisors and administrators. Before working in Bellmore-Merrick, I taught for 20 years in New York City, mainly at Benjamin Cardozo, Francis Lewis, and Jamaica High Schools. To prepare for my current position, I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Biological Sciences from Douglass College of Rutgers University, a Master of Science in Secondary Education from Queens College of the City University of New York, a Master of Arts in Psychology from Stony Brook University of the State University of New York, and a Professional Diploma in Administration and Supervision from C.W. Post College of Long Island University.

For as long as I can remember, teaching and learning processes have fascinated me and have probably consumed more of my waking hours than any other single topic. From observing my newborns grow into wonderful adults; conducting action research with my classes; and collaborating with colleagues in my department to participating in professional workshops with such noted educators as David Berliner, Linda Darling-Hammond, Jacqueline Grennon-Brooks, Heidi Hayes-Jacobs, Spencer Kagan, Louis Mestre and Joseph Novak; and working on committees with such dedicated psychologists as Irwin Altman, Cynthia Baum, Barney Beins, Ludy Benjamin, Charles Brewer, Jane Halonen, Gregory Kimble, Bill McKeachie, Anthony Puente, Charles Spielberger, Robert Sternberg, and Kenneth Weaver; and high school colleagues including Marty Anderson, Charlie Blair-Broeker, Mary Colvard, Randy Ernst, Alan Feldman, Caren Gough, Rob McEntarfffer, Peter Petrossian, Marissa Sarrabando, Allyson Weseley, and Kristin Whitlock, I learn more about how we learn every day.

Among the awards bestowed upon me, I most value the American Psychological Association (APA) Presidential Citation for leading the effort to create National Standards for the Teaching of High School Psychology, the APA Division 2 Moffett Teaching Excellence Award, and the Tandy/RadioShack National Outstanding Teacher “Champion of the Classroom” Award. The latter two revealed the incredible support and respect esteemed colleagues have for me. What a validating experience!
My Early Development as a Teacher

Much like other biological sciences majors in college who wanted to help other people, I planned to become a medical doctor. One day I realized I might make decisions that could kill patients, and that possibility terrified me. Because I loved tutoring, working as a camp counselor, babysitting, volunteering in the pediatrics unit of a hospital, and because I came from a family of educators, teaching was the natural alternate career path to take. I enrolled in introductory history and philosophy of education courses, then sought a student teaching placement for the spring semester of my senior year in college. Surprisingly, the science department chairs at the two schools I visited offered me paid regular substitute teaching positions instead. Having earned all of the necessary credits for graduation, I filled out papers for my diploma, and embarked on my career as an educator.

The first Monday in February of 1967, I was officially a teacher with five subject classes, a homeroom class, a study hall, and tons of homework. When one colleague told me, “It’s sink or swim,” I became determined to do the crawl, but more often found myself just treading water. Instead of feeling flattered or respected when asked if they would share their lesson plans with me, some experienced teachers said they considered using someone else’s lesson plans as stealing their work. Fortunately, one teacher let me read her plans and my chairperson provided me with a detailed curriculum guide for a second subject. I thought about spending my preparation period in the faculty room to develop friendships, but the tobacco smoke was too dense to navigate. Instead, I spent preparation periods in a classroom with friendly students who had unassigned periods and who gladly helped with clerical work, which left me with more time to prepare lessons.

During those first weeks, my principal told me, “You should hear a pin drop in your classroom; no students should be talking.” Instruction and support from my department chair, Herman Gillary, good subject area knowledge, enthusiasm, amiable students, and a belief in the importance of helping to educate the next generation kept me afloat. At the end of the semester, a teacher returned from sabbatical leave, and I was excessed to another school. I officially matriculated for a master’s degree in science education in the evenings so that I could work towards credentials for permanent certification and a tenure-track position.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

In September, I arrived at the junior high to which I was assigned at the same time as a young man who was labeled “an instant teacher.” He had majored in political science, gotten a limited number of education credits over the summer in a special program, and never taught before. He admitted to me that he only wanted to teach in order to avoid the draft. Although he had only 16 credits in science, he was initially given advanced science classes to teach, and
I was assigned to teach general science to seventh-graders. Although I had been excessed from the first school when a male teacher with a less desirable record was retained, I had not entertained the notion that my sex had anything to do with the choice until my new colleague and I were given our assignments. I asked the principal about the criteria used for his assignments and was told that my new colleague was bigger and more likely able to handle ninth-graders. I brought up the point that I had already taught ninth-graders and older students. My new colleague said that he would be happy teaching the other program, so the principal reassigned our programs. My classes were a delight to teach, so I did not want to shortchange them. Without a department chair in the junior high school, I asked an experienced science teacher if I could visit his classes, and he was delighted. From him I learned more of what I did not want to do with my classes than what I did want to do, which was valuable, but disappointing. That December I married a teacher from the first school, and at our wedding my first principal invited me back. I accepted his invitation without hesitation.

In February, I returned to Jamaica High School with a year of teaching experience, several graduate courses that filled voids in my scientific background, and an excellent methods-of-teaching science course under my belt. The professor for the methods course had urged the students in the class to become active in professional associations and to attend meetings, so that is what I did. The New York Biology Teachers Association was a group of enthusiastic, knowledgeable teachers eager to share whatever they knew with me, and together with the National Association of Biology Teachers and National Science Teachers Association, provided as many helpful publications as I could read each month. Now a less needy teacher with lots of materials to share with my colleagues, I found the colleagues with whom I was again working were much more willing to share their lesson strategies. My students benefited with enriched opportunities to learn. Teaching became more rewarding than before, and I realized that I was in love, not only with my new husband, but also with the career I had chosen.

The early years passed quickly. Before it seemed possible, I was awarded tenure, earned a master’s degree, advised student clubs, helped students conduct research, began to present workshops, was assigned a student teacher, helped get a faculty room designated for nonsmokers, and was given premium classes including the children of teachers, chairs, an assistant superintendent, and the borough president. Some of that changed as soon as I told my department chair that I was pregnant. The principal called me to his office, told me, “A pregnant woman should not be teaching students, should not be seen in public,” and then sent me to the New York City Board of Education to be examined by a physician. Although I wanted to teach until the end of the school year, I was told that I had to leave before Memorial Day. I was assigned five general science classes for the spring term. I joined a class action suit
to prevent women from being forced to take maternity leave before they want to. The second time I was pregnant, teachers no longer had to leave sooner than they wanted. When that same principal who had recently retired saw me pregnant, he told me that my husband and I should have more children. I reminded him what he had previously said. He responded, “Then, I was only concerned with the school community, now I’m concerned about the world.” When my daughter was 16 months old, I was excessed again.

Fortunately, the good news is that I was welcomed to teach at the high school from which I graduated. The better news, although I did not realize it immediately, was that I would have to teach Psychobiology. With a weak background consisting of only nine credits in psychology, I sat in on a class taught by Marc Robin, the teacher who had initiated the course, for several weeks. We developed a great professional relationship. I bartered effective instructional strategies for his reference materials. I enrolled in psychology courses and found them much more captivating than I had as an undergraduate, and I went on to earn a master’s degree in psychology. Because there was no New York association of psychology or psychobiology teachers, I contacted teachers at other New York City schools to start one. Can anything be more blissful than teaching and learning about teaching and learning?

The Examined Life of a Teacher

If a tree falls in a forest and there is no one there to hear it, has a sound been made? That’s a familiar question to most of us. Analogously, if a teacher teaches and someone does not learn, has the teacher taught? If a teacher thinks she knows or knows she knows something, and her knowledge is a misconception, how can she know that?

These questions have concerned me since I started teaching. The only way I have found to minimize the chances of teaching without students learning is to align curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student learning. The alignment process requires tremendous time, energy, expertise, and effort, and is never-ending. Put simply, the process involves designing curriculum goals and objectives keyed to standards, then creating unit plans with instructional strategies that will enable the teacher to discover what students already know and understand, the learners to attain the goals and objectives, and both the teacher and learners to measure changes in conceptions through formative and summative assessments.

The only way I have learned to uncover my misconceptions so that I do not pass them on to my students is to collaborate with colleagues, conduct practitioner/action research, read subject matter, participate on committees; take part in conferences, workshops, and conventions; join listservs; and communicate with experts as often as possible about what I teach. This effort consumes as much time as I can possibly spare, and probably explains why
my husband bought me a t-shirt that features an ad for a movie, “The job that ate my brain!”—but, isn’t that a great way to go?

Long since many of us have forgotten what the advertising campaign was hawking, we remember the slogan, “You’ve come a long way, baby.” What we know about learning has come a long way since 1967, and as a result, so has teaching. If an observer could hear a pin drop in my classroom these days, the observer would think that something was terribly wrong. Although some students can sit through lectures or Socratic-type discussions and learn well, not everyone thrives in that kind of classroom environment. Whereas my lessons years ago typically consisted mostly of short lectures, demonstrations, whole class discussions, and individual students writing answers to worksheets I created, my lessons today are more student-centered. Typically lectures have been replaced by Webquests and video clips, demonstrations by hands-on activities, whole class discussions by discussions in cooperative learning groups, and worksheets I created based on reports of research conducted by individuals or cooperative groups. Working together, students frequently seem to create better products and learn more than they do by working individually. However, because some would rather have others do their work, we teachers need to monitor groups so that each participant contributes to the group effort.

What can be more rewarding than seeing students grow into lifelong learners with dreams that evolve into goals they can achieve and knowing that we have helped them in some small way? Getting a call from a former student who came from an abusive household, and who now has children that no one hits because she says she learned from me, “People are not for hitting,” is more rewarding than I could have imagined. Hearing from others that they became psychologists or are pursuing other worthwhile careers because I helped them realize that they had the ability is also very satisfying.

As wonderful as achieving this ideal is, not all of my students set high standards for themselves. Some become afflicted by “senioritis” early in their last year of high school. By the time most college acceptances are received, more students have flagging motivation and declining levels of achievement. Nothing is more frustrating for me than working my hardest to help students learn only to have them resist and get turned off. How to turn them back on has consumed lots of my effort and energy. Although I have not been able to excite all afflicted by senioritis, I have been successful in motivating some by getting them involved in their own research projects.

Somewhere inside most students is a question they really want to answer. However, uncovering that question can be challenging. Although sometimes burning questions can be exposed through discussion, more digging is often required. One strategy that has proven successful is offering students lots of questions that other students have explored, mixed in
with hunches of what I think may interest these particular students. Often this approach triggers an “aha” response.

Getting them started on a road to research excites us all. Then, of course, there is the Advanced Placement (AP) examination for those enrolled in the AP Psychology course. Keeping all students, including reluctant learners, striving for success necessitates establishing individual accountability. Fortunately, technology has come to the rescue. A new system of wands hooked up to a classroom computer and LCD projector quizzes students instantaneously, providing immediate feedback that is reinforcing to students.

Because such a system is costly, it is not available all of the time. Even if it were more available, using a variety of instructional and assessment strategies makes teaching and learning more interesting. Years ago, I did not know much about formative assessments, nor did I recognize that students come to me with preconceptions about how the world works, many of which are different from those that scientific research has revealed. As a result, my checking for student understanding was limited. I would ask questions during class, review homework and laboratory reports, and grade quizzes and tests. Today my repertoire of effective formative and summative assessment strategies is considerably larger. During a typical month, I will use anticipation guides, think-pair-share or think-write-pair-share, carousel brainstorming, focused free write, topical barometers, concept mapping, KTW (What I Know, What I Think I Know, What I Want to Learn), analogies, role playing, graphic organizers, metacognitive split page writing, paraphrasing, reflection logs, structured academic controversies, and problem based learning as both instructional and assessment strategies in addition to the old tried and true methods of assessment. Probing for understanding frequently tells me how students’ conceptions are changing. When students are not learning, then I am not teaching them successfully; I need to try something else. When I am feeling especially brave, I will videotape a lesson, then analyze it moment-by-moment.

As well as using these strategies with my classes, I work with different collegial groups to which I belong to employ some of the same techniques for evaluating our own work. We create or revise units cooperatively, or construct concept maps. Occasionally we peer review lessons. Although each group does not meet frequently, I participate in at least one or more groups each month to keep my teaching skills current and fresh. In 38 years, this job has never become boring!

Advice for New Teachers

If you want to be a good or even outstanding teacher, be the kind of teacher that both you and a friend of yours who does not learn the same way as you would want to have as a teacher. To keep your enthusiasm, associate with other passionate teachers. Stay away from
the malcontents who often lurk in the corners of faculty rooms. Team up with teachers who are instructors for similar courses; share everything—give and you shall receive. Do not be afraid to ask for advice. Ask accomplished teachers questions and they will generally tell you much more than you knew you wanted to learn, but you will not be sorry for asking. Join local, regional, and national professional associations. Read their publications and attend their meetings. My fourth-grade teacher, Leah Lieberman, used to say,

Good, better, best,
Never let it rest,
Until the good is better,
And the better is the best.
P.S. We never reach the best.

Final Thoughts

The other day, a colleague of mine who also started teaching in 1967, said that teaching has not changed much. When we started teaching we did not have calculators; my yellow slide rule was guaranteed for life. We used typewriters, but “white out” did not exist. We cranked out purple copies of handouts using a ditto machine. Setting up a 16mm film projector took so much time and effort that showing a 30-second film clip was out of the question. Female teachers were not permitted to wear slacks to school. Offices were filled with cigarette smoke. Pregnant teachers were not supposed to be seen in school. Observers were supposed to be able to hear a pin drop in the classroom. We knew much less about how students learn. We’ve come a long way, baby. Thankfully!
I am honored to have the opportunity to share my journey of becoming a college teacher. During 29 years at James Madison University (JMU) teaching was my passion. My courses in statistics, research methods, social psychology, and introductory psychology gave me many opportunities to share with students my excitement about psychology and the research enterprise and to help students develop skills that would allow them to pursue their own professional passions. In my current role as Executive Director of Psi Chi, The National Honor Society in Psychology, I still consider myself a teacher. Although I do not interact with students in a classroom, my activities provide opportunities to inform students about the discipline of psychology and to foster students’ development as scholars, professionals, and citizens.

My love of psychology began at the University of Waterloo where I earned a Bachelor of Mathematics degree (with a major in computer science) and a Bachelor of Arts degree (with a major in psychology). I honed my teaching and research skills at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill (UNC) where I earned my MA and PhD degrees in social psychology. As I progressed through these programs I became more enthralled with teaching and more determined to share my excitement and awe for psychology.

Teaching was the center of my professional life, but I believed that scholarship and professional service were integral to teaching excellence because they informed what I did as teacher. Consequently, over the years I collaborated with colleagues and students on a variety of research projects, many of which resulted in publications and presentations with student co-authors. My professional service involved leadership at many levels, including founding president of the Virginia Academy of Academic Psychologists, an academy of the Virginia Psychological Association; president of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP), Division 2 of the American Psychological Association (APA); member of the APA’s Board of Educational Affairs and chair of its Psychology Partnerships Project: Academic Partnerships to Meet the Teaching and Learning Needs of the 21st Century; faculty liaison on the APA’s Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools Committee; and member of the Steering Committee for the American Psychological Society’s Fund for the Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science.

Throughout my professional life I tried to integrate teaching, scholarship, and service but my zeal for teaching was paramount. Consequently, I am proud of the awards I received.
for my teaching and contributions to psychology education. These awards included the 1981 JMU Distinguished Faculty Award, selection as the APA 2000 Harry Kirke Wolfe Lecturer, and the APA 2002 Distinguished Contributions to Applications of Psychology to Education and Training Award. This point in my career is an opportune time to reflect on the journey that led to these accolades.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My early development as a teacher began well before any training to become a college professor. I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was a child playing school with my sisters and neighborhood friends. What I enjoyed most about playing school was playing teacher. I found delight in every aspect of this role, from organizing my classroom, preparing my lesson plans, teaching my students, to grading tests. My commitment to becoming a teacher persisted and the fun, enthusiasm, and pure joy of playing teacher led to the exhilaration, satisfaction, and passion of being a teacher.

So how did I get from play to passion? My initial interest in teaching was sparked by my elementary school teachers, but it was not until high school that the goal became more concrete and focused on becoming a mathematics teacher. Gary Flynn, one of the many exceptional mathematics teachers I had at Royal York Collegiate Institute in Toronto, was instrumental in this decision. His enthusiasm for mathematics and more importantly for teaching mathematics was contagious. He fostered in me a love of mathematics and analytical thinking that persists today. His persistent challenge to extend ourselves beyond what we thought we could do, his thoughtful attention to organizing lessons to engage and guide us through this process, his unwavering encouragement as we struggled to do so, and his obvious delight when we succeeded are etched in my memory. Although neither of us realized it at the time, he was in fact my first teaching mentor simply by giving me the opportunity to observe a master teacher at work. At every stage of my teaching career I have held Mr. Flynn up as my role model—the ideal teacher I hoped to become.

With Mr. Flynn’s encouragement, in 1967 I entered the cooperative mathematics and computer science program at the University of Waterloo. I enjoyed my courses and work terms immensely and continued to prepare to teach high school mathematics, but two opportunities changed the focus of my teaching goals. During my first semester I was enrolled in the introductory psychology course and became enthralled with psychology. Every class period captured my attention and imagination. The second fortuitous event was the invitation to serve as Harold Miller’s undergraduate teaching assistant in a mathematical psychology course. This unique opportunity combined my love of teaching, mathematics, and psychology. To teach even a few classes was an exhilarating experience for an undergraduate novice. I
later became one of Miller’s research assistants and found myself captivated by the world of research. From that point on, my career goals solidified and I set out to pursue a career of college teaching and research in psychology.

In 1971, I entered the social psychology program at UNC, eager to combine teaching and research but still clearly focused on my long-term teaching goals. I am grateful to John Thibaut, my master’s thesis and dissertation advisor, and to all the social psychology faculty members for their constant encouragement and support of my interest in teaching. Early in the program I had the opportunity to teach classes under the supervision of Thibaut and Stephen Worchel. Eventually I became an instructor for the undergraduate social psychology course. Although the program did not offer any formal training or preparation for teaching, all of the faculty members were readily available to provide guidance and assistance when I needed help with teaching-related issues. Along with their own words of wisdom, they steered me to an early version of McKeachie’s book *Teaching Tips*, an invaluable source of information and inspiration. In fact, my most recent copy (McKeachie, 2002) still holds a place of honor in my collection of teaching resources. The UNC faculty members also served as role models for extending teaching beyond the classroom to supervision of research. They welcomed undergraduate students to their research teams and gave graduate students the opportunity to develop research supervision skills that integrated their teaching and research.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

By the time I became a faculty member at Madison College in 1975 (now James Madison University), I thought of myself first and foremost as a teacher of psychology. I was fortunate that my JMU colleagues provided an environment that encouraged, supported, and valued teaching excellence. Even with this exceptional support system, however, I struggled to find a balance among teaching, scholarly activity, and professional service. I tended to see them as separate areas of responsibility, with each area requiring its own set of skills, time commitment, and focus. It took me a few years of frenzied shifting from one activity to another to realize that I could organize my scholarly activity and service in ways that would complement and not distract from teaching. I began to structure my research so that it involved collaboration with teams of undergraduate students, thereby extending my teaching beyond the classroom and giving me the opportunity to mentor students on a more meaningful level. More recently, work by Boyer (1990), Halpern et al., (1998), and Lynton (1995) helped me realize that the scholarship of teaching and the scholarship of service are viable and valuable scholarship areas. This realization further reduced the tension surrounding the struggle to balance teaching, scholarship, and service by giving me a sense of freedom to pursue scholarship in teaching and service.
I also reframed how I viewed my professional service and recognized that it could be a vehicle for improving my teaching. Through my service I developed a network of psychologists who shared my enthusiasm for teaching. As I carried out my service activities with these colleagues, I had many opportunities to discuss teaching strategies with master teachers; share and get feedback on my own teaching experiences; learn about new pedagogical tools to improve my teaching; become more knowledgeable about issues confronting teachers at the national level; learn how to be a better academic advisor; and broaden my understanding of the challenges and issues that confront psychologists who provide mental health services. The knowledge I gained through my service contacts undoubtedly helped to make me a better teacher, mentor, and advisor.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

The transition from viewing teaching, scholarship, and service as distinct entities to viewing them as integrated components of my teaching profession was just one of many changes that occurred over my teaching career. My approach to teaching and the strategies I used in the classroom also changed over the years.

When I first started teaching, I did not have a coherent vision that guided my teaching activities. I focused on the course content, trying to make sure that I covered the basic concepts, theories, and research orderly and clearly. I wanted students to learn what they needed to know, but I did not consider to any great length what they brought to the classroom to facilitate this learning or how my teaching style and their learning styles interacted to influence their learning. Then, in the mid-1980s I discovered Perry’s (1970) theory of the developmental stages of college students and ways to apply his concepts to my teaching (Widick, Knefelkamp, & Parker, 1975; Widick & Simpson, 1978). I started to think about students’ cognitive level and the structure and pedagogy that would be most appropriate to facilitate learning at each stage of development. My course planning became more thoughtful and purposeful. In first-year courses, where students were more likely to be in the dualistic stage, I provided more structured teacher-led activities. In upper level courses where I tried to help students make the transition to the relativism and commitment stages, I used less structure and provided more flexibility and student-led activities.

My discovery of Perry went hand-in-hand with my discovery of the literature on critical thinking and active learning. As I searched for ways to tailor my upper-level courses to students in the relativism and commitment stages, I realized the value of incorporating more critical thinking and active learning activities in all of my courses. Books by Brookfield (1988), Halonen (1986), and Halpern (1996) became invaluable resources. I moved away from the 50-minute lecture with some attempts at discussion to mini-lectures punctuated by
hands-on demonstrations, small group activities, and opportunities to work on problems. I made a more concerted effort to engage every student actively in each class period.

Another trend that took root in the mid-1980s was assessment. I had always conducted course evaluations at the end of each semester and tried to use students’ feedback to improve my teaching, but as I became more involved in and committed to the campus-wide assessment program at JMU, I embraced a broader view of assessment in my own courses. I spent more time developing learning objectives for each course, articulating these objectives to students, and defining measurable outcomes. I screened my class activities, demonstrations, and assignments more carefully to determine if these activities were valuable aids in helping students achieve the objectives. I also examined the way I evaluated student performance and searched for ways to make the assessment process more frequent, more authentic, more developmental, and more relevant to providing feedback about the extent to which students were meeting the course objectives.

My ability to incorporate active learning and meaningful assessment into each class was enhanced by the technological revolution that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Given my background in computer science, I was particularly enthusiastic about using computer-based multimedia materials in my classes. In 1992, I was one of six psychology faculty members who worked with technicians to design JMU’s first multimedia classroom that included electronic keypads at every seat. Not only did this technology change the way I organized and presented material, it also created a new array of active learning opportunities in which all students could participate. For example, I incorporated non-graded quick quizzes (multiple-choice questions to which students provided answers using the electronic keypads) into classes at least once a week to get an immediate assessment of students’ understanding of important concepts. Using the increased access to the Internet and the just-in-time teaching technique (Novak, Patterson, Gavrin, & Christian, 1999), I created weekly on-line pre-class questions to determine students’ understanding of major issues and concepts, and then used their pre-class responses to tailor my class presentation to address the concepts students did not understand.

As I examine the major changes in my teaching style, I realize that these changes reflect the development of a philosophy of teaching that was not present early in my career. My philosophy comprises four basic principles. The first principle is that it is just as important to know my students as it is to know the content I am teaching. This principle motivated me to consider students’ developmental stage; ask them about their goals for my course; ascertain the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and experiences they brought to the class; and take into account how the demands and stresses of their personal lives might influence their performance in my class. The second principle in my teaching philosophy is that every course
should have learning goals and outcomes that are clearly defined and conveyed explicitly to students, content and activities designed to help students achieve these goals, and frequent assessment (both graded and non-graded) with timely constructive feedback to inform students about the extent to which they are achieving the desired outcomes. The third principle that guided my teaching was the importance of engaging students in the learning process and challenging them to extend themselves intellectually through activities that involve active learning, critical thinking, practice, and self-assessment. I believe these activities are most effective in promoting learning if they are tailored for the developmental and cognitive level of the students and if they occur in an environment that provides support and encouragement while reinforcing the value of hard work and challenge. The fourth principle underlying my teaching philosophy is that I must model the behaviors and attitudes I want students to acquire. Included in these behaviors and attitudes are treating others respectfully, engaging in professional development, being willing to take risks in my efforts to acquire new knowledge or skills, and using setbacks as opportunities for learning.

I believe I matured as a teacher when these principles became the guiding forces of my teaching. It took a concerted effort over many years to articulate these principles and incorporate them into my teaching, however; and I did not do it on my own. I participated regularly in JMU workshops designed to enhance teaching. Every year I attended at least one (and often several) state, regional, or national conference and sought out the sessions related to teaching. It was at these sessions that I was first introduced to many of the concepts that helped me to improve my teaching. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues in STP because they played a pivotal role in organizing and leading sessions that stimulated thought-provoking discussions about teaching, provided resources I could use in my classes, and inspired me to examine my teaching and dedicate myself to improving it. Books and journals related to teaching, particularly STP’s journal *Teaching of Psychology*, have been invaluable resources along the way.

My journey to becoming a college teacher has been an exciting one. Being a teacher has been even more fun than playing teacher. I have found every aspect of teaching intellectually stimulating and immensely rewarding. By being a teacher I have also become a life-long learner, garnering new perspectives, experiences, and knowledge from each new group of students.

Advice for New Teachers

In looking back over my own career as a teacher, I realize that there are many paths to becoming an outstanding teacher and many role models to emulate. I do not believe there is one teaching style or one set of techniques that are the hallmark of an outstanding teacher.
The best advice I can give to new teachers is to know yourself and be yourself in the classroom. Be open to learning about new teaching strategies from your colleagues and your students, but spend some time selecting the ones that best fit your own teaching philosophy and style. If you bring your passion for teaching, your excitement about psychology, and your enthusiasm for learning to your classroom and share them with your students in a way that is comfortable and engaging for all of you, you will become an outstanding teacher.

References
I currently hold the title of Distinguished Teaching Professor of Psychology at SUNY Geneseo, where I have been teaching since 1971. I earned my bachelor’s degree in psychology from Stanford University in 1966. As an undergraduate, I was a research assistant for Leonard Horowitz, in the area of human memory. In 1969, I earned my PhD from the University of Michigan in experimental psychology. At Michigan, I worked with Robert Zajonc, and my dissertation explored the mere-exposure effect.

During my early years at SUNY Geneseo, I taught courses such as experimental psychology, statistics, sensation and perception, educational psychology, conflict resolution, peacemaking, and issues in feminism. In the past decade, my four standard courses have been cognitive psychology, psychology of women, introductory psychology, and child development.

My academic background had prepared me for research, but not for teaching. By the late 1970s, however, my identity shifted, and teaching became a passion. During the same period, I discovered a second academic passion—writing psychology textbooks. As I will discuss later, my textbooks include *Human Experimental Psychology*, *Cognition, Sensation and Perception*, *The Psychology of Women*, and an introductory textbook, *Psychology*.

I have been fortunate to receive several awards related to teaching. Three of these awards are connected with the American Psychological Association (APA): The Society for the Teaching of Psychology’s (STP) Robert S. Daniel Award in the 4-year college/university division in 1985; the American Psychological Foundation Distinguished Teaching in Psychology Award in 1995; and the Society for the Psychology of Women’s Heritage Award for Lifetime Contributions to Teaching in 2001. Three other awards are connected with the State University of New York: The SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, in 1977; the SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor Award in 1987; and the SUNY Geneseo PATH Award (for promoting campus awareness about diversity issues) in 2001.

In 1994, the Educational Testing Service invited me to join the GRE Psychology Committee, a 6-person committee that constructs and reviews questions for the GRE Subject Test in Psychology. I served as Chair of this committee from 1998 to 2002. This responsibility encouraged me to develop expertise throughout diverse areas of psychology. Together with others in the Society for the Psychology of Women, I have also led many
workshops on teaching courses in the psychology of women and gender. These workshops helped solidify my teaching goals and connected me with many inspired professors.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Many colleagues in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology received extensive training that prepared them for a lifetime of teaching. In contrast, I received no training whatsoever. However, I did have several wonderful teachers. My high school biology teacher, Harry K. Wong, later became an internationally known expert on pre-college teaching. Some psychology professors whom I especially admired were Leonard Horowitz and Eleanor Maccoby at Stanford and Art Melton and Dan Weintraub at Michigan. Bob Zajonc provided a superb role model of a psychologist whose expertise ranged widely through many areas of psychology.

At Michigan, I could have arranged to be a teaching assistant. However, this was during the Vietnam War. My husband, Arnie Matlin, is a pediatrician, and the “Doctor Draft” required every young physician to serve two years in the military. We knew that Arnie would begin military service in 1968, in his home town of Brooklyn, New York. The idea of a commuter marriage was not appealing, so I realized that I would need to complete all my course work for my PhD in two years.

We moved to New York City in the summer of 1968. By good fortune, we lived on Staten Island, right next to two colleges, Wagner College and Notre Dame of Staten Island. The faculty members at these colleges kindly awarded extra credit to psychology students who participated in my dissertation research. I gathered my data and wrote my dissertation during that first year in New York. I genuinely enjoyed both the research and the writing components of my dissertation. However, my only experience in teaching before I came to SUNY Geneseo was one lecture that I presented to the Wagner College students about the results of my research.

We lived in Staten Island for two years, and our elder daughter, Beth, was born in 1970. After Arnie completed his military service, we moved to Rochester, New York, so that he could finish his pediatric residency. In 1971, we both started jobs in Geneseo, about 40 minutes south of Rochester. Arnie accepted a position as the first pediatrician in this rural region, and I accepted a half-time teaching position at SUNY Geneseo. I had no special interest in teaching, but it seemed like something to do for a year or two. We also were expecting our second child, Sally, who was born in 1972.

I certainly was not born with a natural gift for teaching, and I was basically terrified during these initial years. I read my notes out loud to the students, making very little connection with them. As you might imagine, this form of teaching was unpleasant for both
my students and me. I want to emphasize an important point to those who are not yet clear about their professional goals: Do not be too sure about what you can and cannot do, or what you do and do not like. You may be able to transform an unpleasant job into something more palatable, and perhaps even wonderful. Now, I cannot imagine a more enjoyable or rewarding profession than teaching psychology.

Gradually, I discovered that teaching was much more interesting if I encouraged discussion, provided relevant anecdotes, and invited students to apply the theory and research to their daily lives. I began full-time teaching in 1973. My self-confidence and my teaching skills grew as I noticed which techniques seemed to engage students’ curiosity and enhance their learning. For example, I required the students in my experimental psychology course to keep a journal. These journals included observations from their everyday experiences that were related to experimental design. One student noted that Shakespeare used counterbalancing for the names of Rosenkranz and Guildenstern in Hamlet. Another student related signal detection theory to his experience of perceiving a ringing telephone (rather than a doorbell) when he was awaiting a phone call about a job prospect. When students wrote especially compelling anecdotes, I asked their permission to use them in future teaching and, later, in my textbooks.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

By the late 1970s, I was genuinely enjoying teaching, and my first teaching award from SUNY helped me to define myself as a good teacher. During that period, I wrote an academic book with another psychologist, an experience that was very difficult. However, an unpleasant experience can still be informative. I learned that I really loved to write, especially on a large-scale project. At this point, I decided to take a major risk: I submitted a prospectus for a textbook called Human Experimental Psychology, and the publisher offered me a contract (Matlin, 1979).

I then began to write additional textbooks. Cognition is currently in its 6th edition, (Matlin, 2005), and it has been translated into French and Portuguese. A third textbook, Sensation and Perception, reached its 4th edition, and it was translated into Spanish. I was fortunate to have Hugh Foley, of Skidmore College, as the skilled coauthor of the last two editions of this book (e.g., Matlin & Foley, 1997). However, we both decided that we had too many commitments to begin a 5th edition.

During the late 1970s, I introduced a course in the psychology of women at SUNY Geneseo. This course became really important to me, especially because I saw how the information could encourage women to take their lives more seriously. So my next textbook seemed inevitable: The Psychology of Women. This textbook is now in its 5th edition (Matlin,
and I am currently writing the 6th edition. This book has been translated into Chinese, and it is currently being translated into French.

In the late 1980s, I decided to write an introductory psychology textbook, especially because I had developed expertise in many areas within psychology. This project was appealing because it provided the opportunity to reach students who would never take another psychology course. In addition to the “science side” of psychology, I could also provide information about social-justice issues, such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ageism, and conflict resolution. I wrote three editions of this textbook (Matlin, 1999). This was an exhausting enterprise; my publisher and I decided not to pursue a 4th edition.

The major obstacle I have faced in my teaching is insufficient time. At SUNY Geneseo, we teach three courses each semester. Textbook writing is clearly time-consuming, especially when I had four textbooks that required new editions every three or four years. However, writing the textbooks clearly helped me become a better teacher. They provided a broad overview of the subjects I teach, and they also kept me informed about the latest research.

In addition, my husband and I have several important interests outside of our work. Our daughter Sally lives in California and works as the bilingual staff member for Marin Abused Women’s Services. Our daughter Beth is a kindergarten teacher in inner-city Boston; she and her husband now have a truly delightful baby boy. We enjoy many trips each year to visit our extended family. Arnie and I also have intense interests in several areas, such as travel in Europe, foreign films, early Flemish painting, 16th-century majolica, Shakespeare, Portuguese fados, Italian operas, 19th-century British novels, and unusual cuisines. Our life is definitely more than just our work; our family interactions and other interests help us maintain a sense of balance and joy.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My principles of teaching have evolved since I first began to define myself as a teacher. For instance, I realize that “less is more,” and I can teach more effectively if I select my topics carefully. After 35 years of teaching, my core principles are these: (a) encourage students to think like a psychologist, (b) psychology research has produced knowledge that can help students lead better lives, and (c) students need to adopt a social-justice perspective.

Critical thinking is one component of the “think like a psychologist” principle. My courses in introductory psychology and in child development include a unit on critical thinking, and we try to apply the principles throughout the semester.

In every course, I emphasize the importance of well-designed research. For instance, the students in my cognitive psychology class have had courses in statistics and research
methods. However, according to the concept of situated learning, they may not be able to apply these important concepts in new situations. Thus, I have designed in-depth exercises that relate three research-methods topics to cognitive psychology: correlation and causation, confounding variables, and statistical interactions. In my Psychology of Women course, students design their own original studies, conduct the research, and then report the study in an APA-style paper.

My second core principle is to follow George Miller’s (1969) call to “give psychology away.” We psychologists are very fortunate to be teaching a subject that does have practical applications. Whenever possible, I try to point out how students can improve their lives by knowing more about psychology. In cognitive psychology, for instance, we discuss such topics as memory improvement, metacognition, writing strategies, and effective decision making.

My third core principle focuses on social justice. Fortunately, most of my students at SUNY Geneseo are planning careers in which they will help other people. Most of them appreciate the idea that diversity should be valued, and life should be fair for all humans. Unfortunately, however, my students’ pre-college education emphasizes that the United States offers equal opportunities to everyone; they did not learn much about various forms of inequality. In all my current courses, I talk about gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation. I also address international issues. In 1990, our family founded a program for malnourished preschoolers in Nicaragua, the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. We continue to fund this program, and we travel to Nicaragua regularly. This connection with an impoverished country helps me provide concrete information about real people whose lives deserve to be better.

My teaching has definitely changed throughout the course of my academic career. For example, I try harder now to draw connections between topics and between areas. In cognitive psychology, for instance, I emphasize that our cognitive “equipment” processes social information, and it therefore plays a role in the development of stereotypes. When we discuss decision making in cognitive psychology, I ask students to analyze some of the decision-making heuristics that led to the invasion of Iraq. Fortunately, my experience in writing textbooks forces me to search for themes and broad perspectives.

I also continue to search for general principles that can be applied throughout psychology. For instance, several years ago, I came across a list of four basic truths that apply to most of psychology. Amazingly, Berelson and Steiner had compiled this somewhat humorous list in 1964, and yet it still applies to so much of the research we describe to our students:
1. Some do, some don’t.
2. It depends on how you measure it.
3. The differences aren’t very great.
4. It’s more complicated than that.

For me, the most rewarding aspect of teaching is watching how students can blossom when they are given information and encouragement. One of the most memorable moments occurred three years ago in my course in child development. The class that semester was unusually intelligent and eager to learn, and they frequently asked questions that focused on social justice. Jonathan Kozol, the author of *Savage Inequalities* (1991), had spoken the previous night at SUNY Geneseo, and most of the students had attended. The next morning, they clearly wanted to discuss why children in wealthy neighborhoods have so much better funding than inner-city children. The students were so eloquent—and so outraged. I can still recall one young man saying, “I just don’t get it. Why doesn’t our country care enough about children to give them all decent schools?”

Another rewarding aspect of teaching is tracing the development of individual students whom I have known for several years. What a pleasure to see a promising student write a thoughtful paper, present a superb lecture to the class, or ask an especially sophisticated question.

In contrast, one of my greatest frustrations in teaching is the handful of students who cannot be motivated to perform well, even though they seem to have the appropriate cognitive skills. I can reach some of them and help them to improve. Sadly, however, I now acknowledge that I cannot rescue all of them.

The other great frustration is that my students are typically not well informed about current events. For instance, at the beginning of the invasion of Afghanistan, many of the students in my psychology of women class knew little about the Taliban’s treatment of women. Most of the students in this year’s cognitive psychology class know little about the torture at Abu Ghraib. Once they hear about issues like these, most have the appropriate sense of outrage. However, it is clear that most of them do not choose to learn about the current state of the world.

Final Thoughts

I have called this paper, “Thirty-five Years of Teaching, and I’m Still Learning!” This title reflects the pleasure I experience in continuing to learn about the intricacies of psychological processes. I often share this excitement with my students by bringing in the latest issue of a journal to update them on a topic we have been discussing.
But I’m also still learning how to be a more effective teacher. I examine all the student comments from our faculty evaluation surveys because students can provide some genuinely useful information about my teaching. In addition, I read *Teaching of Psychology* with the goal of finding new perspectives and new teaching techniques. When I go to conferences, I pay special attention to the style of the speakers’ presentations. I am also always searching for new anecdotes to illustrate important psychological processes. If a demonstration in my cognitive psychology course does not work out, or if an example in child development produces bewildered expressions, I will make a note to myself to change the material. What other profession—besides college teaching—allows a person to make a fresh, new start, twice a year?

Advice for New Teachers

The most important advice I can provide for new college professors is to be sure that you have a supportive spouse or partner who understands and values the work that you do. My husband Arnie is definitely my strongest supporter, and he has boosted my confidence at numerous times when I was worried about taking some academic risks.

I also recommend that new teachers join the Society for the Teaching of Psychology and attend the sessions on teaching at conventions. It is one of the most egalitarian groups I know, and you can easily make connections with people who teach the same courses and face the same problems. Another source of support may be your own department members. This year, for instance, the colleagues in my department are the strongest teaching faculty we have had in my 35 years at Geneseo.

In addition, I must emphasize that teaching may not come easily at first. However, keep analyzing your interactions and figure out how to find joy in your profession. Notice what you like to do and what other people praise you for doing. Also, take some moderate risks by volunteering for committees, proposing a new course, or undertaking a writing project. Always ask yourself, “What is the worst thing that could possibly happen?” Finally, keep learning. Learn from your unpleasant experiences, learn from the research in your discipline, and learn how to provide a better learning experience for your students.

References


I have been teaching Introductory Psychology and Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology at Lincoln Southeast High School for 13 years. I was awarded the Moffett Award for Excellence in High School teaching in 2004 and have been a reader, table leader, and question leader for the AP Psychology exam. I am currently studying for my doctorate in education at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

My Early Development as a Teacher

In high school, my favorite class was taught by Kerstin Vandervoort. She taught Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, and her classroom was literally her work of art. Every year Kerstin covered her room with white butcher paper and wrote words on it in her wonderful 1950’s trained handwriting. She covered each desk with white word-filled paper. The walls were lined with homemade bookshelves with multiple copies of the books we were to read that semester, arranged by color and size instead of alphabetically by title. Her whole room was composed, like a painting. I did not know why her room and class fascinated me at the time, but now I realize that she was the only artist I knew. She spent time every year creating her room, working at it like an art installation. By the time we arrived on the first day, everything was in its place, ready for the opening act. I did not see anyone else in my life spending time creating, and her class fascinated me.

Her teaching was similarly creative. She combined traditional teaching methods with radically new ones she created for each book we read. We wrote detailed analyses of Hamlet as a tragic figure and wrote poems using only 10 different words in order to try to understand Toni Morrison’s novels. Her class was the only experience I had that valued academic work for its own sake, instead of for class credit or supposed preparation for the future. Kerstin seldom mentioned grades (although she labored over our papers) and talked about the importance of literature in our present lives, not the future. Every day I could tell she was happy and she loved talking to and writing with her students. Later, in college, when I was in my fourth major and fifth year, I knew I had to decide on a job that would fill my time after I graduated. I was not thinking about a “career” yet—just a job that I would enjoy. College taught me that I could be interested in and study many different subjects, but I did not learn how to focus on one area deeply for any amount of time. I decided to major in education and get my teaching certificate mainly because of Kerstin’s example.
After graduation, I was fortunate to get a job at my old high school. My first teaching assignment included classes in psychology, philosophy, composition, and theater. I barely remember my first few years of teaching. I remember being intimidated when I looked at the school calendar. There were so many days to fill. I remember realizing that every day 150 students were being forced to come into my classroom for an hour, and realizing what a huge responsibility I had. In teachers college, we learned some developmental and cognitive psychological theories that related to student learning, but we never talked about the workload and responsibilities of a teacher. Watching Kerstin in high school, I never thought about how hard she worked, how many hours she spent not only on the visible aspects of her teaching like decorating her room, but on the invisible aspects like preparing for every class and commenting on student papers. I was not prepared for how many decisions I had to make every class. That first year, I had a recurring dream about my old job: Selling shoes. I dreamt I got to meet people, find the shoes they wanted, they would pay for them, and leave. I did not have to talk with them or be responsible for them after they left.

I became more comfortable during my second and third year, but I was still struggling to fill each class in ways I thought were worthwhile. I was paranoid about boring students and wasting their time. I stayed a few days ahead of the students and tried new assignments and discussion topics, but my class was fairly random. Most students told me they enjoyed our class, but I did not feel that I was really doing anything. I did not get the sense from my classroom that I got from Kerstin’s. I did not feel like we were doing real work, work that inspired students to dedicate themselves to a topic or idea. We were filling time creatively and in an entertaining way, but I was frustrated.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Then Randy Ernst, a psychology teacher at another high school in my town, invited me to an National Science Foundation (NSF) sponsored Psychology Teaching institute at Texas A&M University organized by Dr. Ludy Benjamin. At the time, I was discouraged and I was not sure if I wanted to stay in teaching, but I was intrigued by the institute. It almost seemed too good to be true: If accepted, I would get to study at Texas A&M for a month, with paid room and board, and I would get a stipend and free books. I applied more because of personal interest than genuine dedication to improving my teaching. One of the requirements was to write a statement about how we would use our training to benefit teachers in our district, and I remember struggling to fulfill this requirement. I wrote something vague about “teaching staff development classes,” and sent in my application.

I was accepted and I drove my rusted old Toyota pickup truck all the way south to Texas. At the institute, I met 30 dedicated psychology teachers; learning about their
classrooms was a revelation. At the time, teaching psychology was just one of my four “preps,” and I took it as seriously as all my other classes: I studied the introductory text we used, made sure I understood the terms well enough to explain them to my class and provide some examples for them, and tested students over their understanding of these terms. At the institute, I was exposed for the first time to the discipline of psychology, and saw that it was a habit of thinking, a way of understanding the world, not just a collection of terms. Every day we got to listen to specialists from various psychological fields talk about their research. I heard the stories behind the terms in my textbook, why certain methodologies were chosen, why conclusions were made, and how psychology evolved. Psychology became a more complete story to me. I saw psychology as a process of discovering rather than a finished body of knowledge. I met teachers in many stages of their careers and saw that teaching psychology was a task that could be fascinating and all-consuming, and to which I could dedicate myself. For the first time, I saw research as a creative endeavor.

The next year in my classroom, I began to encourage my students to do their own research. I did not know much about how to choose research questions, research methods, define variables, or analyze data, but I still asked my students to do all these things and we worked at them together. I saw many students commit fully to this project. They started caring about whether what they were doing was worthwhile and valid; they did not merely complete assignments just to show me they knew what they were doing. Students’ work became about their own goals instead of mine. Eventually I wanted to learn more about research, and I started my Masters degree in educational psychology, with an emphasis in quantitative and qualitative research methods. As I learned more, my students’ projects became more sophisticated and satisfying. For the next 10 years, I encouraged my students to think and reflect on psychological concepts, but beneath it all we were doing research, and these projects became the core of my class.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Later, I got involved in psychology at the national level through the American Psychological Association (APA) and Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools. I was invited to teach at other psychology institutes inspired by the Texas A&M experience. I became a reader in the AP Psychology program. All these experiences gave me the opportunity to talk with other teachers about their goals for their classrooms and to define my own goals further. My primary goal in my classroom is to help students discover the psychological ideas about which they are passionate. My class is an elective, and students enroll in the class with a basic interest in psychology (or at least their conception of psychology). My class builds on this interest. I think the class would be in some way a failure
if a student entered with an interest in psychology, but left with a lot of knowledge but no further interest.

To help students discover and build on personal interests, I let them choose much of what they do in our class. For each area of psychology we study, I ask them to complete a project. The goal of the project is that they use some of the theories we discussed to analyze a topic that means something to them. This freedom of choice can be a challenge for many students. Often the most difficult part of the project is choosing a topic, especially since I resist giving them ideas for their projects. One of my objectives is to help students learn how to apply psychological theories to their lives, so I will help them develop topic ideas, but I will not give them a topic idea. After students get used to this system, most embrace it and start generating their own ideas as soon as we start a new topic in class. Students develop their own ideas, research the theories they want to apply, and generate their own products to share with me. Some students turn in traditional papers, but others turn in Web pages, posters, PowerPoint files, pamphlets, etc. My classroom filled slowly with projects I kept from each class. I proudly display the three-dimensional brain sculpture with brain areas that light up when the appropriate button is selected, and the outdated computer turned into a metaphor for consciousness with labels and interactive quizzes. I ask students to explain their analysis by creating whatever product best fits their project. This choice of product turns into another analytic task for the student. I think these projects are some of the most valuable learning experiences we do in my classroom. Students get to use psychological theories in ways they generate themselves, instead of responding to specific questions that someone else (me, textbook writers, etc.) think are important or interesting. I hope that this skill transfers to the students’ lives outside of class and to other classes.

Along with these projects, I assess students on their knowledge of the psychological theories we discuss in more traditional ways. Because I teach an AP psychology course, I develop AP style tests for each chapter we cover. I try to write multiple-choice questions that require students to understand and apply theories instead of just recognizing definitions of terms. Each test also includes an AP style essay question that requires students to apply theories from more than one area of psychology. Students may be asked to choose an appropriate therapy technique for a specific scenario, and then use their knowledge of research methodology to design a study to test the effectiveness of this therapy technique. I model what I see as reliable and valid assessment practices for students on these exams. We discuss the purpose of the exams and why they are designed the way they are. We discuss limitations on the reliability and validity of the exams. Students quickly become skilled at pointing out elements of the exam that limit the test’s ability to assess their knowledge (sometimes too adeptly). We analyze specific multiple-choice items for problems in wording.
I share the rubric I use for grading their essays, and how I developed it. I explain how to use the rubric (I use the grading process used to grade the essays on the actual AP exam). I indicate on their tests what points on the essays they missed according to the rubric.

Two years ago during one of our discussions of the purpose of the test and validity, a student asked me why they were not allowed to correct mistakes on the test for more credit. If the purpose of the test is to assess their knowledge of the psychological theories, why not adjust the test score if students demonstrated increased understanding by correcting their tests? I did not have a good answer to this question, so we decided as a class to try it. I asked students to take their exams home and “correct” any mistakes they made. They researched the questions using their textbook and notes, explained why their original answers were wrong and what the correct answers were and why. I decided to give students half credit back for these corrections. Students report that this experience is valuable, and not just only for improving grades. Student misconceptions are corrected quickly and they gain experience analyzing and understanding why test items are worded in certain ways.

This experience and others like it taught me how important it is to ask for feedback on my teaching from my students during our class. I do not understand why we do not ask high school students to evaluate our classes. I made up my own class evaluation form, and I ask students for feedback in at mid-term and at the end of our class. Students submit these evaluations anonymously, and I report the results in class. This discussion allows me to talk about my rationale behind my decisions and sometimes to make needed changes in class. In my classroom, I want to work with students to create worthwhile learning experiences, and allowing students choices in their work, giving them continuing chances to demonstrate understanding, and asking for honest feedback during the course helps me adapt our class to meet my goals and theirs.

Advice for New Teachers

One of my favorite teachers, Charles Brewer from Furman University, says “Teaching is a good life if you don’t weaken.” When I first heard him say this aphorism at the Texas A&M summer psychology institute, I did not know what he meant. I think I understand now. Teaching requires our full attention and commitment. Students respond when we communicate our passion for the ideas we want to share. It is too easy for us to weaken and teach only what it is easy for us to teach: what the textbook says, what we taught last year, or what we know students will enjoy. My favorite moments of teaching come when I managed to help students understand the ideas I see as important. Sometimes in class I am able to communicate an idea and why it is important for all our lives at this moment. For that moment, we are all focused together as a class on an important idea. When students
understand the idea and why it is vital, we can talk about implications, perspectives, and variations on the idea. We become partners in exploring a vital idea, and their ideas add to my understanding and appreciation of the idea. I hope new teachers find their ways of connecting with students in this way. Teaching is fascinating because it is so difficult and so rewarding because we have to work so hard to ensure the rewards for ourselves and our students.

Final Thoughts

Some days as I am walking through the hallway during one of my planning periods, the enormity of “school” hits me. I walk past other teachers in their classrooms and I realize that in our building we have 1800 people all working at understanding the world. Every hour of every school day between 7 and 3 o’clock the people in our building are spending time and effort to study, talk about, and explore ideas. I feel lucky to live in a time and place where so much effort is given to education. It does not always work, not everyone (students and teachers) appreciates it, but I love being amazed over and over again at the enormity of the task and our willingness to engage in it. I am glad and grateful that I chose to become a teacher. I am grateful that I had an inspirational model to follow into this job. I am grateful that my students let me and helped me figure out that I loved teaching during the first few awkward years in the classroom. I am grateful for the excellent psychology teachers who offered me advice and opportunities to become better. For me, teaching high school psychology is an excellent way to share the excitement and relevance of psychology with others.
A Life of Learning and Teaching

Wilbert J. (Bill) McKeachie
University of Michigan

I am Professor emeritus, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, where I have taught for the past 58 years. My primary activities have been teaching, research on learning and teaching, and training college teachers. I have been President of the American Psychological Association; the American Association of Higher Education; the Division of Educational, Instructional, and School Psychology of the International Association of Applied Psychology; and the Center for Social Gerontology; and Past Chair of the Committee on Teaching, Research, and Publication of the American Association of University Professors. I have also been a member of the Council of the National Institute of Mental Health, the Special Medical Advisory Group of the Veteran's Administration and various other governmental advisory committees. I have published a number of articles and books, the best known of which is *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers.* 12th ed (2005), published by Houghton-Mifflin. Among other honors I have received 8 honorary degrees and the American Psychological Foundation Gold Medal for Lifetime Contributions to Psychology.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My training for teaching started before I began graduate school. I graduated from Michigan State Normal College in 1942, prepared to teach high school mathematics, history, and English. My career as a high school teacher lasted only two months. World War II had started and I spent most of the next 3 years as a radar and combat information officer on a destroyer in the Pacific. My only teaching was training a young Naval Academy graduate in ship handling. During combat my job was to plot the position, course, and speed of potential attackers to guide the officer of the deck and gunnery officer in keeping us alive and carrying out our missions.

I had been one of the first officers trained for destroyer radar/combat information duty. By the end of the war I was probably the most combat-experienced destroyer officer in the Navy because my classmates had either been reassigned or killed. The order of discharge after the war was determined by length of service and amount of combat; so I was released in time to enroll in the 1945 fall term at the University of Michigan. A year or two previously I had written to my wife that if I survived, I wanted to do graduate work in psychology. The next year I was one of eight graduate student Teaching Fellows teaching three discussion sections meeting 2 hrs a week in connection with the 500-student lecture in Introductory Psychology.
Our Department Chair had asked Harold Guetzkow, an assistant professor, to meet with the Teaching Fellows weekly to talk about teaching, discuss problems we encountered, and debate the virtues of different ways of approaching teaching. Such training in teaching was rare. Graduate departments trained students to do research; teaching was simply something you did with the knowledge you had gained.

Harold was an ideal mentor. He developed the sort of accepting, supportive situation that enabled us to discuss problems arising in our classes without our feeling embarrassed or defensive. Too often novice teachers are afraid that admitting problems will damage chances for promotion. Several years ago one of our PhDs who had not had our teacher-training program made frequent long distance phone calls from UCLA to me at Michigan to ask for advice about his teaching because he did not dare reveal problems to his colleagues at UCLA.

Deciding to Become a College Teacher

I do not think I ever made a conscious decision to become a college teacher; I just drifted into it. When I had collected the data for my dissertation, I went to Don Marquis, our Department Chair, and said, "I guess I should start looking for a job."

He said, "Pick any university you'd like, and I'll get you a job there." (Quite a different situation from today's job market.) I said, "I'd like to go someplace interested in teaching like Bennington or Sarah Lawrence." A couple of weeks later he called me in and said, "How would you like to stay here for a few years to manage the introductory psychology course and train the teaching fellows?" Having been away from home for 3 years while I was in the Pacific, that sounded good to me--and I've been teaching at Michigan ever since.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I enjoyed teaching. One of my GI Bill World War II veteran students in 1946 wrote on his rating form, "I didn't come to Michigan to be taught by a rosy-cheeked boy." (I doubt that he had had as much combat experience as I did) In any case, most of my students accepted my rosy cheeks and my teaching.

My biggest problem in teaching now is that I do not know the students' culture. In order to teach effectively we have to build bridges between what is in our heads and what is in the students' heads. Because I seldom watch TV, go to movies, or participate in other aspects of the popular culture, I have trouble coming up with useful metaphors or analogies that will help students understand difficult concepts. I try to overcome this problem by using a lot of student interaction, buzz groups, asking the students to come up with examples, etc.
The Zero-Sum Game-Teaching vs. Research.

Often one hears faculty complain that teaching has prevented them from getting their research done. Because my research is on teaching, I probably experience less conflict between teaching and research than faculty members in other areas of research; however, even for those whose research is in other fields, the classic research by Pelz and Andrews (1966) showed that full-time researchers are no more productive that those who teach at least a quarter-time. Teaching not only provides a change of activities, which helps reduce boredom, but it may also help us clarify thinking that was fuzzy before we tried to explain our research to novices.

The Examined Life of a Teacher: My Philosophy (If You Can Call It That)

I often cite John Dewey's maxim--teaching is like selling. You have not sold something unless someone has bought it; you have not taught unless someone has learned.

Another important principle guiding my teaching is that each human being is a natural learner. Our task is to stimulate their natural curiosity, to provide challenges that they can enjoy surmounting. If the teacher is enthusiastic about the subject, students are likely to believe that it is something that might be valuable and interesting.

Students differ in prior knowledge and motivation. Thus, to teach effectively we need to have a repertoire of teaching strategies that continues to develop as new classes pose new challenges.

We need to develop our theories of learning and motivation continuously in order to adapt effectively to new situations. Each class is different from others, and each class changes over the course of the term so that those strategies most effective for teaching during the first weeks of class are likely to be different from those needed later.

Changes Over My Career

When I began teaching, most Introductory Psychology classes were taught by lecture. Nevertheless, even in my 500-student lecture sections I often broke the class into 6-person groups to discuss particular problems. After the advent of cognitive psychology, I realized that it was much more valuable for students to talk to one another than to listen to me; so I used more small-group activities, minute papers, pair discussions, etc.

Satisfactions

Probably the most rewarding thing for me is to see students get excited about psychology and want to learn more. However, it is also very satisfying to see evidence of understanding when I manage to develop an example or demonstration that clarifies a difficult concept, and when in the midst of a class discussion I gain a new insight, I almost jump with joy.
Assessment

When I began teaching, we used multiple-choice tests and thought of them as assessment of the students' achievement rather than of the effectiveness of our teaching. Now I use more papers, research projects, essay questions and measures of conceptual structure, all of which I review with my teaching assistants as assessment of how well we have taught as well as of how well the students have learned.

Improving My Teaching

I still get good ideas to try out from Teaching of Psychology, from the American Psychological Association, Midwestern Psychological Association and American Psychological Society conventions, and from faculty members at other colleges where I speak or give a workshop.

Advice

- Get to know your students. I have one of my former students take a picture of each student. Then I meet with each student and make notes on the back of the picture that will help me know what experiences they have had that might be helpful in class discussion.
- Do not grade on a curve. Avoid creating a sense of competition. Competition increases anxiety, may discourage cooperative learning, is detrimental to intrinsic motivation, and results in less deep learning (Covington, 1998).
- Reduce time pressure on tests. Give students the time necessary to complete tests. I plan my tests so that the fastest students are through in about half of the allotted time, and I announce at the beginning of the test that students can take as long as they need to complete the test. If another class is coming into the classroom, I take any of my students who aren't finished back to my office or to the seminar room next to my office.
- Practice applications.
- Give students opportunities to put psychological concepts into practice through such activities as service learning, research projects, and exercises in observing and describing behavior on campus or at home.
- Work to improve your teaching. Every teacher can improve.
- Talk about your teaching. Faculty development centers can be very helpful. So is talking about teaching with colleagues.
Final Thoughts

I find it hard to believe that any other career can be as fascinating and satisfying as that of teaching psychology. We are lucky to have a subject matter that is intrinsically interesting and that is continuing to develop. Who can help being intrigued by gaining understanding of why others act as they do, as well as of one's own human nature?

Boredom is rare because each class poses new challenges, and within each class the individual differences among the students continually stimulate one to devise new strategies for helping the students become better learners-learners not only in this course but learners in years to come. As a Baptist humanist, I believe that one's eternal life is in the impact one has on other human beings and the impact that they in turn have on others. At age 83, I feel fortunate to have had the opportunities and good luck I have had.

References
I am an Associate Professor of Psychology at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois, where I have been teaching since 1996. I completed my undergraduate education at Brown University and received both my MA and PhD degrees in clinical psychology from Michigan State University. I frequently taught undergraduate courses during my doctoral training, and was honored to receive both Michigan State’s Excellence-in-Teaching Certificate and the McKeachie Early Career Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) in 1994.

My research interests closely relate to my teaching and can be categorized into two areas. First, I study the interrelations among child development, family functioning, and broader social contexts. For example, I have explored topics such as how neighborhood characteristics help determine whether a particular parenting strategy is adaptive (Meyers & Miller, 2004), or the factors that shape adolescent mothers’ parenting attitudes (Meyers & Battistoni, 2003). A second major area of my research addresses faculty development and effective college teaching. In conjunction with my colleague and friend Loreto Prieto, I have conducted several national surveys about the training and development of psychology graduate teaching assistants (Meyers & Prieto, 2000; Prieto & Meyers, 2001). Similarly, I have examined topics such as classroom conflict, the mentorship of graduate students of color, and the use of collaborative learning in the teaching of psychology (e.g., Meyers, 1997, 2003).

Finally, I am a licensed clinical psychologist in the State of Illinois and hold a diplomate in clinical psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP). Since 1997, I have provided psychotherapy to children, adults, couples, and families in a private practice in suburban Chicago. I have previously worked in clinical settings such as a university-based clinic, inpatient psychiatric hospitals for children, and a private practice that catered to inner-city children.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My interest in teaching began when I was a child; it was fueled by two main forces. First, my mother, father, and grandmother convinced me that I had worthwhile ideas to share. Successful college teaching not only requires competence, but confidence. My family has provided me with praise and encouragement, which have been invaluable in my career and in my life.
Second, the opportunity to teach can spark an interest in a career in education, and even during childhood I had the chance to teach. Excited by the information that I learned at elementary school, I would come home and attempt to teach it to my younger sister, Michelle. My sister was the only student enrolled at “Steven School” and she dropped out at a young age.

Undeterred by this high attrition rate, I sought other opportunities to teach. In high school, I taught Spanish to younger children who enrolled in my school district’s gifted and talented program. When I was a senior in college, I had the chance to teach lab sections of Introductory Psychology for two semesters. Bolstered by these successful experiences, I wanted to teach during graduate school and had full course responsibility after I received my MA degree.

I built on this foundation during the following years by trial and error when refining my teaching practices, emulating the styles of my favorite instructors, and seeking mentorship. Most of my training on how to teach actually occurred on an informal basis. I always had a faculty supervisor with whom I could consult, and I occasionally received materials to assist with lesson planning. However, the amount of structured training that I received for teaching in graduate school paled in comparison to the scope of my preparation to become a researcher and a clinician. Such a training gap is common among doctoral programs in psychology (Meyers & Prieto, 2000).

Nevertheless, I have been fortunate to have many teaching mentors. For example, I learned first hand about the importance of an instructor’s ability to express compassion and understanding from John Edwards, a chemistry professor at Brown University. At the end of my first semester of college, Professor Edwards scheduled an appointment with me to share the news of my stunningly poor performance on his inorganic chemistry final exam. Perhaps he was concerned that I might begin to doubt my ability to succeed in college. His level of thoughtfulness is still inspirational and aspirational for me, even though I stayed away from Chemistry courses for the remainder of my college career.

My most influential teaching mentor was my advisor at Michigan State University, Professor Gary Stollak. I chose to attend Michigan State’s doctoral program primarily to work with him. We share research interests that focus on the well-being of children and families, a commitment to clinical work, and a conviction that teaching is important. Gary is a thoughtful and dedicated college instructor, and he appreciated that I wanted to be a teacher more than either a researcher or therapist. In our conversations across several years, Gary provided me with the opportunity to crystallize my thoughts about teaching, shared his own insights and approaches, and communicated by example that college teaching is a worthwhile and fulfilling endeavor.
Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I always wore a tie and jacket during my first nine years of teaching. I chose to dress more formally in class because I was virtually the same age as many of my students. Further obscuring this distinction is the fact that I am relatively short and look relatively young for my age. I was concerned that I was not sufficiently professorial.

As years passed, I gained more experience, lost more hair, and started to dress more casually. My clothing has been a proxy for my level of comfort and ease in front of college students. Essentially, I have been able to incorporate my role as a teacher, researcher, and clinician more successfully into my identity as time has progressed.

Much of this development is attributable to experience and to having the opportunity to refine my skills. However, another aspect is achieving a certain synergy among my different responsibilities. More specifically, many faculty struggle with balancing teaching, research, service, and outreach activities. In my case, I have been able to align the focus of my work to maximize productivity. For example, I publish research work regarding effective college instruction, supervise graduate students’ teaching responsibilities, lead faculty development efforts at my university, and remain active in STP. Knowledge and insights in one domain inspire my development in the others.

I am fortunate that my university allows faculty members to teach primarily in their specialties and that it actively caters to people’s strengths. Sometimes I struggle to juggle particular responsibilities, but streamlining allows me to be interested and engaged in the work that I do. I also believe that this approach has consolidated my professional identity as a scientist-practitioner-educator.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My personal philosophy changes as I grow as a teacher. The following thoughts currently form the core of my teaching philosophy: (a) people matter, (b) relationships matter, (c) students must participate in the process, and (d) structure and rigor matter.

People Matter

Many people believe that teaching is the transmission of the facts, theories, stories, and skills of a particular field or discipline. For some, good teaching mainly involves sharing this information with students in an interesting or inspiring way. I certainly subscribed to this belief when I started teaching. I focused a lot on the content of my classes and lessons. I wanted to ensure that my presentation was thorough, the readings were comprehensive and timely, and the coverage was clear.

My early years of teaching during graduate school were also a time of relatively rapid personal and professional growth in my life. I was also learning how to do therapy with
children and families. Becoming a skillful clinician involves more than gaining a set of techniques. It frequently involves turning inward, monitoring your responses, learning your biases, and knowing how to draw on aspects of your personality to convey understanding to clients.

As I became more proficient in providing therapy, I quickly realized an analogous process existed for teaching. In other words, my personality, values, strengths, and weaknesses are all integral to how I teach. Knowing myself allows me to teach in a way that is more honest and authentic. There are corollaries to this notion. First, a technique that works well for a colleague may not work as well for me. Thus, a teaching role model can provide inspiration, but the goal should not be duplication. Second, I have found that my teaching style evolves as I change as a person. I find the synergy between personal and professional development to be an extremely rewarding part of college teaching.

The maxim, “people matter” applies equally to students. More specifically, I believe that students want to feel that they are knowledgeable, worthy, and important. However, it is easy to lose sight of this point when I focus more on transmitting information than on the room full of people, each of whom has unique aspirations and motivations, fears and concerns, and lives outside of the classroom.

I often remind myself that I am entrusted with the education of each student. Appreciating students’ individuality is rewarding, and it insulates me against possible boredom or burnout that can stem from merely repeating the presentation of content, semester after semester. This mindset also suggests that I can contribute to my students’ growth by focusing on and cultivating the inherent potential in each person.

Relationships Matter

Over the past several years, I have paid increasing attention to the interpersonal relationships that exist in my classes. I think many college faculty members are cognizant of the social and emotional tone of their classes, especially when they experience conflict with their students. Conversely, instructors become aware of these dynamics when they create meaningful connections with students. Personally, I find that these relationships matter and are a powerful determinant of students’ learning.

Clinicians emphasize the importance of this point when they discuss the role of the working alliance in psychotherapy. More specifically, a working alliance is established when a connection is formed between therapist and client and they develop a common agenda; it is furthered by therapists’ communication of empathy, genuineness, and warmth (Rogers, 1951). This concept can provide a helpful lens for faculty as well. I try to establish productive working alliances when teaching. This process involves learning students’ names, maintaining availability outside of class, expressing enthusiasm when teaching, listening sensitively to
students’ concerns, praising and encouraging students, and using teaching strategies that engage and challenge students.

**Students Must Participate in the Process**

Faculty also promote working alliances when they share responsibility with students for creating a successful learning experience (Billson & Tiberius, 1991; Tiberius & Billson, 1991). In order to promote true investment and enduring change, I believe that students cannot be merely interested observers in the classroom. Rather, students learn best when they manipulate information and actively relate knowledge to themselves and to the issues they find interesting and important.

This realization guides my preference for active and collaborative learning strategies. I frequently use case studies, role plays, service learning, writing exercises, think-pair-share activities, discussions, and problem-based learning. Ultimately, my students spend a significant amount of time working with each other. For instance, they check in with a peer every 20 minutes to ensure their mutual understanding, and work on lengthy activities in stable small groups. In my undergraduate courses, I increase student participation and engagement through service learning. Students connect learning to life while they volunteer in homeless shelters for families, special education classrooms, and mentorship programs with at-risk youth.

**Structure and Rigor Matter**

If you were to ask my students to describe my teaching style, and if they were to respond kindly, many would share the observation that my classes are generally well structured and demanding. I believe that learning occurs best when the class experience is well organized. I approach my subject matter by selecting the skills and abilities that I hope my students will develop as the course progresses. In each session, I begin by explaining the set of instructional goals so that students know our agenda and purpose. Finally, I try to organize the material in a structured way so that students can build on their current framework of knowledge.

Moreover, I have high expectations of students: regular attendance, active participation in discussions and activities, weekly written assignments, and completing lengthy readings. I am committed to my students’ potential and proud of their accomplishments. I am inspired much more often than I am disappointed. With high expectations, students have more than the opportunity to learn lots of information—they ideally learn what they are capable of doing and who they are capable of being.
Advice for New Teachers

I conclude this chapter with some advice for new college instructors and more seasoned faculty members who are looking for some inspiration. First, you have a long time to get it right, so be patient and kind to yourself along the way. Teaching well requires practice and persistence. Some great teachers are born, but many are made. I fear that some faculty give up prematurely or hastily devalue teaching because they have not reached a point at which teaching becomes enjoyable for them. Faculty spend most of their time teaching, even at research universities (Astin, Korn, & Day, 1991).

Second, content is where it starts, not where it ends. “Getting through the material” is a siren of college teaching. Notably, what students learn is more important than what faculty teach. I recommend approaching the task of teaching by carefully reflecting on the skills and abilities that you want to develop in your students. Choose teaching and evaluation strategies that align with these goals. Attend to the broader environment in your classroom, including your relationships with students, to maximize their interest and learning.

Third, spend time reading and talking about teaching. Most faculty members devote a considerable amount of time to reading books and journals in their area of research expertise. In a similar vein, I encourage others to read about effective college teaching. There are many peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Teaching of Psychology, College Teaching); general texts on instruction (Davis, 1993; McKeachie, 2002); readings tailored to the teaching of psychology (Lucas & Bernstein, 2005); and books that focus on a specific pedagogical issue, such as formulating goals (Mager, 1997), assessing students’ learning (Ory & Ryan, 1993), or the ethics of teaching (Keith-Spiegel, Whitley, Balogh, Perkins, & Wittig, 2002). Instructors can also find many helpful resources on the internet, including those distributed by STP.

I find it ironic that teaching, which is an inherently public activity, becomes such a private endeavor for so many instructors. Although faculty members regularly discuss research with colleagues, there are fewer conversations about teaching. I encourage those committed to effective teaching to form “teaching circles” in which interested faculty meet regularly to discuss their experiences and innovations. A similar idea for receiving support and guidance is to arrange for peer coaching, in which instructors ask a colleague to visit their class to collect data and provide nonjudgmental feedback on a topic of interest (e.g., extent to which students are engaged, degree to which the instructor promotes critical thinking).

Personally, I try to improve my teaching through these methods. I have modest, perpetual self-improvement plans in most areas of my life, including teaching. For instance, I develop new courses on a regular basis and experiment with different teaching strategies (e.g., service learning, problem-based learning, online teaching) to create variety and new
challenges. I also read teaching-related literature to inform my practices, keep me apprised of recent developments for the graduate seminar I teach in this area, and provide a basis for my writing about the scholarship of teaching and learning. Finally, I am fortunate to have colleagues who enjoy discussing teaching; I benefit from them greatly.

Final Thoughts

I agree with Charles Brewer’s (2002) sentiment that “the real reason for teaching is to make a difference” (p. 507). By the end of my courses, I hope that my students are not only more knowledgeable, but also more curious, confident, self-aware, and sensitive to the plight of others. Teaching also makes a difference in my own life. It gives me the regularly scheduled opportunity to be enthusiastic, helpful, and hopeful.

References


I am Professor of Psychology at Waubonsee Community College in Sugar Grove, Illinois, where I have been teaching for 30 years. I have also taught courses as an adjunct professor at Northern Illinois University and College of DuPage. I received a Bachelor’s degree in Education with a major in Psychology in 1972 from Eastern Illinois University. My Master’s degree was also earned at Eastern in General/Experimental Psychology. In 1982 I earned my doctorate from Northern Illinois University in Educational Psychology.

Selected awards and honors that I have received include the Teaching Excellence Award for Two Year Colleges, sponsored by Division 2 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology) of the American Psychological Association. I was recently notified by the graduate school at Eastern Illinois University that I have been selected as one of 50 graduate alumni to receive the Outstanding Graduate Alumni Award commemorating 50 years of graduate education at the university. In addition, I serve on the advisory board to the College of Sciences at Eastern Illinois University (2001-present). I received the “Golden Eraser Award” from the Phi Omicron Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa as teacher of the year in 2000. I was a member of the National Council of Psi Beta (the National Honor Society in Psychology for two-year students) from 1997-2002, serving as Midwestern Regional Vice President and as National President of the organization. I am faculty advisor for our chapter of Psi Beta, which I chartered in 1991.

My Early Development as a Teacher

As part of the degree requirements for my bachelor’s degree I took several education courses that related to teaching, along with a methods course on teaching that was taught through the Department of Psychology. In addition, I was required to spend a semester engaged in student teaching in my subject area at my appropriate certification level (6-12th grades). In my master’s and doctoral programs, I was required teach classes. However, I received no formal teacher training of any kind as a graduate student.

I do not believe that I have had any mentors in my teaching career, at least in the truest definition of that word. No one ever took me “under his or her wing” in an attempt to teach me how to teach. What I did have, however, was the good fortune to have had a large number of incredibly talented, bright, and dedicated teachers throughout my life who made learning fun. These teachers commanded respect and maintained it by setting rigorous standards, but at
the same time provided a nurturing learning environment. As early as junior high school I knew that I wanted to be a teacher and often reflected back on my “good” and “bad” teachers and what made them that way.

A former colleague of mine taught history at the college for some 33 years—he was the most successful classroom teacher that I have ever encountered in my career. He was terribly demanding of his students and only those students who truly earned high grades received them. He always said that we should set the bar high and keep it there, particularly for those students striving for As and Bs in our courses. He reminded me that not only do our students take their grades and reputations with them to senior institutions when they transfer, but that they take our grades and our reputation with them as well. When my best students transfer to a university and get singled out by their professors as being particularly well trained, the professors often ask who provided that training. When the students tell their professors that it was “Murphy at Waubonsee,” then the college, the program, and I, along with the student, all win. It is most gratifying to get a “thank you” from a student who has become successful because of the high standards I set for my courses.

The factors that led to my becoming a college instructor make for an interesting story. As I stated previously, I was originally trained to teach psychology at the high school level. I student taught at a high school in Indiana and I absolutely hated the experience. My cooperating teacher in psychology was also the Dean of Boys at the school and he was something of a tyrant. Rather than teaching me to be a good teacher, he instructed me to be suspicious and untrusting of the students in my classes. I was forced to spend incredible amounts of time taking attendance, checking passes, and sending students to the office for tardy passes if they were even a moment late for the class. If they were late a certain number of times, he would force me to assign them detentions and then make me monitor those detention sessions. It was not academia; it was more like a prison camp.

When I was teaching, I thoroughly enjoyed the students and do think that I made a difference in their learning. I protested to him that I felt uncomfortable in the role as enforcer and he said something similar to, “This is what we face in high school, so you had better get used to it.” I never got used to it. Although I made it through the experience and received a good evaluation, I decided then and there that if this is what high school teaching had become, I wanted no part of it. I know now that this situation is not at all what high school teaching has to be like and was just an unfortunate situation into which I was thrust. Nonetheless, there I was with a degree in one hand and a teacher certification in the other, facing the reality that I did not want to do what I had spent all those years training to do. Talk about identity diffusion!
However, the community college movement was gearing up in Illinois in the early
1970s, and I knew that I could teach at a community college with a master’s degree. I had
never intended to earn a master’s degree, but really saw no other alternative to my dilemma. I
received a scholarship and enrolled in Eastern’s MA program in General/Experimental
Psychology. I graduated in 1974 and with my newly minted degree I struck out to land a job
at a community college. Little did I know that teaching experience was a prerequisite for full-
time employment at virtually every institution and, of course, I really had none. I worked
construction during the day and started teaching nights as an adjunct instructor for colleges in
the western suburbs of Chicago. After a year of working two jobs, Waubonsee Community
College opened a search for a tenure-track position. I applied for it and was offered the job
starting in the fall semester of 1975. I have been here ever since, doing what I love, with the
freedom (more or less) to establish my own classroom policies that allow me to teach.
Essentially, then, I became a college teacher by default.

In 1976, I began to offer students in my developmental psychology courses (then
Child and Adolescent Psychology) the opportunity to engage in “field work” experiences so
that they might avoid making the same mistake that I did as an undergraduate. For example, I
had many education majors who were absolutely convinced that they wanted to teach and
only at a certain level. I thought that by offering them the opportunity to get first-hand
experience of what teaching at a particular level was actually like would afford them the
opportunity to verify that this was truly what they wanted to do, or just as importantly,
something that they did not want to do. Innumerable students have thanked me for offering a
“real world” look at the various professions that they investigated. Most students enjoyed
their experiences and had reaffirmed that this was what they wanted to do as their life’s work.
Other students found that they were mistaken in their early assumptions about becoming a
teacher and shifted gears toward another career choice altogether. Knowing that you do not
want to do something is as important as knowing what you do want to do, and students
appreciate the opportunity to make this discovery before they are too far along in their
academic training. This early effort turned into a college wide “service learning” component
of instruction that is becoming more common on college campuses around the country. The
students and the communities in which they live all benefit from such programs.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

One obstacle that I have repeatedly encountered in my years of teaching has been
resisting the growing trend of grade inflation. I have strived to maintain an appropriately
rigorous curriculum in my classes so that my students would leave the college with a firm
foundation that would allow them to succeed in upper-division courses. This path of retaining
high levels of rigor is particularly difficult to follow given the very nature of the community college population, which tends to be much more diverse than traditional university students, particularly with regard to previous educational success. I have developed a reputation as a “fair, yet demanding” instructor. In short, the academically superior students must consistently demonstrate that superiority throughout the course to earn a high grade. Those students who work hard to learn, but who struggle, receive a lot of my time and attention so that they can learn how to learn. Those students who are not willing to make the effort to do well receive little of my time or attention and usually earn poor grades. Because I have taught at the college for so long, the word is out about me among the students. My classes still fill every semester, even with my long established policy of not handing out easy grades. It is refreshing when students enter my class and tell me that their mothers or fathers had me 25 or 30 years ago and that they are taking my class on their suggestion. On the other hand, it reminds me how old I am getting. I will retire from teaching before the first grandchild of a former student takes my class.

Inside the classroom, a major obstacle that we all face in teaching psychology, particularly the Introductory Psychology course, is providing a good balance between breadth and depth of coverage of the information available in the discipline. I decided a long time ago to sacrifice breadth of coverage for a more in-depth analysis of certain areas that I know students are going to have to understand if they are to do well at a four-year school. I have dealt with this continuing dilemma by discussing this issue with colleagues at all levels of teaching to see what they think is most important for students in an introductory course. Somehow, though, I always feel as though the students are getting cheated if I do not cover all the topics in significant depth. I think that the introductory course should be a two-semester course, which is unlikely to gain widespread support in most colleges and universities. C’est la vie!

Because the primary mission of faculty at the community college is to teach (I have taught 5 classes per semester plus overload every semester, including summer, for my entire career), there really is not much time to sustain an active research program. Waubonsee always encouraged and supported research activities, but I felt that I could not teach that many courses and conduct quality research simultaneously. I routinely taught over 800 students a year without any assistance in grading, and that was about all that I could handle. As a result, I decided early on that I would concentrate on my teaching. I stayed active by reviewing textbooks, being involved with Psi Beta, attending conferences, and doing committee work at the college.
The Examined Life of a Teacher

My personal philosophy of teaching is rather simple. At the very heart of this philosophy is maintaining legitimately rigorous academic standards and not deviating from them. I see my job as providing students with a true picture of their ability to do college level work. It does not matter if the student does outstanding work and earns an A, average work and earns a C, or does poor work and earns an F. I tell my students that they will receive an honest appraisal of their ability (at least in psychology) to perform college level work anywhere they might go in the future. I remind them that I do not give grades but that they earn their grades. This practice has served me well.

Whenever possible, I use real-life examples to make difficult concepts clear. My evaluations from students often mention how the examples or the stories that I provided in class helped them to understand the material. Over the years, my students have provided me with many of the stories that I retell in my classes. The good news is that these really aid student learning. The bad news is that I have accumulated so many stories and examples that I often get behind in covering the material that I want to cover. As evidenced by student comments, however, this practice seems to be a fair tradeoff.

An effective teacher must be tremendo enthusiastic about his or her discipline or the presentation in the classroom comes off as flat and uninteresting. If teachers really enjoy what they are teaching, they feel more at ease in front of the class and are much more likely to keep the class lively. The use of humor is well documented as an effective strategy to keep students engaged, and when they are engaged, they cannot help but learn.

In 1976, my colleagues and I created a “hands on” Research and Methodology course that was distinctly unusual in a community college setting. We created a sophisticated program where we established a rat colony for learning experiments, a perception laboratory, and a statistics laboratory. That course, although significantly modified, is still being taught today. This class allowed students to take what they had been taught in their earlier courses and to apply it in real experiments. This experience proved invaluable when they transferred to universities.

In 1977, I was one of the first community college instructors in the state of Illinois to start teaching using the (then) new technology of telecourse instruction. Reaching out to provide educational opportunities to those students who could not attend regularly scheduled classes seemed a logical thing to do, and I am still teaching a section of Introductory Psychology in that format today. I have also used computer aided instruction (CAI) and am currently teaching an online course. Embracing new teaching methods has kept me involved
in the discipline in ways that teaching only in the classroom cannot. Do not be afraid to try new things.

My most rewarding experiences that in teaching are when students who have become successful either write or visit me to thank me for whatever part I might have played in that success. To me, student success serves as validation that what I do is important and that it made a difference in their lives. On the other hand, there is great frustration when I see huge potential in a student but cannot convince him or her that it is real. Some very talented students have gotten away from me, and I deeply regret that I could not do more to help them realize their academic abilities.

Student evaluations of my classes are the primary method on which I rely to assess my teaching. Because they are the consumers and have had other classroom experiences against which to judge mine, I take what they say seriously. Students write down three things that they really enjoyed about the class along with three things they did not enjoy (or would like to see incorporated into the class), which affords me the opportunity to improve continually the methods that help them learn. I feel that student assessment is critical to the improvement of teaching process.

I try to improve my teaching by learning from my colleagues who are successful teachers. I do so by regularly attending local, regional, and national teaching conferences every year. I maintain memberships in those organizations that value and support quality teaching. I read *Teaching of Psychology* in which master teachers share their successes with other teachers. By hanging around good teachers I figure that some of what they possess will rub off on me—and it has.

**Advice for New Teachers**

Get involved early in your career with organizations that promote good teaching. The support provided by colleagues who share your passion for the discipline and quality teaching will serve as an invaluable resource for the rest of your teaching career.

**Final Thoughts**

Set high standards and maintain them. Have fun. Stay involved. I simply cannot imagine having done anything other than teaching for the last 30 years. It is truly a rewarding profession that has provided me with tremendous satisfaction.
To be honest, I am quite surprised I have been invited to contribute to a collection of perspectives from psychology’s best teachers. Although teaching is one of the great loves of my life, I have never thought of myself as one of psychology’s best teachers. I consider myself to be a good teacher, but I am aware that most of my accomplishments have been the result of being part of a community, or a “village,” of best teachers. My teaching and my students’ learning have benefited immensely from that community.

After 20 years at Kennesaw State University (KSU), the last 10 of which I served as Department Chair and Dean, I am now the Associate Director of KSU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). My primary role at CETL is faculty mentoring at all levels, from new faculty to department chairs. I have also returned to the classroom full-time; and it is great to be back.

I completed the Biopsychology doctoral program at the University of Georgia in 1985. Immediately thereafter, I was hired in the KSU Psychology Department, and I have spent my entire career at a dynamic and thriving university. I have also been part of a department committed to teaching excellence. When I joined KSU, we had 5,000 students and no graduate programs. Since then, we have grown to over 18,000 students, have nationally recognized Master’s and Baccalaureate programs, and are striving to become a doctoral-granting institution. My colleagues sometimes ask me if I have ever considered leaving KSU. I always respond, why should I? KSU has been several different types of institutions in the last 20 years, and I have never stopped growing with it. Change has been a way of life here, and I have never been bored.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My graduate training did not include formal preparation for teaching. Teaching assistants (TAs) at the University of Georgia began by assisting an instructor of record in a course and were gradually given more responsibility for their own courses over time. For example, I started out as a TA in the laboratory section of a course and was given sole responsibility for a course only after I completed my Master’s degree (which was departmental policy). Oddly, my Master’s degree did not include any formal teaching preparation, so I assumed all you needed to be a good teacher was content knowledge. At that time, I was assigned a more senior graduate student as a formal mentor. I also had a major professor who was an outstanding teacher, and both were available to assist me.
I did not consider myself an effective teacher in graduate school. When I started teaching, I looked at sample departmental syllabi and simply copied what I saw. I barely kept my head above water; reading each chapter the night before we covered it in class and designing course assignments on the fly. Most of the time, I felt as though the only difference between me and my students was that I had actually read the chapter.

Being effective was not just about teaching the material; understanding campus culture was also important. I remember teaching General Psychology for the first time during a fall semester. I scheduled an exam for the Friday before the Georgia/Florida football game. Of course, being a principled instructor, I was not about to revise my course schedule for a football game. I was shocked on exam day when only 2 of 35 students showed up to take the test (and those two only came because they could not get game tickets)! I gave up, rescheduled the test, and the next year I attended the game. It was my first lesson that teaching was not just about covering the material; it is also about knowing the culture of a campus.

I am not sure when I decided to become a college teacher. I come from a long line of educators, so I knew I liked the idea of being a teacher. I conducted research and taught while in graduate school, but I was not sure what type of faculty position I wanted. When I began applying for jobs, my major professor explained to me the mission differences across institutions. I understood different types of institutions placed different priorities on teaching and research. I also spent some time reflecting on what activities I enjoyed the most. When all was said and done, I applied to some institutions that prioritized research and some that emphasized teaching. By the time I had to make a decision, I knew I wanted a position in which teaching was my primary responsibility, but in which research was also valued. Having come to that realization, I knew what type of institution I wanted to join, and KSU was a perfect match.

I did not start developing as an effective teacher until I began teaching full-time at KSU. I believe I acquired most of my teaching strengths because I joined a department of exceptional teachers, some of whom became the most significant mentors of my career. KSU’s Psychology Department had a strong commitment to teaching excellence and they had built a collaborative community. I had found my village and they began to raise me.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

From the outset I experienced a departmental culture of sharing, collaboration, and support. Having only taught General Psychology in graduate school, I was faced with many new course preparations in my first few years. Colleagues who were teaching the same courses generously gave me copies of their course syllabi and all the assignments they had developed. The first lesson I learned about good teaching was to ask for and accept help. In
effective departments, teaching is not considered a private enterprise (Cox & Richlin, 2004). Thanks to my colleagues, I had a lot of materials and examples from which to work. My main challenge in those early years was to sort through the techniques and philosophies of my fellow faculty and find those that fit my own style and philosophy. My KSU colleagues also introduced me to the larger village that is the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP, Division Two of the American Psychological Association [APA]). I found the same sharing culture in STP, and my teaching was now being influenced by a much larger village and some of the best psychology teachers across the nation.

One of the early challenges I faced was developing my teaching philosophy. When I began to teach, we did not talk about teaching philosophies. Although I had some general sense of why I required certain assignments or focused on particular material, I had never fully considered why I designed courses the way I did. It was not until later in my career that accountability became important and the emphasis on student learning outcomes grew (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). As part of this movement, I developed learning outcomes for my courses and my teaching philosophy began to take shape. The structure of my courses and the purpose behind the learning experiences in those courses became clearer to me, and more importantly, to my students. Helping students see the connection between what they were doing in their academic program and the skills and knowledge they should be acquiring as a result was a critical turning point for me. Learning outcomes provided a nice framework for my teaching, and I was now able to see how student skills such as scientific thinking, effective communication, and teamwork are manifested across all courses I teach.

Another challenge I had as a developing teacher was setting course policies (something that I still struggle with today). My goal is to set course policies with the right balance between good parameters for students and enough flexibility for the type of students we have at KSU (most students are juggling school with jobs, families, etc.). As a teaching psychologist, I believe it is my responsibility to help students develop work habits that will serve them well outside of college. However, I do not want my courses to be seen as a series of rules to be followed. Yet, I cannot allow students to routinely violate the parameters I set up in a course. That much flexibility is not good for them or fair to other students who are following the course guidelines. So, how did I set up fair and equitable policies for attendance, turning in late assignments, and taking make-up exams? Again, I turned to my village. I borrowed ideas from my colleagues, reviewed the literature (e.g., Keith-Spiegel, Whittley, Balogh, Perkins, & Wittig, 2002; Sleigh, Ritzer, & Casey, 2002), and listened to my students. The information I gathered from all of these sources allowed me to establish policies well-grounded in the literature, but tailored to my personal philosophy and goals.
I have recently returned to the classroom after 10 years of full-time administration. Although some faculty sacrifice good teaching for research, I sacrificed good teaching for service. When I realized my responsibilities as Dean were interfering with my teaching, I decided I would not teach rather than offer my students less than they deserved. When you talk to some administrators who are no longer teaching, they often define teaching broadly and explain how teaching does not always occur in the classroom. Granted, as an administrator, there is much you can do to support effective teaching. For me, though, it was just not the same. I missed the direct contact with students and I missed my village. Ultimately, my village made me realize how much I wanted to teach again. During my year as STP President, I reconnected with really good teachers who cared about student learning. Not long afterwards, I decided to leave full-time administration and return to the classroom. Although I would not trade my administrative experiences for the world, and I believe my administrative perspective will make me a better teacher. Returning to the classroom was like coming home—and it is good to be back in the village again!

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Helping students acquire the knowledge and skills to be successful both personally and professionally is at the heart of my teaching philosophy. I am a firm believer in the value of a liberal arts education and a degree in psychology in particular. However, many students do not understand what a liberal arts education is, let alone how it might lead to a job or career. Therefore, I structure my courses to help students see how the material they study and the course requirements they complete are connected to skills and knowledge they will use beyond college. This practice forces me to identify learning outcomes in my courses, connect them to more general program outcomes for the major, and explain to students how these outcomes translate to the workplace. For example, I expect my students to be able to think scientifically, communicate effectively, and work together collaboratively. I intentionally design various course assignments to strengthen their skills in these areas. I talk with students about how the skills required to complete those assignments might be useful on the job. At all times, I strive to help students connect their educational experiences to particular skills and knowledge they may need in the workplace.

It has been an interesting exercise to reflect on how my teaching has changed over the years. I definitely have become a less content-focused teacher. There was a time when covering the entire textbook was my highest priority. I am now more interested in students fully understanding major concepts in a course than being introduced only briefly to all course concepts. I am also more flexible during classroom discussions and more likely to go off on a tangent as a result of a great question.
Of course, technology has also changed the way I teach. In many ways, I feel like a new teacher again. Technology has provided my students and me with 24/7 access to course materials and a library of related information. Having the world at your fingertips and in the classroom has influenced my teaching.

I think the most significant change in my teaching over the years has been my focus on student learning. When I began teaching, the focus was on what I did as a teacher. Today the focus has shifted to demonstrating how what I do influences student learning. It is no longer enough to claim students learn simply because they successfully complete my course. I must now provide evidence that my teaching is enhancing my student’s learning. I still find myself leaving a class and experiencing the joy of knowing I had delivered a great lecture, but now that joy is accompanied by the nagging question of how am I sure my students learned anything from this great lecture. I have always been drawn to identifying student learning outcomes and developing educational opportunities for students to meet these outcomes. I am just now beginning to learn how to demonstrate my teaching effectiveness in terms of my students’ learning.

Becoming more learner-centered has been an important higher education initiative in the past few years (McClenny, 2003; Wergin, 2005), and I believe it is the way all institutions should be headed. This shift in focus will necessarily change how faculty evaluate and reflect upon their teaching. Until now, I have demonstrated my teaching effectiveness through peer and administrative evaluation of samples of my course syllabi, explanations of my course assignments, and conference presentations and publications about my teaching. It has always been about what I do. I have always relied on student feedback in my courses, but these measures have traditionally been open-ended or required by my department. None of these measures give me any information about student learning or students’ perceptions of their learning. It now has to be about how what I do enhances student learning. I will need to develop new teaching techniques that more actively engage students in the learning process (e.g., Huba & Freed, 2000). I will also need to develop multiple methods to assess how my teaching is impacting student learning (e.g., Angelo & Cross, 1993).

Essentially, as higher education changes, how we define good teaching changes. I will have to change to remain an effective teacher. To make these changes, I will once again turn to my village. Being part of the STP community, attending teaching conferences, and reading the literature have always been my preferred methods of improving my teaching. I will certainly not abandon those strategies now.
Advice for New Teachers

My first recommendation to new teachers is to make sure they have found the right institution for them. If you love to teach, make sure you are working at an institution that values and rewards good teaching. A mismatch between your personal values and interests and the mission of your institution can lead to much discontent, both on your part and the part of the institution.

Find your own village! Mine has been my KSU and STP colleagues, but there are others.

Teaching is a lifelong learning process. Just when you think you have mastered it, something changes. Do not hesitate to ask for help. Go beyond your discipline for ideas. Finding and being part of a community of colleagues who are committed to good teaching is essential to your continued growth and improvement as a teacher. You should never stop learning. Avoid complacency. As we say to our students regularly, you do not have to know everything, but you do need to know how to find the information. A village will help you do just that.

Always put student learning at the core of what you do. For me, the most rewarding piece of teaching has been the opportunity to work with students. Never underestimate the role you play in your students’ futures. Sometimes we make decisions out of frustration when, in reality, our students need us to take a few moments and think through how we should handle a situation. Be fair, be honest, and remember that some of your most teachable moments will not be about course material. Above all, have fun! Give to your students and they will give you much in return. Remember the words so often attributed to Winston Churchill (2005): “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”

References


As I am about to receive an award for 35 years of service from Arcadia University, I take this chapter as an opportunity to review, in an informal and personal way, my teaching career. My teaching career and my life as a working mother and wife of a fellow academic are inseparable from each other and from the culture and societal changes for these roles over the years. This autobiographical format feels a bit self-centered, but I assume that readers will be served by the lessons of this compilation, or, as in my case, gain a perspective of the times in which some of us became college professors.

Some Biographical Facts

I am Professor of Psychology at Arcadia University (formerly Beaver College) in suburban Philadelphia and Chair of the department. I earned a Bachelor’s degree in psychology at Bucknell University and PhD at the University of Massachusetts. I am the co-author of *Writing in the Arts and Sciences* (Maimon, Belcher, Hearn, Nodine, & O'Connor, 1981), *Readings in the Arts and Sciences* (Maimon, Belcher, Hearn, Nodine, & O'Connor, 1984), and *Thinking, Reasoning, and Writing* (Maimon, Nodine, & O'Connor, 1989). I am also the author of the *Study Guide* for students to accompany three editions of an introductory psychology text by Benjamin, Hopkins, and Nation. I was a co-editor of Volume IV of the American Psychological Association *Activities Handbook* (Benjamin, Nodine, Ernst, & Blair Broeker, 1998). As the guest editor of a Special Issue devoted to writing in *Teaching of Psychology* (Nodine, 1990), I was able to bring some of my work in the field of composition to psychology.

My teaching awards include the Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1975 and CASE Professor of the Year Arcadia University Award in 1989. National awards include the Robert S. Daniel Award for Teaching Excellence Award in 1996 and the American Psychological Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence in 1999. In, 1994, I was invited to deliver a G. Stanley Hall Address.

I have been President of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) and also President of the Eastern Psychological Association (EPA). Service on numerous committees related to undergraduate teaching at APA led to being a member of the Steering Committee for the St. Mary’s Conference on Undergraduate Education and the resulting book, which took place in 1990-93.
Another gratifying experience was as Director of the Summer Experimental Program, 1989-92, a collaboration between Arcadia University and Community College of Philadelphia, bringing at-risk college students to a college program to encourage completion of their bachelor’s degree. Our program was modeled after the Ford Foundation collaborative programs and sponsored by the William Penn Foundation.

Serving as a consultant/evaluator for psychology department evaluations has been a rewarding experience, as I offer evaluative and contextual perspective on undergraduate psychology programs that differ in how they can best serve their students in their type of institution.

My Early Development as a Teacher

As I talk with students about their goals and their plans for attaining them, I look ruefully at my own history and see a lack of goals and very short-term planning, which I never divulge to them. Marrying quite young, I attended graduate school because my husband was going and because I could not get a job. My graduate work was funded by a grant and my family, so I never worked as a graduate assistant. Leaving school and accompanying my husband to his new academic position, I, as a new mother, traveled through those early years, parenting and eavesdropping on my husband’s interactions with students and class preparations. I knew no one else with a PhD who was parenting for a career and the few women faculty I knew were not parents. Over the course of seven years, with three young children, I had yet to earn a paycheck with my advanced degree, except for a few part-time teaching, fill-in positions. The roles of well-educated mother and faculty wife were quite comfortable.

A part-time position at Arcadia University led the following year to a full-time position. Probably because my early part-time teaching opportunities had been so badly taught, by my own standards, I worked very hard my first year at Arcadia to make those Introductory Psychology courses successful, which led to my shift into a full-time tenure track position. Introductory Psychology at Arcadia, 35 years ago and still today, is a year-long, two-semester course, so topics can be explored in some depth.

I discovered that I knew very little psychology, having spent a record three short years obtaining my PhD. I was pretty good at methodology and statistics and had in-depth knowledge of a few topics, but very little general knowledge of psychology. I spent my first few years learning the content of the discipline that I was teaching. My barometer of teaching quality was the attentive looks on student faces, which are quite easy to read in classes of 25 students. Early lectures were accompanied by large packs of notes. The day that I somehow left my notes at home on my desk, where they were prepared during the quiet hours between
9:00 pm and 1:00 am (such is the not so comfortable life of a working mother), was a turning point. I discovered that I could deliver a good lecture without that large pack of notes. Younger faculty who have always had their notes on their computer may not be able to understand the importance of those handwritten notes.

Besides learning the content of my courses, the other thing that I learned to do during those early years was figure out ways to demonstrate the content and engage students in it. At that time, I had never heard the words “active learning,” but it was obvious that having students participate or observe a study I was discussing would engage them with the material. Most of the activities I generated myself because source material was very limited in the early 1970s. I recognized the value of asking questions, both mine and theirs, as I thought about the few courses in which I had been taught well.

Besides inventing activities and reading background material, attending the EPA meetings was an important factor in my development as a teacher. Hearing invited addresses were exciting, not only because they were well delivered, but also because they provided the background of ideas in areas that were not part of my graduate training. When you are a faculty member at a small college, there is little opportunity to hear a wide range of psychological ideas discussed. Thus, attendance at EPA connected me to the larger world of psychology. For most readers of this chapter, a longer period of graduate training and some early experience at teaching would provide this background, but it had not been part of my beginnings as a psychologist. Also, EPA began to have occasional discussion sessions directed at teaching, so gradually those faculty concerned with their teaching role at their universities shared expertise and, in fact, bonded with each other. These offerings were fairly limited in the 1970s, but have grown significantly as a facet of EPA offerings, as has the group of faculty who share these interests.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I was becoming comfortable with my role as the teacher in the classroom. Then the struggle turned to a reconciliation of my enthusiasm for the content of my classes with the imperfections of student enthusiasm and learning. Why don’t they show complete comprehension and preparation for each class and each exam? After all, I was perfectly clear about both the material taught and my expectations of them for each assignment and exam. This struggle is an on-going one for me, and I will discuss it again in the next section.

Not only are college professors expected to be successful classroom teachers, we are also expected to meet the other criteria of the tenured professor. The criteria differ a fair amount, depending on one’s teaching “niche.” The balance of quality teaching, scholarly work, and service differ immensely from institution to institution. As a pre-tenured faculty
member, I had to figure out the balance for myself. Now, as a department chair and faculty mentor I guide new faculty in understanding the criteria at my institution and others.

There are general lessons to be learned from the chapters in this collection with respect to meeting the criteria. There is wide variation within and between institutional settings. Watching those near and dear to me at other institutions led me to the belief that the criteria at my institution were a good match to my inclinations and strengths. At Arcadia University, teaching was defined as the first and most important criterion for tenure (but not for promotion) and my success in the classroom made this criterion attainable. The criterion of scholarly work was broadly defined to include professional activities, presentations to a wide variety of audiences as well as published work, both original empirical work and contextual. Some of my scholarly work was also influenced by the type of institution at which I taught. As a faculty, we are collegial and collaborative. This characteristic of the Arcadia faculty climate led me to my work in composition, which led to several books and articles.

Writing-across-the-curriculum, as it was then called, is an application of cognitive psychology to the student process of learning and writing about that learning. This cross-disciplinary area contains aspects of cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, constructivism, active learning, and faculty development. I was interested in all of these areas, so the fit was perfect, and the collaborative work began. I published two books with five co-authors, from five different disciplines, and then a third book with three co-authors. At one point in my career, I found myself making a presentation to the College Composition and Communication Conference, in the form of a scripted dialogue, with one of my colleagues in English. It was a bit like being in a play, in front of an academic audience. I wondered what my thesis advisor would think of this step in my career.

When I gained tenure at Arcadia, I was the only woman with young children who held tenure. At another point in my career, I was one of two women with the rank of full professor and the other woman was not married nor a parent. That situation changed quite rapidly, though, and my description is no longer appropriate of my university nor is it likely to describe others. Some rewarding aspects of that situation came to me later. Periodically, I would meet alumni of the university who would tell me that I was a role model for them. One, in particular, said that she entered a doctoral program in psychology because I was proof that you did not have to choose between having a family life and having an academic career.

The Examined Life as a Teacher

Explaining a psychological perspective on teaching and learning was a necessary component of the collaborative work that I have done with people from other disciplines, so before it became de rigueur to have a personal philosophy of teaching, I had articulated it in
our interdisciplinary efforts. I believe that students learn as a function of their cognitive engagement with the material they are learning. This notion is hardly a profound idea; though all faculty probably give lip-service to this belief, they may not act on it. The belief that students must be cognitively and constructively engaged in the material should structure the nature of lecturing, lecture aids, assignments, and assessments in our classes. The particulars of how one provides this structure differ from one faculty member to another, and technology may have changed how some of these aspects manifest themselves, but at the core should be a teacher engaging a student with the material. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to itemize how I have structured my classes and what techniques I have used for which level of classes, but all of them have been directed at this cognitive engagement. Over the years, new techniques, gleaned from conferences and collegial sharing are all directed at the same goal of engaging students to construct their own knowledge.

The frustration I have about teaching, which has haunted me for three decades is my disappointment in the level of work and comprehension shown by many students. Why did they not live up to my expectation? Was my expectation one of perfection? Were they bad students? Was I a bad teacher? How can I change the manner in which I structure Introductory Psychology or Senior Seminar to make all students the best students they can be? In my long teaching career, I have adapted to the disappointment over lack of perfect performance from my students, but I have never succumbed to the pessimistic thought that I can not do more to engage them. Thus, I read about teaching techniques, I talk to my colleagues, I attend meetings and workshops, all with the goal of making my teaching better.

Advice for New Teachers

An advantage to a long career in academe is that you gain some perspective on what you and others do as teachers and scholars. When I began my career, Teaching of Psychology was more of a newsletter than a journal and there were no conferences on teaching. Those opportunities and guides should be taken advantage of, because they provide perspective and guidance.

As a department chair, I give advice to new teachers about how to succeed in teaching and other faculty expectations at my institution. As a member of a collaborative group offering a pre-convention workshop on teaching sponsored by APA, I provide similar advice. The latter activity takes a much broader perspective on success in teaching. During a two-day workshop, we attempt to teach the participants the essentials of successful teaching. Two principles organize that workshop: (a) teaching and assessment of teaching are directed by your personal philosophy of teaching and your implementation of that philosophy into your planning for the course and (b) the particulars of the elements are affected by the context of
the type of university setting in which you teach. Thus, successful teaching requires a self-reflective perspective on personal philosophy and knowledge of the wide range of options for delivering teaching and assessment of teaching.

Final Thoughts

For me, my teaching career is nearing the end, though I have been unable to say the word “retirement” to my dean. To stop being a college professor, even after 35 years, is unthinkable. For some readers, your teaching career is just beginning and I hope you enjoy as many years doing it. If you don’t love it, think about it, review it, revise it, care about it, then find something else to do.

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In 1931, the poet Ogden Nash wrote one of the shortest poems on record: "The Bronx? No Thonx!" Although this poem summarizes Nash's feelings, it does not convey my own. I was born in the Bronx in 1950 and spent the first 26 years of my life there. In fact, most of those 26 years I lived no more than 10 minutes from the institution that would play a pivotal role in my life. When I was a child, my family would often ride down Southern Boulevard past the campus of Fordham University (in our grandparent's car, as we could not afford a car ourselves). To this day, I recall my parents and grandparents telling me that some day I should attend Fordham because it had a good law school. My father told me that Fordham was the place for me because someone named Lombardi went to school there. Neither my mother nor my father attended college, but they valued education. My father worked two jobs to insure that his family would have some of the opportunities that my parents did not have. He lost his battle with cancer in 1961, so he did not live long enough to see me graduate from even elementary school.

In 1964, I stepped onto the campus of Fordham University as a student at Fordham Preparatory School. To this day I do not understand how my mother managed to find the money to pay the tuition, especially when the tuition almost doubled right before my senior year. Years later I would leave the campus of Fordham University having earned a PhD in General-Theoretical Psychology. I am the first person in my family to graduate from college.

My graduate program in General-Theoretical Psychology was specifically designed to prepare us to become college teachers. How ironic that the program was terminated a few years ago. My academic career took me first to small schools in Kentucky and then to Pennsylvania. In 1981, Indiana State University Evansville offered me a position in their Psychology Department. Two weeks after arriving at ISUE (as we were known then), I walked into the Vice President's office to request funds to establish an undergraduate research conference. That conference, the Mid-America Undergraduate Psychology Research Conference (Palladino, Carsrud, Tanke, Aubrecht, & Huber, 1983), will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2006. The success of the conference led me to try my hands at organizing another conference; this time a regional conference dedicated to teaching (at the time it was a novel idea). The Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology (MACTOP) began in 1984 (Palladino, 1988) and ushered in what Barney Beins (2004) described in his Presidential address for the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) as the "Golden Age of Regional
Teaching Conferences." Barney noted that many of the leading figures in the teaching of psychology had spent time at MACTOP over the years. “If you look at the list of MACTOP presenters, you will see that 13 of the last 18 STP presidents gave talks at the conference. And other notable figures in STP graced the program over the years” (Beins, 2004).

In 1985, ISUE became the University of Southern Indiana (USI) and shortly I would be tenured and promoted to the rank of Associate Professor, then Professor. I spent a significant amount of time working on matters related to STP: Methods and Techniques Editor of Teaching of Psychology (ToP), Program Chair, and President (1991-1992). In 1989, I was elected to Fellow status in APA; in 1990, I received STP’s Robert S. Daniel Teaching Excellence Award. My work on teaching conferences was recognized by receipt of a National University Continuing Education Association Faculty Service Award in 1991. The University of Southern Indiana Alumni Association awarded me its Faculty Recognition Award in 2000.

At the current time, I am Chair of the Psychology Department at USI where I teach Introduction to Psychology, Psychometrics, and an interdisciplinary course called Perspectives on Humor. A great deal of my time is spent in meetings of one kind of another. As a chair and a senior faculty member, I am asked to serve on a wide variety of committees, including personnel committees and a committee to select my institution’s next student evaluation of teaching instrument.

My Early Development as a Teacher

In Fall 1973, I remember walking across the Fordham University campus on my way to present my first lecture. The sound I heard was probably my knees knocking. Monday morning at 8 is not a great time to give your first lecture; the MMPI is not the ideal topic! Somehow, the students and I got through the lecture; how, I will never know. I recall the slow walk back to my graduate student office as perspiration bathed my body and I kept thinking that if I am to make a career of teaching I had better get a lot better than I was that day. This lecture was part of a Teaching Practicum that was required of all students in the General-Theoretical program. Although discussions of pedagogical issues and current literature on teaching were enlightening, it would take much more to make me into the teacher I hoped to be someday.

My immediate task was to deal with my nervousness. I decided that the simple technique of pacing would release some pent-up energy. To this day, I still pace before class. In fact, I have actually worn a pedometer and been amazed at the distance I log before class! The pacing allowed me to practice my lecture by visualizing each part of the presentation, sometimes in minute detail.
The single most important event in my professional and teaching careers occurred early in 1981 (months after I arrived at ISUE). I received a package from Dr. Robert S. Daniel that contained an article he asked me to review for ToP. I was honored to be asked to review an article by someone of Bob's stature. Based on earlier submissions and accepted manuscripts, Bob knew of my interest in undergraduate research conferences (the topic of the submission he wished me to review). I was determined that my review would be so meticulous that he would ask me to do others. This was indeed the case; in fact, he asked me to join the editorial board of ToP.

As a result, Bob became my mentor. Whatever I have accomplished as a teacher, organization leader, and so forth can in no small way be traced to Bob's influence. Simply put, Bob showed confidence in my ability, respected my opinion and most importantly, opened doors for me that probably would not have been opened for me without his help. So extensive was Bob's contribution to teaching and teachers of psychology that I invited him to give the opening address at the MACTOP in 1986. At the end of the address, we (a group consisting of several individuals with chapters in this book) awarded Bob a plaque inscribed with the words "Teacher of Teachers." With the help of his lovely wife, Nola, we had arranged to obtain a color photograph of Bob, which was centered on the plaque.

When our daughter Sharin decided to attend graduate school in psychology, she traveled to several campuses around the country accompanied by my wife Marie. One of these trips was to the University of Missouri. Marie tracked down Bob Daniel who was in a nursing home at this time. Sharin and Marie went to visit him. Although the room was rather barren with few items on the wall, Marie spotted a familiar item. The "Teacher of Teachers" plaque hung prominently on the wall. Thanks again, Bob.

There were times early in my career when I wondered if teaching was the career for me. In fact, at one point I began to investigate other related careers. Without Bob Daniel, I would not be writing this chapter.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

The first few years of teaching can be hell and in many ways, they were for me. We (my family) were not in places we wanted to be geographically, and we were separated from the support structure of our families. Although there were many lows over the many years, one of the lowest occurred when as a second year faculty member I was assigned to teach five different preparations, including two night courses. I was stretched beyond what I thought was reasonable. I realize that teaching load is relative and at some institutions this might not be a heavy load, whereas at other institutions it would be unimaginable. Taking my wife's advice, I did not say anything (as I was untenured at the time). However, I made a promise to myself: If
I were ever in a position to set policy I would insure that no faculty member would ever be forced to teach this number of preparations in a single semester. As Chair of the department, I established a policy that limits the number of preparations per semester (3) and overall preparations (6).

Frankly, I have never struggled with the "zero sum game" in which teaching takes away from laboratory time. I was fortunate to find an institution where teaching really was the number one criterion for tenure and promotion. Virtually every institution says teaching is number one but there ought to be a wink symbol that can be inserted into faculty handbooks at institutions that give no more than lip service to this belief.

I threw myself into teaching, which clearly can occur in the classroom and outside. The majority of my publications have been in ToP and many of my presentations and publications deal with topics such as undergraduate research. I took every opportunity to involve my students in research. For example, when I received a phone call from an attorney asking for help on a death penalty case, I seized this as an opportunity to involve students. The end result was the largest project I had ever worked—a survey of hundreds of potential jurors that became part of a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

There are a few basic principles that are at the heart of my personal teaching philosophy. First, I am a firm believer in providing a great deal of detail about a course to students (essentially informed consent). My syllabi now run 10 to 11 pages because of such detail. I view the syllabus as essentially a legal contact (although I doubt courts would or should view it as such). As I tell my students, I expect to be held to my end of this agreement and I also expect them to be held to their end.

Second, I believe in setting appropriately high standards for students. They will let us know when the standards are unreasonable. In addition, I believe it is imperative to provide the assistance needed to meet these standards. For example, I teach a course called Psychometrics. Frankly, the title alone would frighten most students. This course is basically the course I took in graduate school from Dr. Anne Anastasi. From day one, the students know what is expected of them. Imagine how gratifying it is to complete such a course, knowing you have accomplished what many might have thought was impossible.

Third, students are entitled to know where they stand in a class in a timely manner. Not only does this feedback give them a measure of their success in the class, it is also important for making decisions about whether to remain in the class.

When I began teaching, I was primarily a lecturer. I guess with practice one can get pretty good at lecturing. I am not putting down the lecture format, although I came to the
conclusion that even the greatest lecturer in the world needs to inject some variety into a class that is basically a lecture class. Over time, I have found, for example, that interesting and humorous stories are one way to inject variety. When my daughter (Karin, who is now a lawyer) was growing up I had ready-made material for class. My list of Karin stories (night terrors, toilet training, etc.) is interspersed throughout my lectures. I am heartened when students come up to me (sometimes 15 years after taking the class) and tell me they remember some of the details of the stories. For example, they remember the frightening experience of Karin’s night terrors or how we overcome her fear of toilets after she was frightened by an “industrial-strength” toilet during a visit to Seaworld in Orlando. I try to be as visual a teacher as possible. For example, I invite several students to the front of the class where we act out the parts of a neuron (with body parts becoming the dendrites, soma, axon, etc.). Even in large classes, it is possible to involve students as I learned over time (sometimes reluctantly) and I continue to this day to try to create new and innovative ways of presenting course material.

One of the techniques I use is to team teach with one of the junior faculty members in my department (frankly, they are all junior faculty compared to me). Technique borrowing goes both ways. I have been learning quite a bit about technology from younger faculty who cut their teeth when laptops were first around compared to someone like me who was in graduate school when we put data on IBM cards.

Advice for New Teachers

The question I think everyone should ask each of the faculty members at this point in their autobiography is this: Would you enter the profession of teaching again, knowing what you know now, and having struggled with what you have had to struggle with over time? My resounding answer is "in a heart beat." How many of us have swelled with pride when one of our students aces a presentation at an undergraduate research conference? A diffident student is now filled with confidence. How many of us have had students come up to us and been told that we had made a difference in their lives?

I am fortunate in many ways. I am the chair of an outstanding department consisting of very collegial faculty members. Yes, they are quite young so I refer to my department as "Joe and the kids." From a personal perspective, I am also lucky because I have a significant amount of freedom over what I do. Simply put, I teach what I want, when I want to teach it. In addition, my list of courses includes Perspectives on Humor (which I would not recommend until you are tenured).

Here are my keys to success in teaching. First, borrow, borrow, and borrow. One of the amazing aspects of our profession is that we compete with each other quite often: to be published, to get presentations accepted, for grants, and for jobs. However, in my almost 30
years of teaching I cannot recall a single instance in which a faculty member refused to share teaching-related materials with a colleague. Why would anyone write a syllabus from scratch? The majority of the demonstrations we use are borrowed from someone else. Just ask and you will be surprised how helpful even strangers can be.

Second, get yourself mentors (note the plural). I am not a proponent of programs that attempt to connect junior faculty with potential mentors. Such programs strike me as similar to arranged marriages. The word "mentor" does not even have to be mentioned for a successful mentoring relationship to occur. I have been amazed and gratified at the number of colleagues who have told me I was one of their mentors. Mentors can serve as useful sounding boards, offer advice, or in my case open doors that can make all the difference in the world.

Third, do not try to be a hero. As I tell my own faculty members: No one has ever been granted tenure or promoted based on the number of different preparations he or she teaches. Some degree of focus (which may well change over time) is to your advantage. In addition, find ways to involve your students in your research, which can funnel right out of your class.

Fourth, do not be afraid to try new approaches and/or techniques. For years, my preferred teaching technique was lecturing. Then, I was allowed to teach a course on humor, which required a variety of teaching techniques. This new course stretched my abilities and opened up new avenues for me.

Fifth, try to inject some humor into your own life for some needed balance as well as into your classes. I am afraid that many in our profession fail to understand that classroom rule number one is "Get their attention." What better way than using humor? Please note that I am not suggesting that you become a stand-up comic. I have always argued that humor in class should be appropriate and flow from the material. I also realize that you will be fighting an uphill battle here because academia in general and the profession of psychology are filled with those exhibiting Humor-Impaired Personality Disorder (Palladino & Handelsman, 1996). If you doubt this statement, please spend some time at a conference.

Sixth, get a life outside teaching and your institution. Do not spend every minute on either. Inject balance into your life. In my case, I am sports fanatic, so I spend a fair amount of time following various teams like the New York Yankees who were robbed 2004! For nine years, I wrote a humor column for the Psi Chi newsletter with another faculty member profiled in this book, Mitch Handelsman. I recently presented Psych Follies (with Charles Brewer, who is also profiled in this volume) at the Southeastern Psychological Association conference. A little balance and a little laughter go a long way.
Final Thoughts

I never did become the lawyer my family wanted but I am confident they would be pleased with how I turned out (at least, so far). Many years ago, I took a group of students to a psychology conference in Chicago. They decided to thank me by giving me a plaque they purchased in a gift shop. The plaque hangs in my office today and the inscription contains the words of Vince Lombardi (a Fordham graduate): "The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor."

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Reflections on My Career Journey as a Teacher of Psychology

Ann Garrett Robinson
Gateway Community College

I am a Professor Emerita of psychology at Gateway Community College, having joined the faculty when it was South Central Community College in 1972. I retired from full-time teaching in 1999. I am probably best known in my professional teaching career for my community service-oriented and culture-conscious teaching, my national leadership roles in Psi Beta (the National Honor Society in Psychology for two-year colleges) are also widely recognized. I was its 4th president (1987-1990) and its first historian. During my presidency, Psi Beta was affiliated with the American Psychological Association (APA) and it laid the groundwork for offering many leadership awards.

I earned my bachelor's degree in psychology at North Carolina Central University in 1954; my master's degree in clinical psychology from Wayne State University in 1957; and my doctoral degree in education from Nova Southeastern University in 1975. I practiced clinical psychology in North Carolina, Maine, and Indiana and worked as a Certified Psychological Examiner in Connecticut. I also served on the faculty of the Child Study Center of Yale University and Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. I taught psychology for 27 years at Gateway Community College.

I undertook governmental research in the area of Action's Special Volunteer Programs. My continuing education included the study of applied anthropology at Teachers College, Columbia University and I also conducted fieldwork at the Kenya Christian Home in Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa. I was appointed a post-doctoral research fellow in African and African American Studies at Yale University and a Research Fellow at the Yale University School of Divinity.

I have contributed articles to the New Haven Register, as well as to other newspapers. Ebony Magazine cited my research on the study of the three wives of Booker T. Washington. I served as a local historian on local radio and television shows; my life history collections on religious leaders can be found in various places, including the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

I have received many awards and honors including the prestigious 1992 Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division Two of APA) Teaching Excellence award for two-year colleges (now called the Moffett Award), a Recognition award from the American Council of Honor Societies, a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition in 1995, a State of Connecticut General Assembly Citation for my scholarly research and contributions.
as a community-based teacher in 1999, the Seton Elm and Ivy Award for contributing to increased understanding and cooperation between the City of New Haven and Yale University in 2000, a Connecticut Community College system post-retirement award for excellence in service in 2001, and a front-page media tribute for outstanding community services from the Inner City newspaper of New Haven. In 2001, Psi Beta presented its first annual Ann E. Garrett Robinson College Life Award. Thus far, awards have been presented to community college students and/or faculty in psychology in Connecticut, Texas, New Jersey, and Illinois.

As a retiree, I volunteer as the founding curator of the Little Red Brick Schoolhouse Museum in the Prince Hall Masonic Temple of New Haven. I serve as an ordained deacon at the Immanuel Missionary Baptist Church in New Haven. I also continue to support the advancement of psychology through my participation in the President's Circle of Psi Beta and Psi Chi Honor Society in Psychology.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My career path was influenced by my childhood and youthful experiences. I grew up in a segregated, village-like community in the years leading up to World War II. I was privileged: I was reared and nurtured in a family by influential parents and close relatives who worked in teaching and various trades, including publishing and printing. My primary role model was my mother, a public school teacher who had attended a junior college—which she loved—as an adult learner. My father, also a brilliant individual, was a skilled printer for a local daily newspaper and later for a private business.

My family called me a “library child” because I spent so much time in the George Washington Carver Library with a favorite aunt who founded the library. In my private moments, I explored many career options, dreaming of becoming a physician or a lawyer or a dramatist or a great writer.

I can recall the day I made the decision to become a psychologist (Robinson, 1994). I was a senior in high school. I noticed an opportunity in psychology posted by the Veteran's Administration on the high school bulletin board. I suddenly knew with a certainty that I was going to become a psychologist, even though I had no objective basis for selecting psychology as a career--I was unacquainted with psychology as an academic discipline. Before 1950, psychology historians report that there few African Americans worked as practicing psychologists and even fewer worked as teachers of psychology. (Denmark & Fernandez, 1992; Guzman, Schiavo, & Puente, 1992).

With a spirit of adventure, I headed off to college and met my first role models in psychology, two African Americans: Carol Bowie and George Kyle. Both had practiced
clinical psychology but became college teachers of psychology later in their careers. My career would follow a similar path.

In 1972, I joined the college faculty of Gateway Community College as an assistant professor. I was later promoted to associate professor, and made a bit of history by becoming the first woman in the state's community college system to achieve the rank of full professor. In the beginning of my teaching career at Gateway, I felt like a missionary going into unsettled but promising educational territory (Robinson, 1985). At the time, I was the only psychology faculty member and the assistant chairperson of the social science department, which had 10 faculty members. Some mysterious event had happened the year before my arrival and the all psychology faculty departed, leaving behind the entire psychology curriculum, which included Introduction to Psychology, General Psychology, Child Growth and Development, Behavior Modification in Learning, Group Dynamics, Abnormal Psychology, Social Psychology, Theories and Methods of Counseling and Therapy, and Industrial Psychology. During my teaching career, I taught each of these courses.

I entered my first psychology classroom enthusiastic and over-prepared to teach introductory psychology. I had carefully crafted the syllabus and pre-rehearsed my lecture. I reassured my students that my text-based, multiple-choice tests would contain "no surprises." I also shared practical information about the location of the nearby college bookstore and the price of the introductory psychology textbook I had selected to use for the course.

I give credit to my students for awakening my awareness to their collective need for a non-traditional component in my course organizational plans. One day, two students, Mildred and Mabel, asked to bring their two teenaged daughters to class. I permitted them to do so, and much to my surprise, others followed suit and my classroom soon became transformed into a festive, family event.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

My professorial role slowly changed from a teacher engaged in lecturing and testing for mastery of textbook material to a participant observer, a mentor, an educational facilitator, and a role model. I saw students in a new light, and started to notice them exhibiting previously unrecognized talents and gifts, skills, and attitudes. I soon realized that students play many roles in accordance within the social context of their everyday lives. Teaching diverse adult learners requires course opportunities for role diversification and for the expression of multiple intelligences and practical intelligence. From that time forward, I started learning how to include non-traditional components in my psychology course plans. One new project was a Psychology Holiday Symposium at which students made presentations and to which they invited their families—and I brought my family, too.
My intention in developing the Psychology Holiday Symposium and other student-related events was to help students learn about psychology and to insure that their work and their performances reflected competence. I wanted my students and, indeed, the college to project positive images. Together, we even maintained a dress code—the students in particular wanted the Psychology Holiday Symposium to be a dress-up event. Throughout the years, thousands of community members attended these Psychology Holiday Symposium and similar events. The early history of the Psychology Holiday Symposium has been recorded in writing, providing a brief but nevertheless compelling narrative referencing each student project and the perception of the teacher’s role (Sullivan, 1974).

As my commitment to non-traditional teaching continued to grow, I also became interested in adult learning and community college education. I was accepted in the Nova Southeastern University’s off-campus doctoral program for community college educators. Nova's unique three-year program was based on a hybrid curriculum consisting of courses related to traditional and non-traditional teaching strategies exclusively designed for community college educators. This curriculum included three-month seminars in educational policy systems in higher education, curriculum development in higher education, learning theory and applications, college governance, societal factors, and applied educational research and evaluation. In addition, the Nova program required each graduate student to conduct a research project (also known as a practicum) relevant both to our disciplinary area and useful to the college each semester. The practicum was based on the modules being studied in the formal classroom.

I developed my dissertation to meet a pressing need of the South Central Community College system: The system was not satisfactorily meeting the needs of the community, enrollment figures were low, and faculty might lose their jobs. My dissertation thus involved developing a new curriculum, teaching methods, and educational materials for social science. I invented a concept of a "Community Service Laboratory," which could be attached to 13 social science courses. I called this effort a community service-oriented curriculum.

My dissertation represented one of the most complex, far reaching, and rewarding curriculum creations that I ever undertook. It was successful. Without producing trauma or crises, it created institutional changes in registration procedures, administration and governance, grading, professional staff development, curriculum planning, community service programming, and public relations. It helped to save faculty jobs by generating more full-time enrollment figures, assisted the college in meeting the legislatively-expected community service needs of the local community through the volunteer activities of the enrolled student participants, provided workshops for faculty in the attempt to help them better understand community services as a part of its role and functions, and reconstructed the curriculum to
include community-service laboratories. The adult learners who completed these laboratories were significantly more satisfied with these new course arrangements than with traditional course arrangements (Robinson, 1975).

In short, the Nova experience exposed me to a plethora of new ideas and exciting discussions about community college education. I read about the great men and women in this emergent pedagogical field. I also learned a great deal more about effective teaching.

The pathway I followed after receiving my doctorate from Nova was distinguished by steady growth and development as a teacher, writer, producer, and agent of institutional changes. I started to understand the nuts and bolts of teaching adult learners, and learned always to put my students first. My classrooms brimmed with a rich diversity of people who differed in almost every way imaginable, which lent valuable resources and challenges to my teaching and my students' learning experiences.

I am delighted to see my students' successes. They earned their associate degrees and moved on to earn BAs, MAs, LPNs, or RNs. Some of my students even went further and pursued doctoral degrees. I heard wonderful stories about my students who went directly into the workplace and climbed ladders of success (Robinson, 1985).

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I believe that the starting perspective for examining my life as a teacher is that I perceived my students as capable human beings, created in a divine image, and born with natural intellectual endowments that made them all worthy of being taught, uplifted, ennobled, and praised. I believed that experience more so than inborn differences is the key to individual student development and academic competence. I believed that students can learn and that teaching causes learning. Acting on these beliefs, I organized a curriculum and created culture-conscious classroom spaces where each student had a chance to learn and grow (Robinson, 1989).

My ideas about teaching were drawn from many philosophic systems including behaviorism, idealism, humanism, progressivism, and most especially the teaching beliefs of the educational philosopher, Booker T. Washington (1856-1915). Washington's philosophic system included a 3-H teaching method that required the teacher to educate the head and heart as well as train the hands of learners in order to provide them with opportunities to acquire knowledge and achieve academic, vocational, and personal competence (Washington, 1966; Robinson, 1981). Washington's ideas about the 3-H teaching method were apolitical, and this teaching method is universally applicable to all students enrolled in any academic program of study (i.e., occupational, technological or liberal arts).
As time progressed, I built on my ideas about the usefulness of the 3-H teaching method, adding to this teaching technique some teaching strategies based on Gardner's ideas about multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983; 1985). As I gained teaching experience in my already-assumed roles of teacher as authority, teacher as expert, teacher as facilitator, and teacher as role model, I expanded my teacher typology to include teacher as socializing agent, and teacher as person (Mann, et al., 1970). These new roles released me to find more effective ways to express myself in the context of even more relevant teaching approaches.

For example, in the role of teacher as person, I created aesthetic experiences to bring beauty, attractiveness, and pleasure into the classroom; I rearranged moveable furniture to form a perfect circle as the physical context for teaching values of equality and respect. In the role of teacher as socializing agent, I used administrative skills and organizational acumen to advise members of the Psi Beta honor society about careers in psychology. I encouraged these students to maintain academic excellence. I helped them to sponsor the most elegant college life events, which, other than commencement exercises, attracted the most students and families to the college.

To study these “classrooms without walls,” I used an ethnographic approach, maintained a teacher's diary, assigned students to keep a daily course journals—I reviewed over 1,000 such reports, and I supplemented this information with anecdotal reports, interviews, peer reviews, research evaluation reports, videography, and archival data. Overall, my students were satisfied with the course experiences and so was I, in my roles as teacher.

I learned that problems emerge in association with the kaleidoscopic experience of teaching in a community college. What works for one group of students might be less effective with another group. I have a few suggestions for teachers facing these inevitable challenges: Maintain a core value system that includes versatility and flexibility; and attend professional development activities such as national conferences, workshops on excellence in teaching, and continuing education classes to learn new approaches to teaching in changing places. Celebrate the history of community college education in America (Bogue, 1950) and its prehistory, which can be traced back to July 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln signed the First Morrill Act into law, thereby inaugurating the movement towards universal access, open admissions, community orientation, and program diversity in higher education (Robinson 1984).

Advice for New Teachers

Education is a praxeological science, guided by many shoulds and should nots (Wolman, 1965). Here are some propositions that might be helpful to young teachers as they begin to hone their craft:
1. Create a climate in which everyone feels special and all are welcome.
2. Believe that all students have a God-given capacity to learn, no matter what their starting point.
3. Carefully prepare for discussions in order to enable students to become informed and open-minded thinkers.
4. Value honesty and caring.
5. Organize learning experiences that help students to grow in pride and self-respect.
6. Know the importance of cultural and ethnic factors in the life of a student.
7. Gain an increased understanding of how to bring forth the natural intellectual endowments of students.
8. Discover that education is a reciprocal process. Become a good learner and expect to learn from students. Expect great things of students and of yourself.
9. Accept learning is a lifelong process. Continue to study and plan for the future.

Final Thoughts

Though now retired from fulltime teaching, I continue to engage in teacher-related projects associated with psychology. I participated on behalf of Psi Beta Honor Society in the 75th Anniversary Celebration of Psi Chi at Yale, and I speak with students in the educational pipeline about my career journey. I indicate to my audience the truths of my career experience—I have had a rich life of personal and professional growth as a teacher of psychology and a rewarding sense that I was developing in a way that allowed me to be of benefit to my students, the college, my community and profession. They were great years!

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Some Reflections on My Career Teaching Psychology at a Community College

Jerry Rudmann, Irvine Valley College

After earning a Masters degree in experimental psychology, I worked in the aerospace industry as a human factors specialist for 8 years, after which I began teaching psychology full-time at Irvine Valley College in California. Several years later I completed my PhD in educational psychology at the University of Southern California (USC). At Irvine Valley, I initiated an honors chapter of Psi Beta, the national honor society in psychology at community colleges. Not long after, I served as Psi Beta's national President. My involvement in Psi Beta eventually led me to serve on the executive committee of Psychology Teachers at the Community College (PT@CC), a committee of the American Psychological Association. In 1998, I was honored by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) Teaching Excellence Award for Two-year College Teachers. While still teaching at Irvine Valley today, I also serve as Supervisor of Institutional Research at Coastline Community College.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I received little preparation for teaching during my graduate programs. Because I was working in human factors, I was unable to serve as a graduate teaching assistant, and my graduate programs did not offer a course on teaching. During my graduate work at USC, however, I did have two professors from whom I learned valuable lessons about effective teaching. Dr. Earl Pulias, who taught History of Higher Education in the United States, was the consummate professorial role model. His course was comprehensive, challenging, highly structured, and organized completely around student-centered learning outcomes. What I had expected to be the most boring course in my educational career turned out to be the very best one.

The other professor, Dr. Leo Buscaglia, also taught me many things about teaching excellence, among them the importance of having a passion for one's discipline, and love and compassion for one's students. Leo taught me ways an instructor can bring topics to life through role-playing, service-learning assignments, and high quality supplemental readings.

Three other factors influenced my development as a teacher. First, I learned to create and structure cooperative learning groups during a flex-day presentation by Dr. Jim Cooper; I continue to use learning groups and find them to be of great value to teaching. Second, when I read Angelo and Cross’s (1993) Classroom Assessment Techniques, I learned how to gather formative feedback from students in order to make adjustments in course structure. Finally, about 13 years ago, I began to study the faculty evaluation literature. Here I found systematic
studies of what effective college instructors do; and I think at least some of what I learned has rubbed off. My fascination with the study of teaching effectiveness continues, having just completed Ken Bain's (2004) book, "What The Best College Teachers Do"—which I recommended to anyone hoping to improve their teaching effectiveness.

I intentionally sought a job teaching at the community college. Why? The decision was based partially on nostalgia; I had, after all, discovered my love for psychology at a community college. After having taught a class as a part-time instructor, I was hooked, although I am afraid my first attempts to teach were pretty awful. However, I was intrigued by the challenge of helping students learn, especially students who reminded me of myself when I first started college. More importantly, I chose the community college because the system provided me with the opportunity to become the person I am today. My parents had not completed high school, my family was poor, and only a few distant relatives had ever attended college. After reviewing my freshman year records, my high school counselor understandingly put me on the non-college track, better known among my friends as the "dumbbell express." Once I realized the importance of higher education, the local community college was the only avenue available for me. I loved the community college I attended. My teachers cared about students and taught well. (Make no mistake, most of my classes included some students who had not, at least not yet, learned how to be students—but I know now that this situation simply reflected the very nature of the open-access institution.) After transferring to the local university, an educational accomplishment that left my parents dumbfounded, I found I was well prepared for upper-division coursework. I was on my way to becoming a psychologist.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to teaching continues to be the very thing that drew me to teaching at a community college—the challenge of working with the wide range of students one faces in an open-access institution. Students, even within the same classroom, vary widely in terms of their commitment to learning, goal clarity, aptitudes, and study skills. After 25 years of teaching, I am still amazed at the ways some students sabotage their education. What teacher has not been asked the "endearing" question by the recently absent student, "Did I miss anything important?" Over the years I have accumulated various tips and strategies to help students develop study strategies and attitudes more accommodating to learning. I sprinkle these tips throughout my courses.

Shyness was also an obstacle for me. Although I admired the effective delivery style of former professors who had a sense of the dramatic and could stalk about the lecture hall, visually and verbally engaging students through gesture and voice, I simply could not do that.

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I chose instead to engage students through well-structured group activities, open-discussions, and co-curricular activities in which students could experience the subject matter outside the classroom. The shyness eased over the years and no longer plagues me, but it was a definite problem and personal stressor earlier in my teaching career.

Having taught at a community college, I have never faced the challenge of maintaining scholarship while fulfilling my obligation to teach classes. I learned late in my teaching career the joys and rewards of becoming involved in co-curricular activities. Co-advising a Psi Beta chapter enriched and improved my effectiveness as a teacher. Working with Psi Beta honors students enabled me to know better many excellent students who are positive classroom role models for others. Some of our Psychology Department’s most significant program-level learning outcomes are derived from co-curricular activities made possible through Psi Beta.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

*Every Student is Capable of Learning*

Whenever a student fails to learn or the class performs worse than I had hoped on an assignment or exam, I know I share responsibility for this failure. It is all too easy to rationalize failure, but instructional design is one of the instructor's top duties. Rather than spending time defending my ego, I set about finding ways to improve things. Each class is unique; each brings a unique history, sets of life experiences, and learning styles to the classroom. What worked last semester may no longer be effective because the students and their learning needs may have changed. This uniqueness is a dynamic all teachers face, but perhaps not all embrace.

*Deep Learning and Robust Outcomes (a.k.a. Critically Important Learning Outcomes) Should Guide Everything a Teacher Does*

One of the things I had to unlearn, which I had picked up from my own college professors, is the use of broad coverage, objective-format exams to assess student learning. This practice all too often only perpetrates learning of loosely, if at all, connected terms and facts. I now place greater emphasis on students demonstrating a deeper level of learning, as indicated by Bloom's (1964) indices of higher thinking. Since I began spending considerable thinking about what I would like every student who leaves my introductory course to be able to do, I have made great shifts in how I teach. My course grades now more closely reflect student competencies rather than the ability to memorize and recite.

I find two things rewarding about teaching. First, when I see students truly engaged in a learning activity that I have designed or selected, I am on cloud nine. This type of engagement activity can range from a debate panel, to a classroom discussion, to a student
poster presentation. When students fail to engage in an activity, or fail to apply themselves, I am very disappointed. The most immediate way I deal with this issue is to reminiscence quickly about what I was like as an undergraduate and the kinds of things I did to avoid learning.

The second, equally rewarding, aspect of teaching, occurs when I encounter former students who have gone on to earn degrees and become active in psychology. Such encounters leave me bursting with pride.

Over the years I have grown to believe that compassion and happiness are absolutely necessary ingredients for successful teaching. I used to fret, even lose sleep by anguishing over the failure of some students to do well on assignments and exams, but I have grown much more compassionate and patient. Neither my students nor I will ever be perfect. Like Leo Buscalgia, one of my two favorite professors, used to say, "I will expect perfection from you the day that I become perfect, so you don't have a thing to worry about!" Likewise, unhappy teachers cannot be effective. Most of us can recall the miserable experience of being students in the classroom of the unhappy teacher; fear is the only thing I learned in those classes. We have, I believe, an obligation to our students, colleagues, family, and ourselves to be happy.

My understanding of the responsibilities and roles played by college teachers has grown much clearer over the years. I once thought the community college teacher's only job was to teach. I now recognize that teachers have important obligations as campus citizens, obligations that some take too lightly. In order for a college to get its business done, teachers must serve on myriad committees. The extent to which teachers avoid these obligations leaving them for others to do, or become passive rather than active participants on these committees, they are short-changing their colleagues and cheating the taxpayer. I also believe that a great deal of student learning, in many cases the most important learning, is derived from their engagement in co-curricular activities. Faculty should not only help design and provide these activities, they should encourage students to attend them and should serve as role models by attending such activities themselves. There is a solid body of educational research that demonstrates that student involvement in educational enrichment outside the classroom contributes to student persistence and learning. If teachers fail to meet their service obligation and fail to support the college's co-curricular life, they are failing as teachers no matter what they are doing in the classroom.

Further, teachers need to stay current in their discipline and in teaching. To meet this need, I regularly attend panels and symposia on teaching at regional and national psychology conventions. I also subscribe to and read Teaching of Psychology.
Advice for New Teachers

Do not become an isolated commuter teacher. Even if your departmental colleagues have become dead wood, fight any inclination to become so yourself. Fortunately, it is easy to network and meet optimistic, successful, effective faculty in psychology—to do so is my strongest single piece of advice to any teacher. Psychology faculty can network through Psi Beta, Psi Chi, STP, PT@CC, CTUP (Council of Teachers of Undergraduate Psychology), and many other regional and national organizations. If I could change one thing in my entire teaching career, I would have become active in these organizations much sooner. Because of my involvement in these organizations, I have friends from across the nation whom I respect and admire, and I have benefited from professionally enriching experiences beyond anything I had thought possible 10 years ago.

A Final Thought

Welcome to one of the most challenging, often frustrating, rewarding, and interesting careers in the world.

References

A Dash of Indolence, A Pinch of Serendipity:  
My Personal Recipe for a Career in Teaching

Bryan K. Saville  
James Madison University

In hindsight, I guess B. F. Skinner (1956) was right: Serendipity is a good thing. In 1991, I enrolled at the University of Minnesota with good intentions of pursuing a degree in engineering. Unfortunately, I soon discovered other facets of college life that interfered with my ability to attend classes regularly. After 2 years of dismal academic performance, I was bored and ready for a change, so I decided to take Introductory Psychology—primarily because my roommate told me it was easy. Little did I know the impact my “lazy” decision would have. Not only did I enjoy the course, I actually earned a B in it, a grade that during my first 2 years surfaced about as often as the Loch Ness monster. I took a few more psychology courses, changed my major, and ultimately graduated in 1995 with a BA in psychology.

Enthralled particularly with the psychology of learning, I moved to St. Cloud State University to pursue a Master’s degree in Applied Psychology. During this time, psychology became a learning endeavor, mostly because my advisor, Tony Marcattilio, pounded into my head that “Grades aren’t everything!” I also attended my first professional conference and taught my first class, experiences that piqued my interest in an academic career.

I then headed to Auburn University in 1998 to obtain a PhD in Experimental Psychology. At Auburn, several events further augmented my interest in academics, the most important of which occurred during my first year. After learning that my first advisor would be leaving, I approached Bill Buskist and asked if he would be my advisor. Fortunately, Bill agreed, and I soon found out we worked well together. For the next 3 years, we pursued similar interests in the teaching of psychology and behavior analysis. My interest in teaching grew even more in early 2002 when I received the McKeachie Early Career Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP).

Shortly thereafter, I accepted a tenure-track position at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA), which looked especially appealing because it emphasized undergraduate teaching and because the Psychology department was developing a Master’s degree in teaching (Saville, 2004). I have never worked harder than I did during my first year at SFA, which was the perfect place to start my academic career.

In 2004, I moved to James Madison University, where I am currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology. Although I enjoy teaching numerous courses, I typically teach
General Psychology and Research Methods. In addition, my primary research interests are in the teaching of psychology and the experimental analysis of social behavior.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I was exposed to teaching early on. My mother worked for 30 years as a teacher, and I learned from her that teaching is difficult, yet rewarding. Unfortunately, it was not a career I saw myself pursuing. I remember thinking, “Why would anyone want to be a teacher…?” If only I had been more vigilant to the words of my grandmother who always said, “You should be a teacher. You’re so good at explaining things…”

My first teaching experience came while I was at St. Cloud. Instead of completing an off-campus internship as part of the degree requirements, my advisor suggested an on-campus internship, part of which included teaching Principles of Behavior. His rationale was that it would be good practice for teaching at Auburn. Although I was initially hesitant, I quickly learned that teaching was demanding, time-consuming, and fun. Moreover, the positive feedback I received from students greatly influenced my decision to pursue an academic career. I am therefore indebted to Tony Marcattilio—an outstanding teacher, mentor, and friend—for giving me the opportunity to teach that class.

At Auburn, I became immersed in teaching. During my first year, I took a teaching seminar from Bill Buskist, in which we read McKeachie’s (2002) *Teaching Tips*, discussed effective teaching, and wrote several papers on the teaching of psychology. Concomitantly, I taught labs for Bill’s introductory social psychology course and had the opportunity to watch him captivate sections of 400-500 students—without the use of notes or a microphone! Needless to say, I learned a lot about teaching that year, and I attempted to assimilate some of Bill’s practices into my own teaching style. Some of these attempts worked, others did not. Luckily, Bill allowed us to “find our own style,” always guiding, but never pressuring us to do it a certain way. In addition, he told us not to worry when we made mistakes—it was simply part of becoming a better teacher.

I spent the next 3 years as a teaching assistant for several different courses, and I was fortunate to observe many outstanding teachers. My teaching experiences came full circle during my last year at Auburn. I once again was asked to be Bill’s teaching assistant, this time in Research Methods. By then, Bill had become not only my advisor, but my mentor, my friend, and a source of endless advice. That year, I watched him create excitement in a large class of approximately 80 students, many of whom entered the class with trepidation; I even got to lecture sometimes, which came in handy when I subsequently taught large sections of General Psychology at SFA. In addition, I took an advanced teaching course, in which I had the opportunity to delve further into the teaching literature and to compose my first statement.
of teaching philosophy, an experience that allowed me for the first time to articulate my personal views on teaching.

My interest in teaching also found its way into my research, and I spent time examining such topics as student-teacher rapport (Buskist & Saville, 2001), elements of master teaching (Buskist, Sikorski, Buckley, & Saville, 2002), and students’ textbook use (Sikorski et al., 2002). I also had the opportunity to interview Charles Brewer regarding his thoughts on teaching (Saville, 2001), quite the experience for a young teacher-scholar.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Although most of my teaching experiences were positive, I have faced several obstacles, the greatest of which plagues most faculty members: lack of time. During the last few years, I have learned that demands on my time are greater than they were in graduate school. Back then, I served as a teaching assistant and conducted research; now, I am responsible for teaching 2-3 courses, engaging in scholarship, performing service activities, and serving on thesis committees. Consequently, I often feel as if I am not able to devote as much time to my teaching as I would like. A recent comment by Brewer (2002) intimated that this may not subside any time soon:

As a beginning teacher, I thought that more experience would make [teaching] less difficult and less time-consuming. I have learned, however, that once you feel more comfortable with the courses you teach, other things will take up the time that you thought would be available (p. 503).

Fortunately, I have been able to balance my time to some extent, and I am lucky to be in a department that values effective teaching.

One way I have attempted to address this issue is by meshing teaching and scholarship (Halpern et al., 1998), specifically by conducting research on effective teaching practices (e.g., Saville, Zinn, & Elliott, in press; Saville, Zinn, Neef, Van Norman, & Ferreri, 2005). In this sense, the classroom has become my laboratory, my data the assessment outcomes (e.g., exam scores) that I would normally collect. As such, I no longer view my work as an either-or proposition in which teaching necessarily precludes scholarship or vice versa.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Reflecting on my personal beliefs about teaching, I realize now that I think about teaching much differently than I did when I first started college. Back then, I failed to comprehend the impact teachers could have on their students’ lives. Paradoxically, I held this belief even though my mother was a teacher. Now, approximately 8 years after my first teaching experience, I believe that teachers have the capacity to impact the life of each student who enters their classrooms.
As such, my teaching philosophy revolves around three central themes. First, I believe that passion is essential for pedagogical success. Just as I became interested in psychology by listening to the passionate lectures of my teachers, I too believe I can excite my students by being passionate. Second, I believe that student-teacher rapport is essential to learning, and I take great steps to establish rapport with my students. Finally, I believe that teaching is most effective when viewed as only one-half of a continuously evolving social exchange relationship. Conceptualized as such, it is easy to see how teachers and students can profoundly influence one another.

Within this context, there are three primary goals I hope to achieve each semester. First, I want my students to learn, and I am willing to do almost anything to achieve this goal. Second, I want students to enjoy my classes to the point that they want to investigate psychology further. Finally, I want my students to think critically about the material, and I want this skill to generalize to other parts of their lives. Although I may not inspire every student who enters my classroom, if I can achieve these goals, even to some extent, I will consider my time well spent.

In an attempt to achieve these goals, my teaching style has undergone considerable transformation in the last few years. I used to rely on lecture-based methods, simply because that is what my teachers typically used. Although I received positive feedback from students, I realized I needed to expand my repertoire if I wanted to become a better teacher. Consequently, after watching Bill Buskist successfully use problem-solving in his Research Methods course, I adopted a similar approach, spending more time engaging in discussion with my students. In the summer of 2003, I adopted interteaching (Boyce & Hineline, 2002), a behavior-analytic method of classroom instruction, into one of my classes. Not only did my students enjoy interteaching, I did too, and I subsequently incorporated it into all of my classes and into my research program (e.g., Saville et al., in press).

Although the methods I use have changed, my affection for teaching has not, and I continue to find it rewarding for two primary reasons. First and foremost, I enjoy helping students who may be lost as I was during my first years of college. Although the rewards come intermittently, there is nothing better than hearing students say how much they enjoyed my class or how I influenced them to become psychology majors. Second, I enjoy the freedom that comes with teaching—a freedom that comes with being able to structure my classes a certain way, teach subjects I find most interesting, and conduct research on topics that appeal to me. As Taylor and Martin (2004) recently stated, “Unlike most jobs, a faculty position…gives you considerable discretion in choosing what problems you want to study and what tasks you want to do next” (p. 386). Ultimately, teaching gives me a sense of freedom I would not find in any other profession.
Along with the rewards, however, come certain frustrations. Possibly the biggest frustration I experience is when students do not enjoy the subject matter as much as I do. Although I attempt to stimulate my students each semester, I am not always successful, and it can be disheartening when they do not find psychology as fascinating as I do. I have found that spending additional time explaining to students how certain material is relevant to their lives can be enough to spark an interest, although it does not alleviate the situation completely.

I also become frustrated when students focus solely on obtaining a good grade, often at the expense of acquiring knowledge. Given the current emphasis on test scores, however, this tendency is not surprising, but when it leads students to engage in questionable practices (e.g., cheating) or to nitpick about every quarter-point on a 50-point exam, I quickly become perturbed. At times, I feel like Dewey Finn (Jack Black) in the movie School of Rock when he tells one of his students, “…if you grade grub one more time, I will send you back to the first grade.” As a remedy, I spend a considerable amount of time preaching to students the importance of learning simply for learning’s sake. Some students “see the light” and come to realize why learning is important; others do not. Unfortunately, it is sometimes hard to modify a well-established belief in a semester or two.

Although these experiences can be frustrating, they also allow me to reflect on my teaching and find ways to improve it. Fortunately, there are several excellent resources that I have found especially helpful: (a) Teaching of Psychology (ToP), which always contains insightful articles; (b) various teaching-related books including those by McKeachie (2002), Davis (1993), Davis and Buskist (2002), and Perlman, McCann, and McFadden (1999, 2004); and (c) Darley, Zanna, and Roediger’s (2004) The Compleat Academic, which offers advice not only on teaching, but on other issues important to new academicians.

In addition, several other activities have given me the opportunity to reflect on my teaching. First, the invitation to write book chapters on teaching (e.g., Saville, 2004; Zinn & Saville, in press) has forced me to examine my own practices. Second, serving as a Guest Reviewer for ToP has allowed me to read extensively on topics central to the teaching of psychology and to identify different practices that I can incorporate into my own classes. Third, regularly attending teaching-related conferences provides an opportunity to discuss teaching with colleagues, and I always leave these conferences with renewed vigor. Finally, as co-editor (along with Tracy Zinn) of E-xcellence in Teaching, a monthly e-column published on the PsychTeacher electronic discussion list, I have been able to work closely with leaders in the field to promote ideas on effective teaching.
Advice for New Teachers

Because I still define myself as a “new” teacher, it is strange to be offering advice to other new teachers, many of whom have been teaching nearly as long as I have. However, because I am relatively new, I am in the position to offer words of advice from the vantage point of someone who only embarked on an academic career 3 years ago. As such, I offer two primary pieces of advice to new teachers.

Be enthusiastic

I strongly believe that enthusiasm is integral for success in any facet of life. Similarly, enthusiasm for teaching is a characteristic that should be an essential part of your repertoire (see Brewer, 1982; Buskist et al., 2002). Without enthusiasm, it is unlikely that you will be able to convey the importance of your message; if you are not enthused about the subject matter, it is unlikely that your students will be either. Always remember that teaching is a “two-way street.” If students are excited about the material, it is likely that you will also become more excited about teaching. Thus, by showing enthusiasm for teaching, a perpetual feedback loop will result, whereby both you and your students will continually be excited about psychology.

Consistently strive to improve your teaching performance

As a graduate teaching assistant with a pending dissertation deadline or a new faculty member with numerous meetings in the upcoming week, it may be easy to neglect your teaching. Do not let it happen. Instead, make it a priority consistently to improve your teaching skills.

How might a busy graduate student or new faculty member go about achieving this goal, especially when time is limited? First, read about effective teaching. Numerous books and journals provide a wealth of information on ways to improve your teaching performance (see Saville & Buskist, 2004, for a list of “essential readings” as suggested by members of the ToP editorial board).

Second, obtain feedback from students, peers, and faculty as often as possible. Most colleges and universities make use of end-of-the-semester student evaluations to help appraise their teachers’ performances. Unfortunately, end-of-the-semester evaluations do little to benefit students during the semester. Consequently, you may have to obtain feedback from students in other ways (see McKeachie, 2002). In addition, ask your peers or teaching mentors to observe (and even videotape) your teaching (Buskist, Tears, Davis, & Rodrigue, 2002; Saville, 2004). Although daunting at first, such feedback will ultimately help to improve your classroom skills.
Finally, observe and learn from other teachers. Not only will you learn what works effectively for them, you may also acquire a new skill. In my interview with Charles Brewer (Saville, 2001), I asked him how teachers could improve their teaching effectiveness, to which he provided an enlightening answer:

Another thing that I have found helpful—and I still do this—is to observe other teachers with different styles. Last year, for example, I visited classes taught by a philosopher, a Russian historian, and a sociologist simply because they were reputed to be good teachers. I got useful information during each visit (p. 234).

If someone with the teaching expertise of Charles Brewer continually strives to improve his teaching performance, it seems a safe bet that new (as well as experienced) teachers would do well to do the same.

Final Thoughts

I agree with Buskist, Benson, and Sikorski (2005): Teaching is a calling. When I first entered graduate school, I had no intentions of pursuing an academic career. Now, nearly 9 years later, I see an exciting future, one in which I will have the opportunity to influence students the way my psychology professors influenced me. If I can have half the influence on my students that my professors had on me, I will consider my time in the classroom well spent. Last, although I would never advocate laziness—a characteristic that in my opinion rarely produces positive outcomes—I would be remiss to say that it is never functional: If it were not for my lazy decision to take Introductory Psychology back at the University of Minnesota, I likely would not be in the fortunate position I am today.

References


I remember distinctly my first day in the classroom as a teacher of psychology. It represents one of those crystal clear memories that never fades with time. I had stayed up the entire night before attempting to match names with faces from the student picture roll that I had received that day. I thought I might work toward acquiring an edge by remembering all of my students’ names right away. I had already planned my personal schedule for the next three weeks. My plan for the first class, feeble in retrospect, was for me to present a listing of controversial psychological theories and concepts and encourage students to discuss and challenge them. The grayish circles beneath my eyes, which would become a trademark of mine throughout graduate school, told the story of a sleepless night characterized by intermittent bouts of frustration, preparation, rumination, and anticipation. After all that, the first comment offered by a student was simple, but excruciating. Only three minutes into my “discussion,” he asked if I thought I was “a little too young to be keeping the entire class on the first day.” All that time I spent the night before, and not once did I even consider that they would not want to hear me. Some say that life comes full circle. As my travels continue, I am learning that this old adage has some truth to it. Asking me to write alongside some of the most respected psychology teachers in the country leaves me feeling excited and honored. The truth is that I am still a graduate student concluding my training in Clinical Psychology at Auburn University. Through my involvement with The Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division 2 of the American Psychological Association [APA]), I have enjoyed developing my personal and professional identity as a teacher of psychology. I worked hard to be and active contributor to STP, and some excellent teachers took notice (Linda Noble, Bill Hill, Charles Brewer, Bill Buskist). Our STP task force on Early Career Development evolved into the Graduate Student Teaching Association (GSTA). I was eventually privileged to be nominated as the first GSTA Chairman, had a voting interest on the Executive Committee, and played a small role in providing needed resources to beginning teachers (Prieto & Meyers, 1999). I became involved in scholarly activities on teaching-related issues, and even began corresponding with instructors who I felt had influenced my teaching considerably (e.g., Charles Brewer, James Korn, Linda Noble). My student colleagues at Auburn University have helped me develop as a teacher and person, and eventually voted me as the Graduate Teaching Assistant of the Year for 1999 and as Most Devoted Graduate Student in 2004. In 2004, I was also awarded the McKeachie Early Career...
Award, an honor that the STP bestows upon individuals beginning their career as a teacher of psychology.

Whether it has been during my practicum experiences, clinical internship, conference presentations, writing ventures, or therapy experiences, my job has been to be humbled, although with humility has come increased drive. Like my father and grandfather before me, who together have kept their gas station running in my hometown for over 50 years, I can work and prepare. With dutiful effort, and my good fortune to become associated with passionate mentors, I have managed to become more confident, mindful, and tactful as a teacher. Perhaps the journey that I have undertaken is similar to the one followed by many in our field. Just maybe, I might be able to resonate with graduate students and beginning teachers of psychology. In short, my story is probably a lot like yours.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I learned that I was teaching two classes, Introduction to Psychology and an Experimental Psychology Laboratory class, only three days prior to the beginning of the semester. I received the textbooks, a couple of sample syllabi, and wishes of good luck from the faculty at my Master’s program. I had two primary goals when I taught then. First, and most important, I felt that it was imperative for me to cover as much material as possible, which meant that I would, at least briefly during the course of my lectures, verbalize the answers to every question that would be posed on every examination or quiz. I then would prepare what I believe to be the single most prolific collection of lecture notes ever constructed by a college teacher in any discipline. Without exaggerating a bit, I wrote out my lectures word-for-word. In fact, I used colored pens to highlight places where I would change the intonation of my voice for emphasis. I began to notice that students were not taking notes. Instead, they were bringing their textbooks to class and merely highlighting sections that I mentioned. After all, those passages were guaranteed to be on the test. Students in my earliest classes had no grade contingent consequences for failing to read their texts critically (Sikorski, Rich, Saville, Buskist, Drogan, & Davis, 2002).

I also wanted to be available to my students. I had been in college long enough to know what it felt like to have a teacher who was approachable and helpful. I desired to be accountable for my students’ success, yet I am not certain that they learned much beyond how to succeed in my classes. It was only later when I read about and saw how one’s most useful life lessons can be taught during office hours as opposed to the classroom (see McKeachie, 1999).

I was proud when my first set of students evaluated me well. They described me as helpful, motivated, meticulous, and dedicated. When I moved to Auburn University for my
doctoral training, I was thrilled to learn that I was assigned to be a teaching assistant in a Social Psychology course during my first semester. After all, I knew I could do this. I was a good teacher according to my students; and I enjoyed the preparatory work, lecturing, and advising more than anything I had done in graduate school. In fact, I decided after that year, that I would strive to be a professor of psychology. I had found my calling, and I thought I was damn good at it. Then, I met Bill Buskist. It would not be long till I would really be learning to teach.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

At Auburn University, all first-year graduate students in the psychology graduate programs are required to teach. We all shared an office and taught sections of an introductory Social Psychology course led by Buskist. I read the textbook for the course, and took detailed notes on the chapters, several weeks before stepping foot on the Auburn campus. I wanted to be ready in case Buskist grilled us about the course during the first week. This teaching exercise would be no walk in the park. I was informed that intensive supervision of my duties in the classroom would be provided. Not only would Buskist visit our classrooms and observe us teach, but he also led a weekly course in which he would address questions about common dilemmas encountered while teaching. We were required to create our personal teaching portfolios and deliver presentations to our peers on topics in psychology. These presentations would be rated by our peers and by Buskist on several criteria. The assigned text for the course was McKeachie’s (1999) classic, Teaching Tips.

Of all the early demands that were placed on me during the beginning of my graduate training at Auburn, teaching was the one in which I felt best prepared to succeed. Most of my graduate student colleagues had never even taught a course in college, and many openly expressed their reservations about teaching students who were not much older or wiser than themselves. I felt as if I was much further along than that. I had been the teacher of record for two college courses already. I had learned how to structure office hours, discourage cheating, catch cheaters, prepare examinations, develop lectures, deliver lectures, and help students succeed in my course. To be honest, I was more worried about statistics and grasping the mountains of complicated readings that I was expected to review each night for my graduate courses.

I spent a considerable amount of time constructing my first lecture that Buskist and my student peers would rate. I decided to speak about relaxation techniques, and even included an exercise in which I would lead my audience into a deep and everlasting calm. I wrote out the entire lecture and did not spare a single detail. To be honest, I felt like it was a homerun. My student peers offered feedback on how detailed my talk had been, and others
indicated that I was well prepared for the task. Yahhhhhhtzeeeee! No problem, another link in the restraining chain of graduate school had been broken.

Buskist delivered his feedback in his office, face-to-face, with no one else around. He held a clipboard in his hand with a rating form attached. On the top of the form, the name ‘SIKORSKI’ was written in capital letters. He videotaped our talks, and sure enough, he had a television and VCR in his office with my tape cued up. Upon sitting down, he immediately began playing the tape. It was not playing for long. In fact, we only ended up getting through about 1/5th of my lecture, as he repeatedly stopped the tape to call my attention to mechanical errors that I had committed. Rather than praise me for my detailed notes, he pointed out how I was reading my lecture word-for-word. He laughed when suggesting that I probably wrote down my jokes before using them. In fact, I had. He observed how infrequently I moved from the lectern, and pointed at my face on the screen to highlight how my expression rarely changed during the lecture. His count indicated that I had used the word ‘OK’ exactly 41 times, and he then queried me on why I had my hands in my pockets throughout. According to Buskist, I came across insincerely because I was trying to convince myself and my students that I was someone else; someone smarter and more respectable.

As he concluded the massacre, I mean meeting, he leaned in closely as if he had something important to say. I braced for the dagger, yet he had now begun the process of building me back up. His praise was not specific like his criticism, it was vast and meaningful. His compliments pertained to passion, knowledge, and accountability. He stressed how obvious it was that I enjoyed teaching, and urged me to take my interests and broaden them. He referred me to teaching scholars like Bill McKeachie, Charles Brewer, and Jim Korn, and stressed that these were psychologists who acquired something beautiful and mysterious as they learned to teach. I read what he referred me to, and I got it. For too long, I had been leaping over obstacles placed in front of me, yet I always landed feeling the same as I did when the leap began. All I was doing was overcoming the obstacles of graduate school, not finding ways to grow, be challenged, and improve as a person and a professional.

That Friday, during my lecture, I brought only an outline of my talk to guide me. On top of the outline, I wrote the words “DON’T SAY OK” in capital letters. I walked all around the room, even in the back. My students followed me with their eyes. To my surprise, I survived. Students began to ask questions, loosened up, laughed, and participated in applying their readings to things in which they were interested. I let them do it. Questions in office hours began differently. The year before, students always began by inquiring whether there was a good chance that a term or theory would be on the examination. More frequently now, students recounted how something we discussed in class had popped up last weekend while they were at the bar, a party, or talking to their crazy uncle. I was having a lot of fun. These
minor changes I made were working. More importantly, my worldview was changing, and my focus was broadening past myself and my accomplishments. My students came into focus. I wanted to harness my privilege to influence their lives.

The Teaching Psychology class continued throughout my first year. I found myself doing work for it first. I enjoyed it so much that I was using it as an excuse to procrastinate for my other classes. My “lectures” were evolving into 50 minute discussion/activity sessions, and my students were responding well. I was fascinated by how a couple of minor mechanical changes could deliver such huge rewards, so I kept changing and trying to improve. I read more about teaching, shared my ideas with others about what I had read, and spent a considerable amount of time amassing what I had read into a voluminous teaching portfolio. I took another teaching class. I spent most of these classes arguing and yelling with other student colleagues who were interested in teaching. It was more than just a class now.

For the first time in my academic life, I was not just doing work toward a desired end. I was not keeping track of my publications or comparing myself to anyone else in any way when it came to my teaching. I was just doing what I wanted to do. There was no end in sight, I was simply happy, content, and interested doing work on teaching and hanging around teachers. I made sure to always reserve time to read, write, and think about teaching. In being myself, I was creating an honest professional identity. In living life the way I wished, I found a more supreme sense of personal fulfillment and happiness.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My statement of teaching philosophy describes how I approach teaching and learning in the classroom, and it applies to the teaching and learning that I do in other life contexts. Whether I am working with a client in therapy, struggling with cluster analysis and structural equation modeling, or teaching college freshmen, the goal must be learning. Not just for the audience, but for me as well. There is something truly liberating about doing what I do and loving it. There is no award, accolade, or experience that can possibly represent the end of a teacher’s journey. Individual minds, and our collective society, need teachers. We, as psychologists, are supposed to be the experts when it comes to things like thinking, behaving, feeling, and learning. Thus, we are in a truly unique position to apply these principles to our work with students (Sikorski & Keeley, 2003). What a grand tapestry upon which to work. Indeed the future is our tapestry, for ourselves and those whom we serve.

The honor of receiving the 2004 Wilbert J. McKeachie Early Career Award occurred during a beautiful ceremony in Hawaii at the APA conference. When I stood up to get that award, I looked down to see people like Charles Brewer and Jim Korn in the audience. They were happy, and looked at me in a manner to suggest that they knew what I was feeling.
Either that or they were laughing because Buskist had convinced me that everyone would be wearing suits in the sweltering heat. When I arrived as the only suit amongst a sea of bright Hawaiian shirts, it was clear I had been had.

Advice and Final Thoughts

I wish that I would have learned earlier that I am in charge of my career and my life. Sure, there will always be hoops to go through. You might be asked to do things that you do not want to do. Yet, you are always in charge of what your choices. We can decide how accountable we will be in trying to impact our students, and to be sure, our society. If you think you can make a difference teaching, and you find it fun, then do what I did. Get feedback on your teaching, find a teaching mentor who is willing to help, and then join STP and rub elbows with people who teach better than you. Use principles that you learned about in your graduate curriculum in psychology when you are in the classroom (e.g., Halpern et al., 1998). Model hard work, accountability, and flexibility for your students. Conduct research on teaching, and exert effort toward really watching how others speak and teach. You will inevitably learn something helpful.

References


I have been Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology at Kennesaw State University (Kennesaw, GA) since July, 2003. Prior to that time, I taught at Ouachita Baptist University (Arkadelphia, AR) for 26 years, advancing to the rank of Professor and serving as chair of that department for almost 20 years. I received a BS in Psychology from University of Houston in 1973; I earned my PhD from Texas Tech University in Experimental Psychology (specialty in human learning and memory) in 1978. I have been active in Southwestern Psychological Association, serving as its President in 1990-91. I have also been highly active in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP), serving as Membership Chair and Fellows Chair; I have served as Editor of STP’s journal (*Teaching of Psychology*) since 1997.

I have been elected as a Fellow of Divisions 1 (General) and 2 (Teaching) of the American Psychological Association (APA). In 2002, I was honored to give the teaching-oriented Harry Kirke Wolfe address at APA. While at Ouachita, I won a Sears-Roebuck Foundation Teaching Excellence and Campus Leadership Award. I am the author of a critical thinking book (*Challenging Your Preconceptions*) and co-author of two research texts (*The Psychologist as Detective: An Introduction to Conducting Research in Psychology* and *Introduction to Statistics and Research Methods: Becoming a Psychological Detective*). In addition, I have edited the instructor’s resource package for Wayne Weiten’s introductory psychology text throughout its six editions.

**My Early Development as a Teacher**

Unlike many teachers, I had not really thought of a career in teaching until graduate school. As an undergraduate, I had planned on obtaining a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling until a faculty member at University of Houston asked me about my GRE scores and then recommended that I pursue a PhD. So, on fairly short notice, I revised my plans and applied to experimental psychology programs around Texas. I was accepted into the social psychology program at Texas Tech; I shifted to learning and memory because my graduate school mentor, Phil Marshall, offered me a research assistantship when I arrived at Tech. After some time in the program, it dawned on me that teaching was the most likely way to make a living with an experimental PhD. During my last 2 years at Tech, I held a teaching assistantship, which required taking the department’s teaching course. Interestingly, the course was taught in PSI format; there was little, if any, practical, hands-on experience in the
class—I do not remember even having to give a lecture. All I truly remember from the course is that it introduced me to Bill McKeachie’s *Teaching Tips* (1969). Further, my assistantship entailed serving as a lab assistant for a research course. There was no classroom teaching involved—just serving as a resource and tutor for students who had questions or who were having trouble with the course. During my last semester at Tech, I actually taught my first course. I drove to a small college 40 miles to the north 2 days a week and taught Experimental Psychology. I had no supervision or oversight in that experience, so I basically taught myself to teach as I went along.

Although I had plenty of role models for teaching and people who served as mentors for my research experience and professional development, I never really had a teaching mentor. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, at least in my experience, people did not spend much time talking about teaching. My teaching life took a giant turn, however, one day in 1984 when I picked up my mail. I found a brochure advertising the Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology (MACTOP) in Evansville, Indiana. The program looked interesting, so I decided to attend. Twenty-plus years and countless (almost) teaching conferences later, I credit the vast majority of my development as a teacher to people I met and observed at these conferences. Two things stick in my mind from that first teaching conference in Evansville. First, I learned that *Teaching of Psychology (ToP)* existed. I started subscribing by joining Division Two and have benefited immeasurably by gleaning many ideas from the pages of the journal. Oddly enough, I now find myself editing that journal. (This transition reminds me somewhat of the old joke: “A few years ago I couldn’t even spell psychologist, and now I are one.”)

The second thing that sticks in my mind from the first MACTOP is a story that Arno Wittig (Ball State) told during his presentation. He talked about a time that he was teaching in General Psychology about disorders. He was talking about mania, and the students seemed uninterested. In desperation, he jumped up on the long tables in class and ran back and forth to simulate mania, knocking students’ notebooks and books off the table in the process. He certainly got the students’ attention. However, the point of his MACTOP story became clear when he said that, a few years later, a student stopped him on campus—the student said that he had been in that class and still remembered Arno running around like a madman. Arno was pleased, but proceeded to ask the critical question: “Do you remember what I was talking about?” The student said “No, but I remember you running around like crazy!”

Arno’s story registered with me on multiple levels. It made me think, for the first time, about a deeper level of assessment in the classroom. How do we, as teachers, know that what we do actually accomplishes what we want it to do? This thought led me to think about the possibility of not only finding the answer to that question but also to the notion that asking
and answering such questions was research worthy of being labeled scholarship. All scholarship did not have to consist of asking minute questions in the lab as I learned to do in graduate school. Even today, Arno’s presentation continues to affect me. As Editor of ToP, I have increasingly asked authors to go beyond simple student affective responses to provide evidence that their teaching ideas actually work. In summary, attending the first MACTOP started me down the road toward the scholarship of teaching.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I believe that I have faced a couple of major obstacles in my development as a teacher: isolation and lack of a mentor. The isolation I experienced came as a result of my first job at Ouachita—the Psychology Department consisted of only three faculty members (counting me). The other two faculty teaching psychology actually had seminary degrees, so I was the only PhD-level psychologist on the faculty. Thus, I had no one with whom to discuss psychology-related topics. Although Ouachita was a teaching institution with a heavy teaching load (I began my career with a 5/4 teaching load), there was no forum or other formal institution devoted to dealing with teaching. One of the benefits of the isolation was that I developed friendships and interests across disciplinary boundaries. Still, we did not talk much about teaching.

I previously mentioned the lack of a teaching mentor throughout graduate school. The isolation at Ouachita and lack of formal attention to teaching prolonged this feeling of not having a mentor. At the same time, I was feeling less and less like the type of psychologist I had trained to be in graduate school. Teaching nine courses a year (typically without any repeats) and working closely with students in supervising their research left no time to develop the in-depth programmatic research that I learned about and read during graduate school.

Again, it was the advent of teaching conferences that helped me to define myself both as a teacher and as a psychologist. Teaching conferences helped alleviate the isolation I felt at Ouachita. Over the years, I have attended teaching conferences in Indiana (MACTOP), Illinois and Florida (National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology), Georgia (Southeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology), and New York (Northeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology). In the early 1990s, I even co-founded (with Steve Davis of Emporia State University and John Hall of Texas Wesleyan University) a teaching conference in Fort Worth, Texas (Southwest Conference for Teachers of Psychology). I made numerous contacts with like-minded individuals at these conferences over the years. Not only did these contacts help reduce my isolation, they also served as mentors, role models, and colleagues for teaching. The advantage of knowing many people devoted to teaching is that I can access
information from experts on virtually any topic regarding teaching. Importantly, the conferences allowed me to once again feel good about myself as a psychologist—I could now work on scholarly projects that were directly related to my demanding job of teaching.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

During my career, I have mostly taught research-oriented courses. At Ouachita, I taught the entire research sequence: Statistics, Experimental Psychology, and Research Methods. Thus, I am most experienced teaching the courses that psychology majors least want to take, and as a result, one of my core goals of teaching is having students develop an appreciation for and interest in research in the discipline. Given that most psychology students want to “work with people” in some way, research is usually low on their interest list. I try to have them see that “working with people” has to be based on research—without research evidence to back a therapeutic approach, people may use approaches such as rebirthing therapy, which led to deaths in Colorado and North Carolina. In addition, it is my belief that learning about and appreciating research increases students’ critical thinking skills.

Another core goal of my teaching is having students learn to apply the principles that they learn in class to the everyday world. If students only memorize definitions and principles but cannot apply them to the real world, then I feel that I have failed them. For example, when I teach Social Psychology, I spend a good deal of time covering cognitive errors. If students can define and describe cognitive errors but cannot recognize them in operation, then those students have not gotten anything out of my class that will help them in life. Coming to this goal has probably brought about the greatest change in my teaching over the years. For many years, I believed that my job was to teach students everything that was in the book, plus all the important information that was not in that particular book. I presented fact after fact in class, typically failing to get all the way through the text because there was simply too much to present (and for students to learn). Focusing more on application has forced me to teach less because, in addition to presenting information, I find that I have to help students learn to apply the information. Thus, I try to teach more by teaching less.

My rewards from teaching are based on my core goals. When I see students getting turned on to research, asking research-related questions, I feel that I have done my job and earned my pay for that day. When I talk to students who are considering research-related careers rather than “only” helping people, I feel that I have had some impact. One of the greatest rewards has come when students have come back to visit from their graduate programs and have talked about how well prepared they were for statistics or research classes compared to their classmates. As far as my application goal is concerned, I feel rewarded when a student asks a good application-type question in class or writes an essay on a test
using a principle or a concept in a way that I had not considered previously. In my Social Psychology class, students complete a project in which they apply 12 principles from the class to the real world. As I read their different entries, I invariably come up with some good examples to use the next time I teach the class. Of course, my frustrations are also linked to my core goals. Students who compartmentalize the department’s research courses from their “fun” or “interesting” classes are quite frustrating. At Kennesaw, we are working on a departmental mission to teach scientific psychology across the curriculum. We hope to disabuse students of the notion that research and applied psychology are somehow different and are not related.

Another major change in my teaching over time is my intentionality. Based on reading about and working with assessment, I think much more about what I want to accomplish in courses and even in individual class meetings. In the old days, I simply went to class to teach some material. Now, I am much more likely to develop specific goals as I think about teaching the material. To paraphrase Charles Brewer, I find that I am much more likely to get where I want to be if I know first where I am going. If teachers do not think about their goals, they are unlikely to attain them. Thus, I find myself being much more intentional with my classes than I used to be. I have found that many of my assignments have changed over time because of teaching with more intentionality. Even though I have long wanted students to apply material that they learned in my classes, I formerly just assumed that it was happening. However, as I became more intentional, I decided that I needed to determine whether students were actually learning to apply the material. Therefore, I developed assignments that more directly measured whether students could apply the material from class. I am much less likely to have students write a simple term paper. Instead, if I give a term paper assignment, the last third of the paper is an application section in which they write about how the topic and the related information apply to the real world.

In most courses, I make assignments other than term papers. As I mentioned previously, social psychology students compose a journal of 12 applications of social psychology phenomena to the real world. Students in my Learning class completed a behavior modification program, using themselves, friends, or pets as the targets of the project. Not only do these types of projects flow from my intentionality about my course goals, they also mesh well with the current emphasis in assessment. In my opinion, the best assessment today focuses not on what we do as teachers, but instead on what students learn. All the best teaching techniques, activities, and assignments are useless if students do not learn from them. In fact, at Kennesaw, we have shifted from talking about assessment and instead focus on assurance of learning. This shift in assessment has the potential to transform much of what we
do in higher education. The future is exciting, thanks in part to changes in assessment practices.

An important lesson I have learned about teaching is that, to be done well, it requires continuous monitoring and improvement. I pay attention to my student evaluations—students are the most knowledgeable people about what we are doing. I would never recommend that faculty members do everything that students suggest on their evaluations, but I do recommend that they pay attention to the suggestions. When I read the same comment from multiple students, I figure that they may be giving me valuable information. Another important activity for teaching improvement is exposing myself to new ideas. The primary ways I seek out new ideas are by attending teaching conferences and presentations and by reading. I have already addressed the advantages of teaching conferences, so I will not belabor that point further. Kennesaw is fortunate to have a strong teaching focus, so teaching merits a good deal of attention here. The university supports a Center on Excellence in Teaching and Learning, so I have the chance to attend teaching-related workshops on my own campus. As far as reading is concerned, I read hundreds of ToP manuscripts every year—all have the potential to affect my teaching in some way. There are also many excellent books available on teaching-related topics; I avail myself of those resources when I can find the time.

Advice for New Teachers

I hope you find something of value in my advice for new teachers. At the same time, please pay close attention to my first piece of advice—you must find what works for you.

1. Develop your own style. Trying to copy someone you respect may lead you to be a poor copy of a good teacher. All styles do not fit all people.

2. Get as much experience as you can. As with many tasks, one of the most important factors is practice. You should get better with experience.

3. Do not fear failure (at the same time, do not embrace failure). If you fear failure, you probably will not try new things in your teaching. Experimentation sometimes allows you to find approaches or techniques that you will incorporate in your repertoire. By the same token, experimentation allows you to discover what does not work for you.

4. Be intentional. Think about what you want to accomplish and develop a plan to accomplish it. Students may not develop in ways that you want if you hope they “pick it up” incidentally.

5. Develop a teaching support group. Talking with other faculty about teaching can invigorate your teaching, give you new ideas to try, provide you with feedback about ideas you would like to try, as well as many other benefits.
Depending on your situation, this group can be composed of other new teachers or seasoned veterans, colleagues from your department or other departments or even other campuses, and so on. The important element is not the composition of the group but the willingness of the group to celebrate teaching.

6. Enjoy yourself! You are fortunate to have a job that is challenging and rewarding as well as being just plain fun.

Final Thoughts

When I look back on my career, I am amazed at where I now find myself and at the opportunities I have had. In graduate school, I never would have predicted what has happened. Thus, my final piece of advice: Be open to new and varied opportunities—you never know where they will lead you.

References


It Started with the Root Feeders: A Teacher’s Tale

C. R. Snyder
University of Kansas

Toward the beginning of the summer of 1951, there was a train derailment a few blocks away from our house in Council Bluffs, Iowa. I was six years old, and I immediately took off with my Red Flyer wagon and my dog Blackie to view the wreck. When I got there, I saw railroad boxcars overturned, and their contents spewed all around. Huge piles of root feeders caught my attention, and I asked a railroad official if I could have them. “Sure kid,” he replied, and with that I made trip after trip transporting the root feeders back to our three-room house. I carried about eight root feeders in my wagon each time, until I finally had about 250 piled in our small back yard.

A root feeder has a compartment resting at the top of a thin, two-foot long metal tube. A stick of fertilizer is placed in the compartment. A water hose is attached to the fertilizer compartment, and the root feeder then is pushed into the ground. When the water is turned on, the fertilizer dissolves and goes through the end of the tube to the roots of the bushes or plants.

Walking door to door, I sold the root feeders for $.75 each, along with a box of fertilizer for $.25. I spent the whole summer of ‘51 selling root feeders. On a Friday evening at the end of the summer, my dad had returned from a week on the road as a traveling salesman. Tired, he slumped into “his” favorite chair (for those who remember the television comedy “Archie Bunker,” this chair was similar to Archie’s chair). In walked my mom, exhausted from having taught school. She then plopped down into “her” favored chair.

This seemed like a good time to make my announcement: “Remember the root feeders and fertilizer plug? Well, I’ve sold all of them.”

“What a salesman!” exulted my dad.

He then asked his big question, “How much did you make?”

“What don’t know,” I responded, “I didn’t keep track.”

Clearly disappointed, my dad asked where the money had gone.

“Beyond the pop, baseball cards, and ice cream bars for me,” I replied, “I used the rest to buy treats for my pals.”

My mom broke into laughter. Trying to talk, the best she could do were some gurgling sounds. Eventually, though, she formed a sentence, “I told you that he would be a teacher! Teachers never pay much attention to money!”
She was correct, and some 50+ years later when I visit my dad, he still may ask about my income as a college teacher. He just shakes his head when I tell him what I am paid.

Just the Facts…

I currently am the Wright Distinguished Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Graduate Training Program in Clinical Psychology, The University of Kansas, Lawrence. I received my bachelor’s degree in psychology at Southern Methodist University in 1967, and my masters and doctorate degrees in clinical psychology in 1968 and 1971, respectively, from Vanderbilt University. In 1971-1972, I was a postdoctoral fellow in medical psychology at the University of California Medical Center, San Francisco. In 1972, I took an assistant professor position in the Psychology Department at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, and with good fortune, I was promoted to associate professor in 1977 and professor in 1980.

In chronological order, I have received the following teaching awards (all at the University of Kansas unless noted otherwise): Honor for the Outstanding Progressive Educator (the H. O. P. E. Award is elected by seniors) in 1991 and 2003; Louise Byrd Outstanding Graduate Educator Award, 1992; Dean’s Scholar Mentor Award, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, 1995, 1997; Fellow, American Psychological Association (APA), Society for the Teaching of Psychology (Division 2), 1995; W. T. Kemper Fellowship for Teaching Excellence, 1997; Fowler Award for Outstanding Graduate Educator, APA, 2000; Byron T. Shutz Distinguished Teaching Award, 2001; Kansas Professor of the Year Award, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2001; Commencement Address Speaker, University of Kansas, 2001; Outstanding Psychology Teacher in State, Kansas Psychological Association, 2002; Fellow in Teaching, Templin Hall Honors Scholars, 2002-2003; Fellow Mentor, Madison & Lila Self Graduate Honors Program, 2002-2005; Teaching of Psychology Address, STP, APA Convention, 2003; Outstanding Mentor Award in Social Sciences, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 2003; Robert S. Daniel Teaching Excellence Award, STP, 2004; Byron A. Alexander Graduate Mentor Award, 2004, and; Commencement Address Speaker, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2005.

During my teaching career at Kansas, I have had the privilege of chairing four postdoctoral students, 40 doctoral students, approximately 50 masters students, and about 20 predoctoral psychology honors students. My signature undergraduate course is in individual differences. In this course alone, I have taught many thousands of students—including now the children of students who took this course three decades ago. My graduate teaching has centered on the interface of clinical and social psychology, and students from several APA-approved programs at the University of Kansas take my graduate course to fulfill the APA requirements for the social bases of behavior.
My Development as a Teacher

I knew that I wanted to be a professor when I started college. A first-semester freshman at Southern Methodist University, the beginning of college was going quite well until November 22, 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I had campaigned for President Kennedy, who had unleashed much promise and excitement among young people. This event devastated me, and I told my teachers that I was going to drop out of school. I was missing most of my classes anyway, and I could not pay attention when I did attend. I do not recall my instructor’s names, but they talked me out of leaving college. Instead, they told me that I needed time to grieve, and they let me out of their classes for two weeks.

Because of their concerns and wisdom, I made it through this nightmarish initial college semester. Happily, I also made it through many more after that one. My teachers during my first college semester were wonderful role models, and it was because of them that I continued my plans to become a college teacher. They showed me that good instructors truly care about their students, and I never wavered about becoming a college teacher from that first semester onward.

Having completed my undergraduate education, I knew that graduate studies were needed in order to become a college professor. Unfortunately, however, I received no training in teaching during my graduate education, nor did I have any mentors to help me with my teaching at any time after I took an assistant professor position. I would hasten to add, however, that I did receive superb graduate school mentoring in scholarly and research matters. I regret my dearth of training as a teacher and, I have tried to give my own graduate students extensive feedback about their teaching in a variety of venues (e.g., small seminar presentations, classroom teaching, formal convention presentations, etc.).

Working with graduate students to help them develop their particular proficiencies is at the core of my positive psychology, strengths approach to mentoring (see Snyder 2002a, 2002b). The key to such mentoring, in my estimation, is a willingness to spend large amounts of time with one’s graduate students (Snyder, 2005b).

As part of my graduate courses, I also require that students give a teaching presentation in front of the class. I then give detailed feedback (one to two pages, single spaced) to students about the process and content of each presentation. It is noteworthy that these students are more likely to comment positively on this feedback than any other factor in my graduate course when they do teacher evaluations at the end of the semester.

When I was the Director of our Clinical Psychology Program, a position that I was honored to hold for 27 years, I initiated a yearly teaching award for the outstanding graduate student instructor. In fact, we conducted a fund-raising drive and secured over $10,000 for
this teaching award. The award was named after two previous graduates—Mitch Handelsman and Lori Irving—who had gone on to careers as award-winning college instructors. We then used the yearly interest money to give a sizeable financial reward and a handsome plaque for this teaching award.

I personally have been extremely lucky to have wonderful graduate students who have flourished as teachers, winning awards both when they were here at Kansas or later at their university settings. With considerable pride, I mention the following award-winning instructors: Randee Shenkel, Mitch Handelsman, Rick Ingram, Cheryl Newburg, Lori Irving, David Feldman, and Kevin Rand.

In our Psychology Department at the University of Kansas, we also have implemented a feedback mentoring system for new assistant professors. I truly enjoy mentoring assistant professors and watching their improvements as instructors. Three of my faculty mentees, Shane Lopez, Steve Ilardi, and Virgil Adams have embraced difficult teaching venues and have won teaching awards. In fact, the seniors selected Professor Ilardi just this fall as the recipient of the HOPE Award (from some 1500 instructors at the University).

Much to my pleasure, my Psychology Department also has been giving stronger emphasis to teaching when we undertake deliberations of the faculty members in regard to promotions. For example, instructors are mandated to give teacher evaluations, and these ratings, along with statements of evaluation based on firsthand observations of teaching by colleagues, are required in such promotion decisions. I would hasten to praise the University administrators also, in that they have implemented numerous teaching awards (including monetary rewards) for faculty members.

Given that I did not have any formal training in teaching or teaching mentors, I was thrown into the fire as a new assistant professor. To compound matters, I was asked to teach a large course in the topic of individual differences, an area in which I previously had neither coursework nor much experience. Pertaining to the content of this course, I read every book and article I could get that was related to this topic. In regard to the course process, I started a process that I have continued for the last 33 years. Namely, I visited other professors who were known for being excellent teachers. I learned from every one of these master teachers, and I borrowed things that I thought would work for me as a person and for the contents of my individual differences course. Every college or university has superb instructors, and based on my experiences, my guess is that they would welcome visitors who want to learn from their skills.
Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

My major teaching difficulty relates to the fact that I have to give grades. Accordingly, over the years I have used as many different approaches as I could imagine to handle grading. Unfortunately, no matter how I have conducted the grading, I believe that it has gotten in the way of my teaching in that it has undermined students’ learning. That is to say, students seem to interpret the grades as the extrinsic reason why they are learning the material, rather than the joy and usefulness of learning being the reason for such learning.

I truly have never felt any sacrifices in making the various aspects of my career work together. In particular, my research and teaching go together hand in glove. Indeed, I think that students enjoy hearing about some of the latest findings that have come from our laboratory.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My philosophy of teaching is based on four factors—care, trust, risk, and hope. Caring for the student’s welfare is a guiding principle, and I try to remember this point when interacting with my students. In turn, trust represents my students’ beliefs that they can count on me to watch out for their welfares. Likewise, without trust, I do not think that students will take risks and try new ideas. So, too, must I take risks and be willing to attempt new approaches—some of these even leading to mistakes from which I can learn (Snyder, 2002c). Finally, hope is the motivation that I endeavor to instill in my students. With hope, they can reach the goals in my course and in their lives more generally (see Snyder 2005c; Snyder & Shorey, 2002).

Over the last four decades, I have become more sympathetic with the traumatic events that students face. College often is not a tranquil existence. My students have undergone a variety of stressful events, including physical attacks, suicides and deaths of friends, siblings, and parents; physical illnesses; car accidents; rape; and psychological problems. When a student asks for special consideration after having undergone one of these stressors, I quickly agree. I think that interrogating such a student is very insensitive and I am not concerned that there may be occasional students who have lied to me about the traumatic events in their lives. Basically, it is not that students are asking to get out of the work in a course, but instead they typically only want a different time for an examination. Accordingly, I work with such students to reach graceful solutions to their stressful dilemmas (Snyder, 2005a).

The most rewarding part of teaching for me is watching a student become excited about the learning process. Given this observation, the most satisfying teaching arena is wherever such student excitement occurs—in classrooms, office visits, or any of the other arenas in which I interact with students. As I noted earlier, I find that the greatest teaching
frustrations relate to the necessity of grades. To cope with the fact that grading can turn off the learning process, I try to establish as many learning opportunities in my classes as I can that are not linked to grades per say. Students are freer and more willing to take risks in such non-graded activities.

In order to improve my teaching, each semester I talk with former students who have just completed my courses. I ask these students about what could have improved the course, and their feedback not only helps in evaluating my teaching efforts, but it also improves my teaching. Although I strongly support the process of teacher evaluations, the reality is that such student evaluations are highly influenced by the grades received in course (Clair & Snyder, 1979; Snyder & Clair, 1972). If students truly sense that you are listening to their input, I have found that they give very helpful feedback. As I noted earlier, I also watch and talk with other teachers in order to see what discoveries they have made through their own teaching efforts.

Advice for New Teachers

For those individuals who are new to the teaching process, I suggest that you build on your strengths rather than trying to “fix” weaknesses or perhaps trying to copy someone else. Find what works for you and perfect those teaching skills. Once you have located what you do well, constantly rework your material so that you have enthusiasm for it. After all, if you do not have energy for your material, you cannot expect your students to manufacture such energy.

Final Thoughts

Don’t become too enamored of the “facts.” Much of the information that I learned in graduate school, for example, no longer holds today. Rather, focus on establishing classroom environments of hope where there is a spirit of inquiry. Your students will remember this hope and spirit long after they have forgotten the specific course content that you taught.

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At the time of this writing I am a professor of psychology at John Carroll University (JCU), the Jesuit University in Cleveland. My whole career has been at JCU. I started my undergraduate education at the University of Rochester hoping to be a flute major. When this option seemed like an impossible choice, I transferred to Tufts University, became a psychology major, and graduated with election to Phi Beta Kappa. I received my MA and PhD from Case Western Reserve University in 1974 and my JD from Cleveland Marshall College of Law at Cleveland State University in 1985. During my years at John Carroll, I have had a few breaks from teaching. When I completed law school, I clerked for the Honorable Judge Ann Aldrich in the United States Court in the Northern District of Ohio. I spent 7 years as the Dean of Student Career Development and almost 2 years as the director of assessment and the coordinator of JCU’s required self-study for continued regional accreditation. Each return to full-time teaching convinced me that becoming a teacher was the right career choice.

I have had numerous opportunities to be of service to the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP). These include being president, secretary, treasurer and representative of STP to the American Psychological Association (APA) Council of Representatives, as well as numerous committee chairs.

My Early Development as a Teacher

The most important influence on my life as a teacher was my father, a professor of chemistry and chemical engineering at Case Institute of Technology (now the Case School of Engineering of Case Western Reserve University). I remember how much he loved teaching and how happy he was about the accomplishments of his students. Even though he was a prolific scholar with numerous graduate students, he always preferred to teach the introductory chemistry course. In Chemistry 101, he had the opportunity to teach the subject to fresh minds and to influence their love of chemistry and their future careers. In later years, when the lure of the corporate ladder had ended his academic career, I often thought he wished he were back in the classroom.

Several master teachers have had a large impact on my own teaching. Bernard Harleston, who taught me Experimental Psychology at Tufts, was the teacher I tried to emulate when I had my own classroom. He was a splendid teacher. He explained concepts clearly. His seemingly unbounded enthusiasm for psychology produced the same reaction in
his students. After 10 years of teaching and chairing the Psychology Department, I went back to law school part time. Here, in addition a legal education, I carefully studied what worked in the classroom and what did not. One of my law professors, Patrick Browne, in a course on Civil Procedure (which could have been deadly), taught me the value in starting the class by saying where we were going and in ending the class and starting the next with a brief summary of where we had been. I still try to use this technique, no matter how many detours we take along the way.

In my last semester in graduate school, I was thrown in to my own class, my first experience in teaching. It was sink or swim, with no experienced professor to guide me. After the course, I persuaded two adult students to critique my teaching. They were kind, but what they had to say was unsettling. I was a terrible teacher. In retrospect, I do not think I had any idea how much time a new course should take to prepare. It was then that someone told me about Bill McKeachie’s book, *Teaching Tips*. I read the book word-for-word, highlighting many lines, and starring many pages. This exercise produced a completely different mindset. Now I was ready to tackle the real thing.

I was lucky enough to find a position at a nearby university. Lucky because with a husband in a high-powered career and three young children, I had absolutely no mobility. It turned out to be an excellent decision. When I started teaching in this real job at JCU, I taught Experimental Design, Child and Adolescent Development, and Psychology 101. These were subjects in which I was up to date, being fresh out of graduate school. Although sometimes I thought I just fell in to this career, now I know it was because of the role model of my father that I came to love it so. My fondest hope was to compare notes with him in his retirement, but sadly Alzheimer’s disease had started to take his memories from him by that time. Without my father to talk to I turned again and again to Bill McKeachie for advice, first by going back to *Teaching Tips* (by now dog-eared), and later in person. It has been a privilege to know Bill and work with him through our service to the STP and APA.

**Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher**

The major obstacle I have had to overcome in my teaching has been a lingering fear from early childhood of public speaking. For several years I dreaded the first couple of minutes of every class. I conquered this fear early in my career by using audiovisual aids, especially at the beginning of the class and using visual imagery for myself. The first of these “crutches” is obvious, but the second needs some explaining.

I took an intellectual property course one summer at Harvard Law School from the well known and media savvy law professor, Arthur Miller. One morning the United States Supreme Court had just announced a prominent and controversial Supreme Court decision on
affirmative. During the break time in the class session that morning, Professor Miller stepped out in to a hallway littered with broadcasting equipment including a satellite uplink connection. He stood quietly for a moment, perhaps composing himself and gathering his thoughts. He then spoke to a national audience on one of the television networks about the significance of the decision. This image of a moment of self-composing has remained a powerful one for me. Even today, I take a moment to center myself before entering a classroom. It has had everything to do with my self-confidence and my ability to focus on student learning.

I have never thought of my work as a zero sum game. My research, service, and outreach activities (primarily the latter two) have enhanced my teaching in many ways. Fortunately, I teach in a department and at a university that also encourages and rewards this approach.

When I began teaching, I taught research design and developmental classes. After 10 years of teaching and a few stints as an expert witness in court cases involving children, I became fascinated with the legal process. I decided to take a couple of law courses at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law at Cleveland State University, which offered one of two part-time, evening law programs in the Northeast Ohio area. After just one course I was hooked, and continued on to the JD degree and then to the bar exam. When I returned to teaching after my clerkship, I proposed a course in Psychology and Law. It was offered the following semester, and has been ever since.

Several years later, I decided to restrict my small law practice to child advocacy. This entirely pro bono practice involves serving as the child’s attorney, or guardian ad litem, in cases where the parents are alleged by the county to have abused or neglected their child. Because it is felt that neither the parents’ nor the county’s attorneys can reliably represent the best interests of the child, an attorney is appointed who advocates for the child’s best interests. There is no issue of being on the most correct side in a case such as this. The following year, I was privileged to be able to add a new course to my repertoire called Children in the Legal System, a course that is made much easier to teach by this experience in the trenches with the children.

Similarly, in the late 1990s, I was elected to the American Psychological Ethics Committee, where I served for 5 years. At the same time I was appointed as the Ethics Committee liaison to the Ethics Code Revision Task Force. Although I thought I knew a lot about the APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, working with the Code both in adjudication and in the revision process taught me much more—and so again, I was fortunate enough to be able to propose and teach an Ethics in Psychology course for undergraduate psychology majors. This course clearly fits the mission of John Carroll
University. The synergy between my professional service activities and the courses I teach has been outstanding.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I have begun site visits as a consultant-evaluator for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, one of six regional accrediting associations covering a 19 state area. As new accreditation standards took effect in 2004 with a pervasive theme of assessment, I have increasingly been mindful of student learning in all of my classes. In the past I have focused on ways to improve my teaching; now I see teaching as a catalyst to spark student learning. There is no point teaching if none of the students learn. My teaching today focuses squarely on student learning, and I often stop and see if the students are really with me in the learning environment. The best I can do is open a door to the students and encourage them. They are the ones who must walk through it.

I have come to believe that if I do not cover all of the material I think is important in a course, no one but me will notice. Less material taught in an eclectic manner will produce more student learning than more material covered in a hurried lecture style. Thus, as my teaching matures, I present less content but devote more class attention to the most important material in a variety of different modalities. I am rewarded when I have piqued a student’s curiosity.

From my teaching, I find it most rewarding when I see that the light bulb has gone on in the students’ minds. I cheer when a student who has been struggling comes up with an insightful question. Like a parent, I am thrilled with my students’ progress and accomplishments. When a student wins a research award or is accepted into a wonderful graduate or law school, I could not be more proud. I am most frustrated when a student is in my class either does not want to learn or has distracting personal problems that interfere with the learning process. Nothing I can do will make a difference. I can only overcome this frustration through the realization that I can only touch so many minds, not every single one of them.

It is important to stay enthusiastic about the subject matter to keep your teaching fresh and alive. I stay enthusiastic primarily by continuing to be a learner myself. Although I am required to take a number of continuing education courses for both my psychologist and attorney licenses, I select them carefully and attend them on a regular basis. If I cannot relate them to my teaching I probably will pass them by. A course for practitioners on the recent history of the insanity defense, for example, gives me new information to use in several courses. One of the joys of teaching is being able to share new information or new insights with the students.
In addition, I attend the STP sessions at the APA and American Psychological Society (APS) meetings and always come home with new strategies for reaching the students. More important, however, is the fellowship with so many other psychologists from all over the globe that STP provides. These friendships have greatly enriched me as a person as well as my teaching. The same is true for the journal *Teaching of Psychology*.

Advice for New Teachers

To be a good or even an outstanding teacher, you must have a good grasp of the subject matter. The discipline has to be so interesting and fascinating to you that your students will feel your passion. Do not be fooled by people who say that teaching is such an easy career because once you get those lecture notes down on paper you can use them again and again, or by those who smile when they hear that there are 12 hour teaching weeks and winter, spring and summer vacations. Teaching is not easy and in fact is very difficult to do well. Here is my advice:

- Work hard.
- Love what you do.
- Care intensely about student learning.
- Have fun.
Enhancing Student Engagement in the Learning Process

Linda R. Tropp
Boston College

I received my BA from Wellesley College and my PhD in Social psychology from the University of California, Santa Cruz. I am currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Boston College, where I teach undergraduate courses on social psychology, statistics and research methods, as well as graduate and undergraduate courses on intergroup relations. For the past 10 years, my research and teaching have focused on psychological processes associated with group membership and intergroup relations, including outcomes of intergroup contact among members of minority and majority status groups, and responses to prejudice and disadvantage among members of devalued groups.

I received the 2000 McKeachie Early Career Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division Two of the American Psychological Association [APA]), as well as the 2003 Gordon W. Allport Intergroup Relations Award from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (Division Nine) for a meta-analytic study of intergroup contact effects. Within these organizations and at my home institution, I work in a range of capacities to mentor and promote the professional development of young scholars, in addition to speaking about these issues on panels organized by the APA Ad-Hoc Committee on Early Career Psychologists and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. I now serve as a member of the Governing Council of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues as well as on committees for undergraduate and graduate training at Boston College.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I think my early development as a teacher grew largely as a function of my early educational experiences. I was fortunate enough to have attended a small, private, non-traditional elementary school in the Midwest, with mixed-age classrooms rather than conventional grade levels. Our classes emphasized both independent and collaborative learning, and we benefited greatly from individualized feedback from our teachers. We also had opportunities to mentor students in the younger grades.

I believe these early experiences instilled in me a general appreciation for the learning process. I also learned that people learn and retain information in different ways, and that each person’s strengths and weaknesses affect their attempts to master new information. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, I have had an interest in teaching for just about as long as I can remember. During my elementary school years, I wanted to be an elementary school teacher;
by high school, I wanted to be a high school teacher. While other teenagers were taking on babysitting jobs, I began to work as a tutor (which I continued throughout my high school and college years). Eventually, by my junior year of college, I realized that I wanted to become a university professor. As I recall, my decision to become a university professor was largely due to two factors.

First, what appealed to me about teaching university students was the expectation that we could all approach the learning process as mature, independent thinkers. Rather than feeling responsible for trying to make students do their homework (as I imagined with high school students), I wanted to work with students who were motivated to learn as adults and who were prepared to make their own decisions regarding their academic commitments. Consistent with this view, I still remind my students that it is ultimately up to them to decide how much they are willing to invest in our coursework, while encouraging them to recognize that the more effort they put into learning the course material, the more they will get out of the course.

The second reason I became interested in teaching at the college level was because of the close attention and mentoring I received from faculty at Wellesley. I recall feeling that my professors were truly invested in my education. One particular instance stands out in my mind. I was taking a research methods course with one of my favorite professors (who later became my undergraduate thesis advisor). As part of this course, we were required to submit an extended critique of an empirical research article. Rather than simply returning the assignment to me with a grade, this professor added a brief note at the end of my paper to suggest that it was my fate to continue to do research in psychology. Had it not been for this feedback and guidance, I do not believe I would have pursued a career in psychological research and teaching at the university level.

Defining Myself as a Teacher

I have come to define my teaching role as that of a coach. To me, the role of a coach means a number of things. In part, it means that I can let my students know that I am committed to them, I care about them, and that I genuinely want them to succeed. At the same time, being a “coach” means that I can maintain high standards and make it clear to students that my primary goal is to help them realize their potential, but that it is ultimately their responsibility to work hard and give of themselves in order to succeed.

Of course, there are also the practical aspects to being a coach, such as giving students opportunities to hone their skills and providing them with feedback about where they stand and where they need to go. Students who enroll in my courses become aware of the fact that a great deal will be expected of them, and I find that they typically rise to the challenge.
Similarly, students who join my research lab soon learn (often from past generations of research assistants) that they can expect to revise draft after draft after draft of our research materials and protocols, not to mention the multiple rounds of edits that go into producing final versions of their senior theses. My sense is that students understand that although the work may be challenging or even daunting at times, it is not pointless. Rather, the work involved is designed to be directly relevant to their learning goals so that they begin to recognize that it is in their best interests to take advantage of opportunities to enhance their academic skills.

Needless to say, providing students with such opportunities to learn requires a substantial commitment of time and energy. Although I believe that undergraduate training and research can often complement each other, I also think that there can sometimes be a conflict between accomplishing all that we hope to do on the research front and providing personalized guidance and attention to students. Especially for those of us who are at the earlier stages of our careers, I think it is important to think deeply about how we wish to define our careers, and how we can incorporate teaching and mentoring into the rest of our lives as academics.

I try to make myself fully available to students when I can while making sure that I set firm limits so that I can guard the time needed to conduct independent research. Specifically, I have structured my schedule so that I preserve my best “writing hours” for research, which then allows me the freedom to schedule meetings with students during my “off hours.” Distributing my time in this manner has worked well in terms of helping me to accommodate both my research and teaching responsibilities. This schedule gives me the time I need to focus on my many important research-related activities (e.g., preparing manuscripts for publication, applying for grants). At the same time, when I meet with students, I find that I can actually enjoy the time that I spend working with them, rather than feeling like I should be spending my time engaged in other activities.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

As I reflect on what stands at the core of my teaching philosophy, one of the first themes that comes to mind is that students feel engaged in their own learning process. One of the things I find most rewarding about teaching is being able to work with students who are motivated to learn and to develop their potential. Although I believe that students should take on a great deal of responsibility for their own learning, I feel that faculty can play an important role in inspiring students to dedicate themselves to learning by demonstrating that the faculty member is engaged and invested in students’ development.
My thoughts about this issue date back to one of my earliest teaching experiences, when I was a tutor for a fifth-grader during my high school years. When I first spoke with the student’s mother about tutoring her son, she expressed concern about his ability to perform well in school and explained that she wanted me to tutor him to enhance his chances of being able to attend an ivy-league institution. At the time, I remember thinking that tutoring this student would be quite a challenge because I would need to help him overcome some academic deficiencies. However, once I began to tutor him, I found that my work largely consisted of making myself available to him for questions if and when he needed them while he sat working diligently and independently. This experience had a profound impact on me in that it showed me how simple gestures such as expressing interest in our students and showing them that we care about their development could have a powerful impact on their motivation to learn. Thus, I regularly use a variety of strategies to try to engage students, enhance their investment in the learning process, and provide them with as much detailed feedback and individualized attention as possible. Whether in the classroom or in the research laboratory, I find that the more enthusiastic and dedicated I am about working with students, the more enthusiasm and commitment they express for learning.

My sense is that these efforts help not only to establish a norm that learning is something to be valued, but that they help students recognize that their own educational development is something to be valued. Although they may be studious and accustomed to hard work, many students’ educational experiences have consisted largely of memorization and regurgitation, and many students are not used to developing and exploring their own thoughts and views. Similarly, when students stop by my office, I find that they are much more likely to ask questions concerning what they should do to get a good job rather than asking about what they should do to figure out their own interests and goals. Thus, by attempting to engage students in the learning process, I believe we may also help students to discover where their true interests lie, which could serve to guide and direct them as they consider options for the future.

Advice for New Teachers

I have two pieces of advice to offer to new teachers. First, I recommend that new teachers take some time to think about the type of relationship they would like to have with their students. It can sometimes be difficult for new teachers to learn how to manage a balance between maintaining some degree of professional distance from students and attempting to develop close mentoring relationships with them. Also, as a graduate student, I had the opportunity to serve as a teaching assistant with many different faculty in our department, and I noticed that different kinds of students tended to gravitate toward different kinds of teaching
styles. Through these experiences, I learned that there are many pathways to becoming an engaging and successful teacher, and what perhaps matters most is that faculty uncover a teaching style that is comfortable and suitable for them.

I also strongly encourage new faculty to discuss their expectations with students, so that faculty and students have a shared sense of what to expect as they work together. Whether in the classroom or in the research laboratory, I take efforts to communicate my expectations to students, so that they feel better prepared and able to meet demands set before them, and so that I can feel more entitled to demand a certain level of performance from them. For example, I usually prepare study guides for my students to help prepare them for course examinations, to give them a sense of the topics to be covered and the format of the test. On the one hand, I believe that sharing this type of information helps me to communicate to my students that I care about their success and that I believe they are capable of doing well if they apply themselves. On the other hand, I believe this type of communication can also help to remind students of their role and responsibility in the learning process: Once they know the criteria on which they will be graded, it then becomes up to them to decide how much they are willing to invest in the work for the course.

I also believe that communicating expectations can be useful in setting up ground rules for class discussions. Whether the course material involves sophisticated statistical procedures or sensitive topics surrounding intergroup relations, I find it useful to establish a norm of mutual respect, such that everyone has a right to ask questions and offer comments, along with an obligation to listen to others. By establishing such norms at the beginning and by reinforcing those norms as needed, I believe teachers can substantially minimize potential conflict and frustration among students at later stages in the course.
Finding My Home

Margaret Anne Bly Turner
Edison College and Walden University

My home is Edison College where I have taught psychology for 18 years. I also teach in the graduate school at Walden University. I earned a Bachelors Degree in biology from the University of the State of New York, a Masters Degree in psychosocial science from Pennsylvania State University (PSU), and a Doctorate in social psychology from Oklahoma State University (OSU). I have been fortunate to be awarded the Graduate Teacher of the Year award from OSU, the Two-Year College Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division Two of the American Psychological Association [APA]), and the Psi Beta Sponsor of the Year.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Most of my childhood was spent in the hospital or at home with a tutor from various illnesses caused by a metabolic disorder. I learned to read early in life and discovered a love of books. Because I was usually isolated from playmates, I found my excitement in the words that I read. I became Nancy Drew as a young girl.

After being pronounced dead at 16, my life changed dramatically with each day becoming an important life event. The perspective was that there would be little time left to explore, and my reading increased because of my desire to learn every thing that I could. In my senior year of high school teachers and a close friend encouraged me to apply to the university. I saw little reason to do so. My parents were penniless, older, and sickly. I appeased my friends and filed the papers to go to the university. It was the second year of the federal loan program and I also applied for a loan. However, there was no money available. (I worked full-time typing labels at a photography mail order facility.) On the night before freshmen were to arrive on campus, the university called me and said that they had found money for me and I was to show up the next morning.

While on campus, I discovered the library had many books and recordings. However, by October, I was again dying. I lived again after dying a second time to some purpose unknown to me at the time. Feeling overwhelmed, despair set in. However, just five weeks later I married a young man who I met the night I was released from the university infirmary. For the next 12 years, there were few books and no classes to attend. Instead, I had two children who gave me an education equal to any in the classroom. I continued to read everything that the county library had on its shelves. What does this background have to do with defining myself as a teacher? In addition to having read a great deal before I started back
to the university, I had developed a strong sense of authenticity and empathy for pain in others. Many of the students I taught had suffered, or are suffering from traumas in their lives. My personal experience has given me a sense of connection with my students that I could have never learned in any course.

Working on Defining Myself as a Teacher

At 29, I enrolled at Alvin Junior College, which was about an hour from my home in Texas. It was considered one of the top 10 two-year colleges in the country at the time. A teaching career was never on my list of plans. In fact, I had no plans for any career because I did not expect to live that long. However, I continued attending college. In biology class, a young man was my lab partner. We were both shy and spoke only to achieve completion of the lab project for the day. He was smart and a joy with whom to work. At the end of the semester, he told me that he was quitting college because he was a failure. He was taking Calculus, English Composition, Biology, Physics, and another equally demanding course. He determined he was a failure because he only had a 3.5 GPA. His desire was to be a forest ranger—his love of the outdoors and animals was intense—but he was giving up. I spoke to him about how hard his classes were. I assumed all was lost as we parted and my heart went out to him. The next semester I saw him on campus and ran over to say hello. I asked him what happened to bring him back this semester and he replied, “You happened.” Seeing this young man and finding out that I had had an impact on his future set my path on to teaching college as a career. I did not know how long I had to live, but teaching in college was now a vision.

All of my reading finally paid off. I finished up my degree through CLEP testing and I earned a degree in biology with a minor in public health from the University of the State of New York. Prior to receiving my degree, I was accepted at PSU where I wanted to study community psychology. It was the closest degree I could find that was based on a public health model. At the same time I had a position with the local lung association as the public educator and there I learned to communicate with the public about lung disease.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Although PSU did not have any training in teaching per se, it was there that I found the mentor who would change my life, Dr. Katherine Towns. She was authentic, personable, professional, brilliant, and successful. She shared more wisdom with me than I can recall. Now more than ever, I felt the passion to follow her model and to serve others in the profession. She passed to me the importance of serving the next generation so that they can reach their goals.
After completing my Masters degree at PSU, I was in my late 30s now and concerned about the cost to complete my educational goals, so I chose to attend OSU, which offered a paid teaching practicum. OSU placed me in front of two classes the first day of my doctoral work. In the teaching practicum, all the teaching assistants shared a syllabus that was based on a university-wide model to teach students to learn. We shared a portion of each test across all sections. Out of 25 questions, the teaching practicum students wrote 15 together and each of us wrote 10 questions of our own. We met each week in a seminar to discuss any course or classroom issues about which we wanted to know more.

What did I learn in Teaching Practicum? I had only one 3 hr course in psychology prior to teaching. So, I had to learn psychology while teaching! I also learned how to manage a classroom, have a sense of humor with my teaching, stimulate and encourage the students, and how to work in a psychology department.

I was asked to write a philosophy of teaching that I still have. I taped myself teaching and realized in horror that I would not listen to me for an hour! I was not a great speaker. My voice was high and squeaky. I found a colleague to help me improve my speaking abilities. I learned to lower my voice and breathe from my diaphragm.

I wished to learn how to help students reach their potential. I assisted students during my office hours and tried to get them all the help that they needed. All of my hard work paid off: The students voted me the Graduate Student Teacher of the Year. I was astounded at this success, particularly because my health started to deteriorate again.

After completing my studies and finding it difficult to obtain a position in social psychology, I accepted an offer for a visiting assistant professor’s position teaching management at OSU. The following year, I was offered a similar position at Utah State University. I enjoyed these visiting positions. However, my health was deteriorating again—I moved to Montana to see if I could recover again. I thought for sure that my teaching days were over. I went to work for the State of Montana for Medicaid. I set up case management teams in northwestern Montana and conducted nursing home assessments. Gradually, my health improved. A few of my former professors called to encourage me to go back to teaching.

About this time, I subscribed to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. After two years completely removed from higher education, the time had come to return to teaching or give up on the profession that I felt was perfect for me. I found an advertisement in the Chronicle for a full-time teaching position at a two-year college in south Florida. I applied, determined that if I could not find a position where I could live with my health problems, then I would change my plans for a teaching career.
Shortly after I applied, I traveled to Hawaii for a meeting over Thanksgiving. When I returned home, I found a number of phone messages from the school asking me to call them immediately. I returned the call and booked a flight the next day. When I arrived on campus, I realized that this was a place where I could live. The atmosphere here was different from the schools I had either attended or interviewed for a faculty position—it was warmer and more supportive. I was offered the position before leaving for home. I had to return and start teaching by January 6—and I lived 3060 miles away!

The reality of a full-time position teaching psychology was not what I had anticipated. I had seven courses with six preparations. The psychologist who interviewed me went on sabbatical and never returned. There was no mentor available, and there was not enough time to examine my teaching to any meaningful extent. The greatest frustration was attempting to do a good job teaching so many courses. Fortunately, after a few years of very hard work highlighted by designing and redesigning my courses, my workload became stable.

I also established a chapter of Psi Beta, the psychology honor society for two-year colleges. This experience invigorated my teaching. Students eagerly participated. Many of the older students befriended and mentored the younger students (the average age of the students was about 29 then). In 1993, one of my students won first place in the Psi Beta Annual Research Competition. I eventually had 10 students enter the competition with eight placing in the top three awards.

The college supported trips to some college-level seminars such as the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development at The University of Texas at Austin. Interacting with other faculty in other schools doing the same kind of teaching that I was doing was exciting. I was now a member of a group of professionals who cared about teaching psychology in higher education.

About the same time that my student won the Psi Beta award, I received the STP award for teaching excellence in two-year colleges. I went to APA and met Bill McKeachie at an STP meeting. I was deeply inspired when I saw him surrounded by graduate students, patiently answering every question they asked. He showed no impatience while answering the same questions over and over again.

This experience had a profound effect on me. Every time I am tired or become impatient with students, I remember him. It was another turning point in my philosophy of teaching.

As I aged, and the college population became younger, the distance between the students and me seemed almost insurmountable at times. McKeachie’s model reminds me that I am to teach, not to preach, and has led me to seek out experiences that assist me in keeping current with new generations of college students. For example, understanding how important
communication across the generations is to learning, I became educated on the Smashing Pumpkins when they were famous. I used them in examples in class and the class lit up. Students became aware that there was a connection in the learning environment with their real experiences and that psychology is relevant to their lives. Although I am not an expert in the life experiences of my students, I try to maintain contact with the important events that form the context for their lives. The day after 9-11, I spent my classes asking the students to express their feelings about the attack. If I see that my examples are no longer relevant, I ask them to give me an example and listen carefully while they relate it to course material. Listening to my students is an important part of my philosophy of teaching.

I created a library on the teaching of psychology, started reading *Teaching of Psychology*, and attended as many conferences on teaching that I could. The Southeastern Teaching Conference in Atlanta each February is one of my favorites. After attending this conference for a couple of years, I asked Bill Hill, the conference coordinator, about presenting a talk. He invited me to give a presentation and it went well. I realized then that as a teacher at a two-year college, I had could experience the sorts of things that academic psychologists working at four-year colleges routinely do.

One day I received a call asking me to teach a Teaching of Psychology course for a distance university, Walden University. I accepted the offer and was flown to their home offices. I was able to teach and mentor graduate students and supervise doctoral dissertations. When my first doctoral student successfully completed her orals, I think that I was happier than she was.

Interactions with students, jobs in unrelated fields, and life have all been “tipping points” (Gladwell, 2000) in my academic career. Gladwell noted that certain occurrences change one’s perspective. I recognized that experiences in my life were relevant to teaching and by using my experiences; connections could be made with students. Now I see all of life as a laboratory for learning how to teach more effectively.

Advice for New Teachers

All teachers of psychology can benefit from joining STP. STP provides a wealth of resources to assist both new and experienced teachers in their work. Find teaching mentors at your college. If there are no potential mentors in psychology, look for others in other departments. Attend every teaching seminar, conference, or other meeting related to college and university teaching. Also attend all research seminars, conferences, and other meetings to stay current in the latest research. Keeping current in the field is essential to being an effective teacher.
Final Thoughts

In reviewing my academic life, it may appear that it has been stymied by my underlying health issues. However, my health problems afforded me the time to do a great deal of studying and introspection. My personality was molded by caring health professionals who gave me a sense of serving others. It is amazing to me how many doors have been opened when I thought I was finished moving forward in my academic career. I have been blessed to have many great experiences in academics and the greatest students.

Reference
I am a Professor of Psychology and University Distinguished Teaching Scholar at Colorado State University (CSU). I received my PhD in General Experimental Psychology from The Ohio State University. I taught at The University of Denver where I also served as Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. I returned to my undergraduate alma mater as Assistant Academic Vice President for Instructional Services and subsequently as Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. I returned to full-time teaching in psychology in 1987 as coordinator of the Introductory Psychology course, which enrolls over 3,000 students annually.

I developed and produced the widely adopted video teaching modules on The BRAIN, the MIND, The Social Connection, and The Many Faces of Psychology. I have received numerous teaching awards from my institution and I am the recipient of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Colorado Professor of the Year in 1999, and the American Psychological Foundation Distinguished Teaching of Psychology Award in 2001.

When I was a youngster I use to hear people greet each other in the morning with, “Hi, how are you today?” I noticed that the response varied, depending on the day of the week. On Mondays many people would say, “Oh, it’s … Monday. On Friday, the response was more like, “Yea, great, it’s Friday.” At the time I couldn’t quite figure out why the response was so different from Monday to Friday. As an adult I discovered that not much had changed. The fact is many people seem to be down on Monday and up on Friday. I finally came to the realization that many people are not all that happy about what they do for a living. These people have not discovered what we teachers mostly take for granted…every day can be an up day experience!

My Early Development As a Teacher

My career as a college teacher began as an undergraduate at Colorado State University. Having changed my major from forestry to psychology, I had the good fortune to enroll in Advanced Introductory Psychology taught by a newly minted PhD from The Ohio State University, Dr. Richard H. Peairs. Peairs was a phenomenon; young, debonair, oozing with enthusiasm, and brilliant. I had never encountered such a person in all my years as a student. I enrolled in every course he taught and I was inspired by his knowledge and total dedication to his students.
By my senior year I began to think of a future beyond the BS degree and one afternoon after class Peairs called me into his office to inquire about my plans after graduation. Hesitantly, I said I was thinking of applying to graduate school somewhere but I was not quite sure. Peairs jumped to his feet, looked me in the eyes, and declared, “Mr. Vattano, what do you mean, “thinking about it.” You’re going to graduate school at The Ohio State University and earn your PhD. He then proceeded to tell me about the world of academe and how I might aspire to become a member of the professoriate. The fact that he thought I had the ability to achieve this goal was enough to ignite a flame which continues to burn. That was 48 years ago and to this day, Dick Peairs and I are in almost in daily communication through e-mail. After a successful career as Professor of Psychology and Western Regional Director of the AAUP Office in San Francisco, Peairs remains an active psychological consultant. The man is as sharp as the day I first entered his class—use it or lose it!

My experience at the Ohio State University was just as Peairs had described. He had paved the way for me as a research assistant under his former mentor, Dr. Delos D. Wickens, which was another stroke of luck! Wickens was a dynamo, a productive scholar, and a wonderful mentor. In my third year of graduate school, Wick (it took me a long time before I could refer to him as “Wick”) invited me to become a Teaching Assistant in Introductory Psychology. What an opportunity to work with a Teacher/Scholar who at that time authored of one of the leading introductory textbooks—the very book I had in my freshman introductory course at CSU. Wickens suggested that I enroll in a graduate seminar on college teaching offered by a professor in the Philosophy department, Dr. Anthony Nemitz. What an experience! Nemitz was one superb teacher. He knew all the ins and outs of academe and pulled no punches about life in the professoriate. The seminar made a real impression on me and provided an insight into college teaching unavailable at most mature research institutions of that time—with the exception perhaps of Bill McKeachie’s program at the University of Michigan. Little did I know then that 11 years later I would initiate my own seminar on college for GTAs aspiring to become college teachers. Reflecting back on my formative years as a wet-behind-ears graduate student, I realize that I had the finest mentors one could every hope for, and have tried to follow their example of encouraging students to be all that can be.

Working At Defining Myself as a Teacher

One of the things I discovered early in my career was that teaching is a public activity. Anyone can walk into a classroom on a college campus, find an empty seat, and observe the proceedings. I took every opportunity to observe other teachers in action and assumed that there was nothing wrong with stealing ideas from the pros. Some of these “pros” were fellow graduate students who had mastered the craft of communicating their ideas to students in
different and novel ways. Whenever I could find the time, I wandered into a classroom to observe teachers in action. If I have achieved anything as a college teacher, it is because I had outstanding mentors willing to share their knowledge and experience. Among the many great features of our profession, openness and sharing are high on the list. I realize that lighting a person’s candle does not diminish the light from mine. I have been the recipient of many such candles.

A few years into my career as an assistant professor, my department chair asked me if I would be interested in teaching Introductory Psychology on television. Our university had decided to experiment with the medium and looked to a large enrollment course for obvious reasons—economy of scale. Having worked my way through college playing in a jazz combo, I was not intimidated by the camera. However, let me tell you, seeing yourself teach is no ego trip. After the shock wore off, I realized that self-confrontation through video tape has to be one of the best ways to sharpen some of the rough edges and to gain insight into your own persona. To this day, I use the medium, along with my graduate teaching fellows as a means for improving our class presentations. I believe it is essential for anyone who teaches to tape a class periodically for the purposes of self-analysis and critique. (It is not a bad idea to hide all sharp objects prior to reviewing your initial tape).

I discovered that a valuable resource for gaining insight into my teaching was a friendly and supportive colleague. I had many such individuals in my career. Everyone should have at least one person in whom they have complete confidence as a good source for peer review. Once established, the benefits can be enormous.

College teaching, like any profession, has its share of frustrations and obstacles. Most of us live with 50 min class periods, quarters or semesters, an ever-growing body of knowledge to uncover (I hope I never cover things), and ever-increasing class sizes. There is the constant dilemma of how to allocate time in your 168 hr week. We all know that working in a major research university requires that faculty teach, engage in research and scholarly activity, and perform service. A given department and university culture will dictate the relative value of this triplet. Interestingly, teaching is always mentioned first, as if it were the most important—or at least as important as research and service. In reality, this is not always the case.

I hit the jackpot when I returned to my Alma Mater as a faculty member. Although Colorado State University is a major Carnegie Class I research university, teaching is highly valued, and appropriately rewarded. Generally speaking, Land-Grant universities value outreach and scholarship as an integral part of their mission. This philosophy is in tune with Ernest Boyer’s thesis articulated in his often cited, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990). The thrust of his argument is unambiguous:
The time has come to move beyond the tired old “teaching versus research” debate and give the familiar and honorable term “scholarship” a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work. (p. 15)

Following Boyer’s lead, Division 2 of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Defining Scholarship in Psychology, proposed a 5-part definition of scholarship to include: (a) original research (creation of knowledge), (b) integration of knowledge (synthesis and reorganization), (c) application of knowledge, (d) the scholarship of pedagogy, and (e) the scholarship of teaching in psychology. The recommendations of the APA Task Force chaired by Diane Halpern (1998) were already in place in my university as part of our Land-Grant mission. More recently, emphasis on the “Scholarship of Teaching” (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999) has opened the door to greater recognition for those who concentrate their efforts on the application of knowledge about the science of psychology and its implications for the practice of our craft (see Halpern, 2003). Granted, it took me longer to attain the rank of full professor than is normally the case, but my work in the development of teaching materials was valued by my department and university as it fit nicely under the rubric established by the APA Task Force and Boyer’s definition of “scholarship.”

One of the real joys and frustrations of teaching introductory psychology is the rapid growth of our field. We have increasing material to deal with in a fixed and rigid unit of time—semesters and quarters. Textbook authors and publishers continue to add content as our knowledge expands, making it more and more difficult deciding what to leave out of our course syllabi. It is an ever increasing problem and one of the most frustrating aspects of my teaching. It finally occurred to me that the way to deal with this problem was to assign more responsibility to students for their own learning. This idea has now become a mantra in the teaching and learning literature (Weimer, 2003). I take the position that students should come to class already in possession of information, rather than to simply take information away. When students come to class prepared to deal with what they already know about the subject—having read their assignment prior to class—I can meet them where they are, and take them to the next level of understanding. After all, is not that what it is all about anyway? All new learning is based on previous learning. Adapting to circumstances has helped to shape my philosophy of teaching.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My philosophy of teaching is predicated on the realization that I am first and foremost a student. What sets me apart from my students is my age and the fact that I know more than they do about psychology. Therefore, I feel qualified to assume responsibility to help them learn. I realize that many of my students are more intelligent than I am, and have grown up in a very different world than I experienced. Many have lived and traveled in places I will
probably never see. I respect my students as learners and I inform them that my efforts at facilitating their learning is a function of a number of very important elements in the teaching-learning equation.

I see my role as a facilitator (not teacher per se) and that if certain conditions prevail, I can increase the probability that learning will occur. I am in total agreement with Eble (1976) who asserted that “…above all else, learning is a pleasurable experience.” So, what are these conditions? Simply put: If students come to the learning environment that I establish (class, office, laboratory, etc.) prepared to engage the subject—having read the assigned material—and if I come to the learning environment prepared to engage the students’ current level of knowledge in an environment of mutual respect, the probability of learning is greatly increased. In short, I can increase the probability that learning will take place if I do my job, and the students do theirs.

I take great pains to ensure that the learning environment (room, place, technology, materials, etc.) offers me the opportunity to orchestrate what I consider important principles in teaching: (a) to maintain student attention through stimulus variability, (b) apply principles of reinforcement, (c) strive to make the material meaningful, (d) remain open to and encourage student comments, and (e) apply a little humor where appropriate. If executed properly, these principles can result in an emotional and enjoyable learning experience.

I think it is important to connect with students on as many levels of their experience as possible. I want students to learn at a cognitive level and to acquire an appreciation for the beauty and complexity of behavior. Students should be different at the end of a given course in a way that has meaning for them in their day-to-day interactions with the world of people, places, and ideas. As Halpern and Hakel (2004) aptly put it,

The underlying rationale for any kind of formal instruction is the assumption that knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned in a particular setting will be recalled accurately, and will be used in some other context at some time in the future. (p. 38)

This is, at least in part, what is meant by transfer of learning. I try to reinforce this principle by presenting the content of psychology through world related examples, with a bit of story telling thrown in for good measure.

When I first started teaching, I concentrated my efforts on knowledge mastery, and becoming a dynamic lecturer. My emphasis was on my own teaching not necessarily on student learning. That was the paradigm under which I operated: I know; I teach; you learn. Over the years I have come to realize that learning does not always occur simply as the result of a good lecture. In fact, there may be very little relationship between the two. My current approach to teaching has been greatly influenced by the work of Barr and Tagg, (1995) on the paradigm shift from teaching to learning.
Psychology is a visual discipline, as evidenced by the richness of today’s introductory textbooks and the plethora of ancillary materials available. I have become convinced that if students read, hear, and experience psychology, they will leave courses with a greater depth of understanding and excitement. My hat is off to the publishers of today’s textbooks who make all this possible.

In the course of my 42 years of teaching, I have never neglected to distribute student course evaluations. I find them invaluable, and at times, intimidating. I would never think of teaching a course without getting student input. About 25 years ago I adopted a policy of both mid-term and final course evaluations. I have learned much from students about my teaching and have made many mid-course and permanent changes as a result. And, as mentioned earlier, one of the most revealing forms of evaluation for me is the use of micro-teaching through video recording.

Advice For New Teachers

I think the most important factor contributing to success as a college teacher is to find an institution that matches your values for teaching. Institutional climate is critical to a rewarding career as a college teacher. Finding the right fit between your goals and the goals and reward structure of a particular college or university is the most important thing to keep in mind when looking for an academic position. Keep in mind that many institutions do recognize and reward scholarship on teaching as a worthy area of investigation (see Hutchings & Shulman, 1999).

Do not hesitate to step out of your discipline and read widely on all aspects of teaching and learning. Most professional societies publish periodicals on teaching and many publications address topics of mutual interest across disciplines. Books, periodicals, conferences, the Internet, and your colleagues right down the hall are all valuable resources available to you.

Final Thoughts

As I think back at my 42 years of college teaching I feel very fortunate that I chose to become a college teacher. It has been a most rewarding career and I have been blessed to have worked with supportive colleagues in an institutional climate that recognizes and rewards teaching. Working with young people has to be the most challenging, exhilarating, and humbling activity on the planet, and it is why the act of getting up in the morning—Monday through Friday—is my greatest joy. I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to contribute to such a worthy endeavor. I think Lee Iococca, former CEO of the Chrysler

Corporation, said it as well as anyone:

“In a totally rational society, the best of us would be Teachers and the rest would have to settle for something else”

References


I am currently Roe R. Cross Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology and Special Education at Emporia State University (ESU) in Emporia, KS. I have a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Master of Education in Secondary Science Education degrees from the University of South Carolina, and a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology degrees from Columbia University.

I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural public health education in the Philippines for two years and a 7th and 8th grade science teacher in South Carolina for five years. After five years in graduate school in New York City, I have been at ESU for 19 years.


I was 1995-1997 President of the Council of Teachers of Undergraduate Psychology (CTUP) and edited CTUP’s Significant Difference newsletter from 1993 to 1997. I attended the 1999 National Forum on Psychology Partnerships at James Madison University, was a proud Assessment All-Star, and served on the Program Committee for the Measuring Up: Best Practices in Assessment in Psychology Education national conference in Atlanta in 2002. I represented the Council of Graduate Departments of Psychology at APA’s Education Leadership Conference in 2003.

I founded the Kansas High School Psychology Teachers Workshop in 1995, which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in October, 2005, and I chaired the Kansas State Department of Education Psychology Standards Committee. I have been national workshop co-leader for Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools, judged the American Psychological Foundation/Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools Intel Talent Search for High School Student Research Competition, and served on APA’s Task Force on High School Standards. I was a member of STP’s Task Force on Defining Scholarship in Psychology, currently serve on STP’s G. Stanley Hall Lecture Selection Committee, and chair STP’s Fellows Committee and the Robert S. Daniel Teaching Award Selection Committee.
My Early Development as a Teacher

In a classic example of identity foreclosure, I decided to become a dentist in the seventh grade. Accordingly, I took the college preparatory curriculum for pre-dentistry in high school and, entering college, declared biology with a pre-dental emphasis as my major. The fall of my senior year at the University of South Carolina, I finally asked myself if I would be happy spending the rest of my life looking into peoples’ mouths. The memory of my emotional panic is still vivid.

I shortly thereafter applied to the Peace Corps for a posting in public health in Southeast Asia to gain some insight into the Vietnam War, for which my draft number was high and my high school buddy lost his life, and to figure out my vocational interest. After three months of training with 24 fine young men and women from throughout the nation, I spent 21 months as a Peace Corps Volunteer, living among the good people of Santa Catalina, Negros Oriental, Philippines. However, a lifelong passion was kindled. Drinking water in the town was contaminated; yet, it looked clear. In trying to explain this paradox to folks whose families had been drinking this water for generations, no word in the Cebuano language, which I minimally learned, existed for microorganism other than the Hispanicized version of the term. How does one communicate an idea? How does one teach about microorganisms when they cannot be seen, touched, or heard? How does a teacher promote learning? Thirty-one years later, I continue to ponder these and many other teaching-related questions, whether for people living in Third World communities or students sitting in my classroom.

Returning to South Carolina in 1976, I was hired for a junior high school science teaching position and obtained an emergency teaching certificate that obligated me to complete 6 hours of university teacher-preparation coursework for several years to upgrade to a regular teaching certificate. My principal, who paddled me in the 7th grade, advised taking graduate courses so that I could move up the pay scale by earning a master’s degree. After four mediocre undergraduate years, I was ready for serious study, and graduate courses such as Methods for Teaching Science, Resources for Teaching and Learning, Introduction to Research in Education, and Principles of Curriculum Construction captivated me. The Human Growth and Development course especially resonated and planted the seed of advanced study.

After five years teaching adolescents and coaching some of them in football, my wife of one year and I moved to New York for 5 years of graduate school in educational psychology where I immersed myself in the study of learning, which soon narrowed to memory. Although the focus was theoretical, my natural tendency was and still is to apply the ideas in a classroom context. This tendency has provided the fuel for my quest to be an effective teacher.
I have been fortunate in many ways, especially having outstanding mentors. My parents Bob and Jan Weaver continue to model work ethic, long-term love, respect, and emotional support. My wife Kathy and our children Merriam, Andy, Katie, and Janet are constant sources of joy, strength, and inspiration. My own elementary, high school, college, and Sunday School teachers and Boy Scout leaders provided consistently wonderful instructional models. One I channel almost daily is Idella Bodie, my ninth grade English teacher, who often said “many drops in a bucket make an ocean,” which I now often say.

Harold Cook, my advisor and dissertation sponsor, brought an aesthetic to teaching, learning, and research that made all three deeply personal. Another member of my dissertation committee, Joel Davitz, had the uncanny knack of asking the right question. I strive to emulate their qualities with my students.

Steve Davis, who hired me at Emporia State University, demonstrated the importance of putting research in the center of student professional development and then collaborated with other psychology educators in the state to establish the Association of Psychological and Educational Research in Kansas, which celebrates its 25th anniversary next November, and the Great Plains Students’ Psychology Convention, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in March.

I am proud to be a teacher, and Charles Brewer embodies that pride. Brewer’s 10 Commandments, his tireless mentoring and support of faculty, and dedication to the teaching of psychology model commitment, devotion, love of learning, and love of teaching. Many others have mentored me, knowingly or unknowingly—Halonen, Ware, Hill, Smith, Hester, Mathie, Beins, Blair-Broeker, Ernst, Appleby, Lutsky, Maitland, Buskist, Halpern, Landrum, Goodwin, Keith, Lloyd, Davidson, McEntarffer, Dunn, McCarthy, Mehrotra, Whitlock, Miller, and Stuber-McEwen—and inspire me with their humor, grace, intellect, work ethic, beauty of accomplishment, and unwavering commitment to their students and to excellence in teaching.

One other mentor is the State of Kansas, whose motto ad astra per aspera means “to the stars with difficulty.” Building responsible citizens requires considerable investment of time, effort, and energy. This difficult task is an important goal for us in higher education.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I started my doctoral program in 1981 with the sole goal of becoming a better teacher. Studying educational psychology with a specialization in cognition at Teachers College, Columbia University, I was primed to examine the research literature from a teaching perspective and soon encountered a cornucopia of pedagogical delights such as Lindsay and Norman’s (1972) human information processing; Slamecka and Graf’s (1978) generation
effect; Eich’s (1980) state dependent retention; Craik and Lockhart’s (1972) levels of processing; Smith, Glenberg, and Bjork’s (1978) context dependent memory; Loftus and Palmer’s (1974) reconstructed memories; Tulving and Thomson’s (1973) encoding specificity, Baddely and Hitch’s (1974) working memory; Tversky and Kahneman’s (1973) availability heuristic; Tulving’s (1972) episodic and semantic memory; Paivio’s (1971) imagery; and Bower’s (1981) mood and memory. Applying theories from the cognitive psychology literature to the classroom continues as a strong element of my approach to teaching and learning. This approach was best captured by the analogy of a participant at the 2003 APA’s Education Leadership Conference: psychology is to education as biology is to medicine.

Another step toward defining myself as a teacher occurred when I joined ESU. The department chair, Steve Davis, encouraged faculty across the nation to promote student research at both the undergraduate and the graduate level. In this environment, I incorporated research expectations into my courses and partnered with students doing research (e.g., Goodrich & Weaver, 1998; Huffman & Weaver, 1996; Huss & Weaver, 1996; Walters & Weaver, 2003; Wann & Weaver, 1993; Weaver & MacNeil, 1992). Student research remains as a central aspect of my teaching.

Another step occurred with the realization that “there is nothing that is not psychological.” This liberating observation imbues literally everything with the potential for teaching and learning if one is astute enough to recognize it as such. I am now more attentive to the environment in search of teaching ideas.

The emotional aspects of facilitating and inhibiting learning are well documented. The first semester of my second year at ESU, many students in several courses commented on their evaluations that I was too serious and never smiled. In response, I developed the Mary Poppins’ approach to teaching. Playing off of her “just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down,” I smiled more, spoke more with students both in and out of class, and asked about their well-being. Course expectations and rigor remained the same. The students’ course experiences, as judged by their comments on the course evaluations, improved. Fostering a positive emotional tone is now another piece to the pursuit of teaching excellence.

In 1999, I taught my first Internet-only course. Getting the course ready was effortful, as I learned new software and rethought content presentation and assessment. My frustration level increased as I struggled with the software and as the time to begin the course quickly approached. Finally, I sought out a mentor who provided good guidance. Now having taught online several semesters, I regard Internet-only learning favorably because the instructor can require involvement from everyone and that involvement, mediated by e-mail, is quantifiable.
Also, with e-mail, the writing makes public one’s understanding, making my assessment of student understanding much more thorough in the distance format than face-to-face.

I view research and service as complementing rather than competing with my teaching. Research and service experiences provide more content in support of my efforts to promote student learning.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My personal philosophy of teaching has at its core “repeated contact with the content over time.” The student engages content through elaboration and production for the duration of the course as well as across courses to connect with knowledge and develop insights. Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy defines the degree, or the depth, of processing to which students think critically about the content. Teaching for comprehension, for example, requires a different skill set than teaching for analysis or synthesis.

The course objectives define the outcomes, which are designed for students to realize their potential. I view outcomes through two lenses. First is Piaget’s (1930) accommodation and assimilation; outcomes requiring accommodation are more demanding for the students and myself. Second is Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development, which defines the degree of support students need to meet outcomes successfully. Presenting the content and its essence in a clear and well-organized manner using a variety of approaches (e.g., lecture, guided questioning, demonstration, discussion, activity) with a variety of sources and supports (e.g., course outlines, guides to writing and studying, related readings) promotes student learning. All examinations are cumulative. All assessments are tied to the course objectives. I like for students to write because writing expands the scope of the assessment, clear writing clarifies thinking, and I know my students better. Detailed rubrics for assessments provide the “compass” for students in preparing their assignments and for me in critiquing their work.

Besides rubric development, assessment has broadened the scope of competencies included in my courses. For example, for years, I assumed that students could critique the results section of an article after completing my introductory statistics course. Finally, I assessed whether they could and found that they could not. I now have added this task as an assignment. Students struggle with the assignment but frequently comment that it was one of the most valuable elements of the course.

When I am learning material, I am attuned to my own struggles and use them to inform my planning of instruction. I vary instructional approaches within a class period to sustain and maintain attention. When I present complicated material, I parse (chunk) the material carefully, organize it clearly, and present it slowly when teaching it.
Arrogance is a teacher’s enemy. It insulates teachers from the evaluation of others and blinds them to the good teaching ideas of others. In 1993, the ESU student government began encouraging faculty to implement student input teams (SIT) of three randomly selected students in a course. In the absence of the professor but during class, SIT members ask the class once a semester to answer anonymously three questions on a piece of paper: what are your concerns about the course, what do you like about the course, and what are your suggestions for improving the course. SIT members organize the answers into themes and then meet with the professor to discuss them. The goal is to improve the course during the semester, which is not possible with traditional end-of-semester course evaluations. With considerable trepidation, I tried this approach 12 years ago, expecting a considerable amount of griping, moaning, and complaining. Instead, I received one good suggestion after another for improving the course. Accessing my students’ perspectives this way has dramatically increased the quality of all of my courses. For over a decade now, I have not taught a course without using a SIT.

My department now has implemented peer review of teaching, in which faculty observe each other teaching in the classroom and prepare a brief report for the faculty member. I now welcome the feedback from fellow teachers observing my teaching, where two decades ago I would not have so responded.

I am appreciative of Teaching of Psychology and the many teaching activities handbooks for their articles on improving my teaching and my students’ learning. Through PsychTeacher, Psych-News, and teaching and other professional conferences, I have met many teachers who generously share their ideas.

I derive much satisfaction from teaching. To teach well, I must learn well, a wonderful reward for teaching. Seeing students prosper is equally rewarding. Sharing teaching ideas with excellent teachers and savoring being taught by an excellent teacher advance the quest for teaching excellence.

Advice for New Teachers

It is not a given that one’s levels of enthusiasm, passion, commitment, energy, and curiosity will remain high over the course of a career. What does one need to do now in order to sustain the zest for teaching 25 years from now? Here are my top five recommendations:

1. Consider the classroom as a laboratory and try new strategies, techniques, and interventions. You change and so do your students. This approach will keep your teaching fresh and innovative. Two themes I am now working to infuse into all of my courses are inspiring students and promoting leadership.

3. Establish high expectations for your students and then provide them the support to meet those expectations.

4. Find a peer with whom you can talk teaching and do so regularly.

5. Read books and journals and attend conferences and workshops to stay abreast of advances in the knowledge of the field and in teaching that knowledge.

If a teacher expects students to be intellectually curious, then the teacher must model such curiosity. How does one convey to students a sense of wonderment? Here is what I have found works well for me: reading widely and sharing aspects of the readings with students, having a variety of interests and incorporating them with the instruction, traveling to different cultures and enlarging one’s world view, and suggesting to students opportunities for personal growth.

Final Thoughts

The status of the quest for teaching excellence is determined by what students know and do and how they conduct themselves professionally. I can spend hours carefully crafting a lecture and deliver it with style and fervor, but if the students are not learning, then my efforts are not appropriate for meeting the course outcomes. On the other hand, if the course outcomes are easily met, where is the rigor? Good teaching articulates rigorous outcomes, presents content in a variety of ways, engages students to work with the content, and assesses them carefully to ensure that the outcomes have been met.

The quest for teaching excellence never ends. At any time or place along the journey, students bring new challenges, knowledge continues to expand, society changes, the teacher matures. Teaching excellence must be achieved student by student, course by course, semester by semester. Even the best assessments provide teachers with only a glimpse of the scope of the effect they have had on their students. Thus, good teachers work diligently to have confidence in their instructional competence.

References


My self-image, which is composed of happy grandfather, father, and husband, almost-octogenarian academic who has been lucky in love and health, and interested bystander in a confusing, often ugly, but fundamentally beautiful world, does not include being one of "psychology's best teachers." Nevertheless it is gratifying, if somewhat puzzling, to be so designated. The following is an attempt to respond to the questions and subtitles that the editors of this book have asked the people they happened to invite to participate in this project to address.

Currently professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Colorado at Boulder (UCB), I received my BA degree with high honors in psychology (Swarthmore College, 1947), MA in psychology (The Johns Hopkins University, 1949), and PhD in experimental psychology (Harvard University, 1952). I was a U.S.P.H.S. clinical psychology intern at Worcester State Hospital (1951-1952). After teaching at Wesleyan University for three years (first as instructor, then assistant professor) I joined the psychology department at UCB in 1955 as assistant professor, became associate professor in 1957, full professor in 1961, and professor emeritus in 1993. At UCB, I directed the Psychology Department's honors program (1956-1993) and the doctoral programs in Experimental Psychology (1957-1960) and Sociocultural Psychology (1985-1990).

I have served on—and chaired—many boards and committees of the American Psychological Association (APA), and have been president of its Divisions 2 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology, 1965-1966), 1 (General Psychology, 1975-1976), 24 (Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology, 1976-1977 and 1984-1985) and 26 (History of Psychology, 1977-1978). I also was president of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (RMPA, 1981-1982) and national president of Psi Chi, the national honor society in psychology (1990-1991).

Honors and awards include election to Phi Beta Kappa (1947), to Sigma Xi (1949), and as an honorary member to Golden Key (1986). I received a Distinguished Teaching in Psychology Award from the American Psychological Foundation (1983), a faculty advising award from the College of Arts and Sciences at UCB (1987), an award from the APA for Distinguished Career Contributions to Education and Training in Psychology (1990), a Gender-Neutral Language Award from the Campus Women's Organization of UCB (1990), and a "Lifetime Achievement Award for Sustained, Outstanding, and Unusual Scholarly
Contributions to the History of Psychology" from Division 26 of the APA (2000). The RMPA named an annual pre-convention event, the "Lillian Portenier-Michael Wertheimer Conference on the Teaching of Psychology," after a late Wyoming colleague and myself.

Many of my publications concern the teaching of psychology, including numerous articles in periodicals and books intended to assist in teaching various courses: nine books on introductory psychology (between 1970 and 1979), 10 on history of psychology (between 1970 and 2005), one on perception (1958), and two on research methods (in 1962 and 1981)—as well as 10 entries in dictionaries and encyclopedias (between 1960 and 2002), four contributions to books on activities for the teaching of psychology (between 1981 and 1999), and eight descriptions of psychology in *Peterson's Guides to Graduate Study* (between 1985 and 1993).

My Early Development as a Teacher

Graduate training at Hopkins and Harvard was exclusively directed to research; I had no specific preparation for a teaching career. My first introduction to teaching psychology was as a 20-year-old teaching assistant for recitation sections of an introductory psychology course at Hopkins. I was terrified of the students, some of whom were older than me, and I had little supervision in that role. My experiences as a teaching assistant for E. G. Boring's courses on Introductory Psychology and the History of Psychology at Harvard were no better; again there was almost no supervision.

Informal introductions to teaching occurred during several summers as a counselor at a two-month-long camp for children in upstate New York when I was a teenager. There I taught swimming, sailing, canoeing, and tennis (even though I did not play tennis very well), and found that I enjoyed helping kids learn skills that they wanted to acquire but did not yet master. At the time I was unaware that I was teaching anything as such. What it felt like was sharing information on rewarding activities about which I knew a little with others who did not yet know quite as much as I did: It did not really seem like teaching, but rather sharing, a pleasant social activity.

I had no formal mentors in my teaching endeavors as far as I remember. However, I did have a number of excellent teachers during my own education, several of whom became admired models. Among them was a first-grade teacher in public elementary school, Miss Walker. She managed to turn a class of kids whose initial reaction to a fellow pupil who had just immigrated from Germany and who could not speak English from ridicule to helpful assistance with learning the complexities, subtleties, and slang of the American English of suburban New York in the early 1930s. Other inspiring models include Robbie MacLeod, in whose seminar at Swarthmore I learned what a powerful teaching technique it can be to apply
gentle, but strong, encouragement in a quiet voice to good students to perform at their very best in any intellectual—indeed in any—endeavor; Hans Wallach, also at Swarthmore, who raised interesting questions to which he actually knew the answer, but about which he intentionally fumbled and bumbled in such a way that his students were highly motivated to find the answers themselves; and Karl Muenzinger at UCB, who started each lecture in his course on the history of psychology by trying to establish, like Johann Herbart, an appropriate "apperceptive mass" by reviewing the previous lecture's content. He asked questions such as "What is Weber's Law?" and then consulted his class list and pointed: "Mr. Viney?"—and if Mr. Viney did not respond soon enough, "Mr. Davis?" His procedure produced an alertness in all the students that I have never seen in anyone else's classroom. I should also mention Solomon Asch at Swarthmore, whose technique was almost the opposite of Muenzinger's. He managed to exude an intense, quiet fascination with the subject matter under discussion that was enormously infectious.

When I first had full responsibility for several undergraduate courses—Introductory Psychology, Perception, History of Psychology—at barely age 25, I was unprepared for the task. I made a mistake that I am sure is not unique to me—borrowing from my training in research and scientific writing, I sprinkled my lectures liberally with references to specific articles and their authors' names—perhaps at least one such reference every three or four sentences. My notes for each lecture were painstaking multiple pages with dozens of references, which typically took many hours of preparation for each hour of lecture. I must have been a resounding bore at that time. It only gradually dawned on me that this approach is not a good pedagogical procedure. I did not abandon it soon enough but perpetrated it on my poor students for several years. I soon found that teaching seminars and engaging honors students one-on-one on their thesis projects led to a spontaneous intellectual exchange that both the students and I found exhilarating.

Instead of funneling information, as it were, into passive, receptive brains by lecturing without an awareness of how the information was being received, I gradually tried to develop a pattern of interaction with students that conveyed my enthusiasm for the subject matter. I strove to promote an interest in the students themselves and to heighten their efforts to grapple with fascinating material that they had not understood before, convincing them that they could, with diligent study, actually master the material in a way that would be rewarding for them. I worked to: convince them that they are capable of understanding complex ideas, and could even come up with worthwhile new ideas of their own. In later years I used various "gimmicks" such as trying to impersonate famous past psychologists—and encouraging students to do such impersonations as well—in front of a large class on the history of psychology, or making up cross-word puzzles as quizzes for a course (which I soon
abandoned, since several students had never tried to solve a cross-word puzzle before), or devising various mnemonic devices to help in memorizing significant facts, names, or events. However, over the years I realized more and more that effective teaching is less a matter of conveying information than it is encouraging students to make full use of their intellectual prowess, convincing them of their own abilities, and sharing with them an enthusiasm for intellectual activity and for the subject matter at hand.

The inherent pleasure of intellectual activities, of following fascinating ideas wherever they might lead, of becoming immersed in intriguing puzzles to which there might or might not be a solution—and irrespective of whether anyone else had ever thought about a given issue in quite the same way in which I am exploring it myself—is what attracted me to a career in college teaching. My father had encouraged all his children in intellectual activity, and my last two years as an undergraduate convinced me to prepare for a university career. During those wonderful years at Swarthmore, I was fortunate to be accepted into the "honors program." One's full load in each of the last four semesters consisted of two weekly seminars, one in the major and one in a minor. Each week you prepared a paper or a report for each seminar. The seminars typically met in the evening, for 2 1/2 hours, but often stretched to 3 or even 4 hours; typically there were only a half dozen or so students in each seminar. You were never graded by your professors, which induced a superb relationship between student and professor: no "apple-polishing," only an effort to use the professor's knowledge and wisdom to try to enhance your own. Those heady four semesters ended in a month-long nightmare in which you had a three-hour written and a one-hour oral exam on each of your eight seminars administered by outside examiners. The time before that, of total immersion in a variety of intellectual fields with no holds barred and with no evaluation (other than peer and professor reaction), was heaven. An academic career that actually paid one to devote oneself to the free exploration of ideas wherever they might lead was enticing indeed.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

One obstacle in my teaching was that it took me some time to realize that a good teacher is not a show-off, a scholar who carefully documents every assertion. True, as Karl Muenzinger once poetically put it, a gifted teacher might be able to show students "the treasures that lie hidden until roused by magic words," but most teachers rarely achieve this goal. Rather, good teaching usually involves motivating students, setting up conditions that maximize their zeal to use their time and talents productively. The lecture method is known to be among the worst techniques for teaching anything; most students learn better by participating in demonstrations or by reading something than by listening to presumed experts talking at them. Throughout my long career I was always afraid that I might be wasting the
students' time (and their and their parents' money), especially in required large lecture courses where I never succeeded in convincing every student why the course was required. Such experiences were among the worst frustrations of my teaching career.

Did time spent in out-of-the-classroom scholarly work, such as empirical research or technical writing, or committee assignments or administration, interfere with teaching activities? I do not think so. As director of the undergraduate honors program (which required a thesis), and member of numerous master's and doctoral committees, my other endeavors meshed well with my teaching duties. Dozens of publications involved collaboration with graduate students and even undergraduate students. Research, administration, scholarly work, and "service" all blended with each other, and with teaching; indeed they often enhanced each other in complementary ways. Many of the products of collaborative research became part of the content of my teaching. I saw no incompatibility between teaching and the other routine chores of the academic life.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

It dawned on me later in my career than would have been desirable that a good teacher does not teach what to think, but how to think. This objective was a goal of all of my admired model teachers. In the more than half century during which I taught, fads came and went; problems that were salient at a particular time were usually not solved, but just abandoned in favor of some other new problems that happened to become popular. There was a bit of progress in some fields occasionally, but mostly there was just change. What did not and should not change is love of wisdom (the root meaning of the term "philosophy"), the need for what MacLeod called "humble and disciplined curiosity." That is what a good teacher strives to encourage in students and self.

Another principle of which I became aware is that the teacher's task concerns reorganizing the cognitive domains of students. Students may come with an undifferentiated or prejudiced conception of the domain to be studied, or may have almost no idea of the area at all. The teacher needs to understand where students are coming from, and then find the best way to help them develop an overview that matches more closely how that domain is viewed by experts. Finding such transformation techniques that will work with different students is not easy, because different students come with different initial cognitive baggage. You do need to know where they are coming from if you want to help them get to where you want them to get. Only if students become proficient in thinking like experts in a given domain are they likely to be able to make creative original contributions that will be taken seriously by experts.
The experience that has been most rewarding in my teaching has been seeing young minds open up and blossom—and succeed in tasks that may at first have seemed to them impossible to accomplish. Among hundreds of successful honors candidates were many who obtained tremendous satisfaction from undertaking original work for their theses, carrying out rigorous empirical chores, and writing up their findings competently—tasks of which, until they actually accomplished them, they never before realized they were capable. The elation that such success produced was beautiful to see. It convinced many of them to alter their occupational goals from going into business or being a one-on-one psychotherapist to contemplating a more intellectual life.

By contrast, what has been most frustrating is that in every lecture course I taught (and even in many seminars) there were always at least a few students I was unable to reach. This frustration occurred most frequently, of course, in large required lecture courses. I never did learn how to solve this problem.

Throughout my career, I always tried to do everything, including teaching, as well as I possibly could. This goal was reinforced by my exhilarating years as a student in Swarthmore's honors program. Anything worth doing at all is worth doing with everything you have got. The motivation was always there, but I fear that I was quite naïve about what works and what does not during my early years of teaching.

I do not know how to evaluate teaching, including my own teaching. Is it the success of one's students? Many honors candidates and graduate students went on to illustrious careers, and I received some heart-warming testimonials about my teaching from former students—but I still harbor nagging doubts: Was their success due to their having been effectively selected, rather than due to anything I might have taught them? Did they achieve their success despite my interference rather than because of something I taught them? I did try to improve my teaching techniques throughout my entire career, but frankly do not know whether in fact I did become a better teacher.

Advice for New Teachers

Teaching is a noble activity that can be tremendously rewarding (though usually not financially). There is nothing more satisfying than seeing someone who was muddled about some issue catch on, and, beaming, show a clear, differentiated and sophisticated perspective over an area that was previously murky. How does one achieve this gratifying goal? I doubt that anyone has a good answer that will apply to all teachers. You have to try out different styles and methods, and find out empirically which ones seem to work best for you—the best methods for teaching different domains (statistics, history of psychology, personality theory, etc.) may well be different, even for the same teacher, depending on the size of the class, the
level of the students, and many other variables. One conclusion, though, is clear to me: There are few careers that can be as rewarding as being a college or university teacher. I am deeply grateful that I was actually paid during my career for doing something that was challenging, usually felt worthwhile, and was a lot of fun.

Final Thought

If you are convinced you want to be a college or university teacher, go for it. You may not always know how well you are actually doing, you may discover that you have done well something you thought you had done poorly, and you may find that you will not always be rewarded for doing well something that you may think you are doing well. Nonetheless, all in all, it can be a wonderful career.
I am a teacher. As long as I can remember, this has been true. To the glee of my siblings, my mother recently unearthed the notes from a childhood club that I organized for the edification of my neighborhood when I was seven years old. The motto of the club was “To educate education!” I do not know whether it was the syntactic play of the newly discovered morphemes that delighted me then, or some prescient sense of my pedagogical instincts, but I remember feeling, with all the unwavering determination of a seven year old, that I would become a teacher.

Over the last two and a half decades I became a teacher of many human beings, at various ages, in many places: young Filipino, Chinese, and Portuguese children in rural Hawaii; taciturn, struggling adolescents in inner cities; and, for the bulk of my life, undergraduate and graduate students in New England. Now I am a teacher of teachers and of researchers. As a Professor of Child Development in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University, I teach undergraduate and masters students who become teachers, clinicians, pediatricians, lawyers, and all manner of professionals whose lives impact children. As the Director of a federally funded research center, the Center for Reading and Language Research, I teach undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral students how to conduct research in cognitive neuroscience, psycholinguistics, child development, and education; and how to become research teachers and professors of the next generation.

Along the way, I have received the highest approbation for my teaching and research from my university, from my professional organizations, and from the American Psychological Association at the state and national levels. Receiving the Distinguished Teacher of the Year award from the Massachusetts APA and the American Psychological Foundation’s Teaching of Psychology Award were my greatest professional achievements in teaching.

With colleagues Robin Morris (Atlanta) and Maureen Lovett (Toronto), I received a series of large-scale R-01 grants and the Shannon Award for Innovative Research from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development. This ongoing work attempts, among many other things, to apply our understanding of the reading brain to intervention for children with reading disorders. I received both a Fulbright Research Fellowship in Germany and the Norman Geschwind Lecture Award from the International Dyslexia Association for my research contributions to dyslexia based on work in the neurosciences.
Although the latter award was a notable research achievement, it was directly connected to the teaching of one of the most extraordinary scholars and teachers I have known in my lifetime, the late, eminent neurologist Norman Geschwind. Norman Geschwind changed the course of my professional life by introducing me to a new approach to the study of reading and reading disorders, based on the neurosciences, during the first year of my doctoral studies at the Harvard Reading Laboratory. To be named the recipient of an award in his honor was a poignant reminder to me of him, and of how inextricably bound the connections are between teaching and research. The story of how I became a teacher is, in fact, interwoven with the influence of powerfully dedicated researchers and teachers, beginning with my first teachers in a red-brick, two-room school house in a tiny Midwestern town.

My Early Development as a Teacher

My earliest memories of teachers and teaching began in a school that looked like a nineteenth century woodcut! There were two rooms, eight grades, ninety students (± 10), and two nuns. By almost any criteria, the teachers of this little school were saints: Sr. Rose Margaret, Sr. Salesia, and later Sr. Ignatius, all Sisters of Notre Dame (an order that is beloved by neuroscientists because they volunteered to be subjects in a lifelong study of precursors to Alzheimer’s disease). Let me describe for you one memory of the “day that never ended” for those teachers. There were four rows in each classroom, with each row representing a grade. At any given moment, some of the fourth row kids were “peer-tutoring” the second row; the third row were tutoring the first row; and our teacher was doing her utmost to teach the children who needed it most. By the end of the school day, each row had received attention to every basic subject at the particular grade level needed. Then after the children left, our teacher would remain tutoring the small number of children who could not learn to read.

To this moment I cannot fully grasp how these teachers did all they did and still achieve what they did. In my class of eight students, there are now two professors, one social worker, one engineer and seven college graduates. In retrospect, I know my teachers used an armamentarium of good teaching practices. Perhaps just as importantly, they were living models of two profoundly held beliefs --- that the potential of each young human being is precious, and that teaching them is a noble use of one’s life. There is no question that the sisters of Sr. Mary’s School left an indelible mark on my life that would become reinforced by my later teachers in high school (like Doris Camp) in college (Miss Noel, John Dunne) and finally in graduate school.
During my graduate studies at Harvard University, I began to understand the importance of every gifted teacher I had ever had or would have. From John Dunne and Norman Geschwind, I learned the role of story and bold personal insight in engaging the listener in everything from philosophy to aphasia. I shall never forget Geschwind’s spellbinding tale of a temporal lobe patient whose epilepsy would become triggered by the simple twirling of a paper clip. From Jeanne Chall I learned the importance of setting high expectations for students, while never forgetting that the goal of these expectations was outside the self, to be found within our ability to change the lives of children. Helen Popp’s kindness and attention to the details of each student’s development gave us a unique supportive environment in which to risk, fail, and maybe to succeed. Carol Chomsky, Roger Brown, Jill de Vilhiers, and Eric Wanner began my life-long study of words in all their variousness and power. Courtney Cazden provided a daily model for how important the study of language is for the real lives of children whose potential could be snuffed out or propelled by their language environments. Each of these teachers changed, guided, modeled, and refined my concept of teaching and contributed to the ways I teach today. I am an amalgamation of each great teacher I have ever known.

What I never learned explicitly from them, however, was how one teaches. We taught by doing. We were called Teaching Fellows, the graduate student equivalent of on-the-job training. We were, therefore, autodidacts in the realm of teaching. For me this manner of teaching worked better than for most, in part because I had been so conscious of every teacher’s style and its effect on my learning, and in part because I had been “teaching” since my primary grades. As I watch our young teaching assistants follow a similar apprentice and immersion model, I feel ambivalent. There is no formal training provided graduate TA’s in many universities, much less for young professors, many of whom are perfunctorily assigned large introductory courses that can test the mettle of the most experienced professor. I believe we would all benefit as a profession if there was a brief, required seminar on teaching in which there would be a full range of participants from the youngest TA to the most experienced and gifted teachers. It would be, perhaps, the most sophisticated analogue of my peer-tutoring life in the tiny 19th century schoolhouse.

Working and Defining Myself as a Teacher

During my first years as a university teacher, I threw myself into the work of teaching without reserve. I won an undergraduate teaching award during my first interim position at Brandeis University, and I became recognized for my work with undergraduates at Tufts University, my first tenure-track position. There was a price. The more successful my
teaching, the more students enrolled in my courses, the less time I had to pursue and publish my research.

I shall never forget in the fifth year of my teaching at Tufts that the then President of the University, the late Jean Mayer, appeared at the end of one of my large lectures. For fifteen minutes in raised voice and French accented syllables, my university president told me in no uncertain terms, that I had the highest approbation for my teaching and that it was not enough. He said that unless I stopped putting all of my efforts into teaching and started publishing prolifically, that I would never get tenure. I was totally shaken, which was exactly his well-intentioned goal.

Then and for the next years, I struggled to balance my drive to be the best of teachers and to produce quality research. To complicate this further, I wanted to marry and have a family of my own. It was a singularly difficult time. This balancing act for professors, particularly for women who want to have children, is still one of the toughest obstacles to dedicated university teaching. I continue to have this issue, but I developed my own set of strategies for addressing balance. During my pre-tenure years, I sought and received a fellowship that allowed me to have a teaching-free semester in which to write up my research. To be sure, I finished two articles during my honeymoon in Greece, a detail that my husband will never forget. I worked night and day during that time on my research program, and in the process, I developed life-long habits of writing. I also developed an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between one’s research and teaching. Over time my research program became the basis for a huge thriving research center, the Center for Reading and Language Research, where the various projects become the basis both for teaching all aspects of research to students from undergraduate to post-doctoral levels and also for providing services to schools, neighborhoods, and now to several sites across the country. The research became the basis of my teaching and my service. It fueled my excitement for teaching over the years, whether in more sophisticated graduate seminars or in introductory child development courses, which I refused to give up, despite teaching.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

The balance between teaching and research was my first true obstacle to quality teaching: The balance among teaching, research, and family was the second. I shall never totally resolve these issues because they change with every year. What I have learned can be summarized in several reflections. First, my largest challenge every day is to confront what I must do that day and to use a Socrates “first principle” approach to the act of sequencing my priorities. In my life I have tried to place my children and family first in these priorities.
Such a resolve is never simple and never perfect, especially given the multiple demands on a teacher and on a researcher. I fail daily at something, which leads me to the second statement.

The most syntactically, semantically, and philosophically inaccurate sentence about professional women that has ever been promulgated is “you can have it all”. Syntactic constraints aside, young professional women can “try to do it all,” but I think the next generation of female professors should not be placed in that position. If I could use my own struggles as a dedicated teacher as a case study, I would recommend an unflinchingly judicious re-evaluation of the expectations and goals of university professors as they evolve over the life span. I believe many truly gifted teachers, particularly young mothers or would-be-mothers, are forced to make choices that are terribly difficult, draining, and potentially wasteful. If our entire teaching/research system could be more developmentally conceptualized, I believe all aspects of the choices would be improved: for professors, students, and ultimately the knowledge base we contribute to as scholars and teachers.

As my own children enter high school and college, I find myself more attentive than ever to the needs of my students. They are all someone else’s children who can benefit and perhaps be changed by my expectations, goals, and hopes for their potential and what this potential can bring our society. I now have the secret luxury of being able to give the students my best efforts at teaching, while giving my graduate assistants some of the teaching and research responsibilities I once assumed for myself. It is a beautiful moment in my teaching and research, for they are now more harmoniously balanced than ever before.

Such a moment (and indeed the writing of this chapter) allows me to examine where I’ve come as a teacher and to reflect upon where I want to go. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I find that my thoughts turn more than ever before to the teaching of teachers, to the creation of new ways of teaching children with learning problems, and to the dissemination of the latter work to populations of children insufficiently served at the present. This sounds vaguely saccharine. I have no desire or temperament for sainthood; rather, I am beginning to feel the pull of all my teachers within me to take the next step in giving away what I know about teaching to the next generation. It is a wonderful feeling: standing on the shoulders of all my teachers, I am using my multi-influenced words to teach how words influence the development of every child. It is a great joy.

Advice for New Teachers

“To learn, read
To think, write
To master, teach”
Every teacher has a unique life history and set of reasons that affected the choice to become a teacher. In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke wrote that you knew you were a poet if you could not do otherwise. For me teaching was like that. I do not believe that university teaching is always or even usually like that. For many (and sometimes for me) teaching is the vehicle for conducting research. My advice to the youngest members of our profession is to question unflinchingly what teaching means to them and to ask what they might do to make teaching a vehicle for their most profoundly felt, intellectual goals. Teaching can be the most satisfying of life’s pursuits because in the act of teaching, we are forced to sharpen, refine, and articulate what we know. Socrates, who never wrote a word, taught us the power at the heart of teaching: at its best we become partners in a dialogue about knowledge, its sources, its lacunae, and its potential for contributing to the formation of virtue in the individual and in society. I would like to think that my teaching of the next generation continues that pursuit in the next and the next generation. That is a life worth living.
In 1999, I earned my PhD in the General Experimental Psychology program at Colorado State University (CSU). I spent two and a half years at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire (UWEC), and since 2002 I have served in the Department of Psychology at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). Teaching has remained central to my career and to my professional identity throughout my graduate education and my academic work. I received the 1999 McKeachie Early Career Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. Among other honors, I have earned the University of Northern Colorado Academic Excellence Award for Teaching Excellence in Undergraduate Education and a Colorado State University Alumni Association Teaching Award. In addition, students at two of the three universities where I have taught voted me Best Professor (CSU and UNC in 1998 and 2004 respectively).

My Early Development as a Teacher

I had the opportunity to participate actively in a teaching-oriented graduate program. Despite facing challenges in graduate school and in my transition to the professoriate (see Woody, 2004a) I had many opportunities for teaching, an innovative course in university teaching, excellent formal teaching supervision, and incredible teaching mentors in psychology and other fields. These factors combined to provide a supportive teaching environment even though some aspects of the graduate environment were less positive (Woody, 2004a, 2004b).

First, teaching positions were readily available, and other forms of assistance were limited. Graduate students could earn funding by assisting in class or by teaching undergraduate labs or courses. Thus, a student could remain fiscally solvent if he or she could accept the lifestyle limitations set by the graduate stipend. I learned that I could live on less than half of the minimum required to be legally impoverished in the United States. Teaching in the midst of a graduate program demanded extensive time, and the financial and experiential rewards of teaching were dampened by the reduction in time available for research, writing, and one’s own coursework (see Woody, 2004b). Additionally, faculty provided variable support for teaching these courses; some students learned independence and often relied on more advanced graduate students as mentors. If students demonstrated themselves in these teaching assignments, they could apply to teach undergraduate topical classes or to teach General Psychology under the supervision of Professor Frank Vattano.
Additionally, I had freedom to include teaching in my doctoral competency projects. In my graduate program, I taught History and Systems of Psychology and several sections of General Psychology, and I created two interdisciplinary courses: a senior seminar called Philosophical Issues in Psychology and a freshman seminar in Psychology and Sociology. Although these teaching activities required significant time commitments during my graduate education, they helped me develop a unique teaching portfolio as I entered the job market.

Dr. Vattano has taught the Seminar in College Teaching at CSU each semester since 1971. He and Professor Jack Avens now teach the graduate course that is open to students in all departments. Drs. Vattano and Avens discuss a wide range of teaching ideas from the basic mechanics of classroom presentations through the philosophical and ethical dilemmas of teaching and the daily life experiences of typical university teachers. Their course serves a valuable role for the university as a whole.

Teaching General Psychology under the direct supervision of Dr. Vattano provided my most formal supervisory relationship. He modeled stellar teaching mechanics in his own courses, supervised the teaching of all General Psychology classes at CSU, and actively demonstrated teaching skills as he guided a team of graduate instructors in the challenging environment of a freshman-level lecture course. He assisted with or handled the student problems and ethical dilemmas faced by all instructors of General Psychology, and his mentorship extended past graduation. Many of us continue to seek his wisdom and experience as we face challenges in our current positions.

My most important mentoring relationship in psychology was with Professor Wayne Viney. As my graduate advisor, Dr. Viney acted as my primary teaching model. I cannot imagine anyone better. I assisted in his History and Systems of Psychology class for several semesters, and he was willing to involve me in the class and to engage me in debates for the benefit of the students. He earned numerous teaching accolades throughout his career, and I learned much about high-quality teaching and, perhaps more critically, about the importance of teaching well from him. I learned from watching him treat students as individuals with integrity. Dr. Viney consistently taught in a variety of roles, including scholar, advisor, teaching mentor, and, sometimes controversially, my friend. I continue to be honored when people describe my research, my teaching, or my attitudes as similar to his.

I also sought teaching mentors outside my immediate department, and these mentors provided both depth and breadth in my professional development. Individuals such as Professors Edouard Thai, Michael Losonsky, Edie Greene, and Michael Wertheimer modeled great teaching across disciplines and departments, and their contributions and styles continue to shape my teaching.
Working to Define Myself as a Teacher

I continuously seek to improve my teaching. First, I actively consider teaching and speaking mechanics. In each class session, I try to speak at an appropriate speed, write legibly when I use the board, and monitor my physical presence. I strive to improve my voice clarity, projection, and enunciation while also working on larger issues of timing, pausing, story arrangement, and fitting examples into the larger organizational system of the class session and the course as a whole.

I attempt to improve larger issues as well. I continuously evaluate the blend of formal course material and relevant ideas from other sources. Can we teach prejudice in the United States without discussing the history of race in science and religion? Can we teach the history of psychology without studying the social context in which history occurs? Can we discuss jury decision-making without discussing current Supreme Court cases and ongoing legal reforms? The actions of psychology in the world shape our students’ experiences with psychology and in our classes, and external developments continue to shape our disciplines. I struggle with the overlap between formal scientific research and relevant cultural events and with ways to blend and prioritize these areas. Teaching can also drive significant political and personal concerns. How can we discuss sexual orientation without risking controversy or perceptions of bias?

Teaching involves difficulties beyond the courses themselves. Many of us want to utilize comprehensive examinations and challenging written assignments, but we face limits from our course load, increasing class enrollments, and other academic requirements. Initially, I faced these challenges through sleep deprivation. Since graduate school, however, I have increased my focus on my health, and I have sought other possible remedies, including blending teaching and research and seeking professional positions that fit my teaching interests.

Although service and advising require significant time commitments, particularly during advising season when the continuous line of students extends down the hall from my office, research presents the most persistent and difficult dilemmas. Although research has officially comprised only 20% of my workload at each of my professional positions, research outcomes have carried disproportionately larger weight in promotion and tenure decisions. Decisions, therefore, to prioritize teaching over research involve significant risks that colleagues and administrators will not share these priorities during evaluations. Time spent conducting research is time lost to teaching, and vice versa, but in some departments these categories are not mutually exclusive. In both of my professional positions, I have been able to further my research programs by involving students. My mentorship activities count as
teaching; students help conduct my research, and they gain valuable experience in the process. Of course, the effort required for a research project grows significantly. Preparing students to present with me at a convention requires far more effort than preparing my own presentations. Blending teaching with research brings rewards, including the far more valuable but less tangible rewards of mentorship.

The source of my solutions in facing the conflicting demands of teaching and research come from the institutions where I have worked. At the UWEC and UNC, teaching is a genuine priority for faculty and administrators. I teach more classes and have higher expectations for my teaching than many faculty members at doctoral research institutions because teaching forms a critical aspect of my evaluation and recognition. At regional undergraduate universities I am likely to teach more, have less research time and support, and have reduced research requirements, but I am less likely to live and die by the success of my grants. I am pleased to find a fit between my positions and my teaching priorities.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My personal philosophy of teaching centers on the idea that teachers primarily convey ideas and inspire passion for learning. I hope that in my classes students can study new ideas while simultaneously thinking of familiar ideas in new ways. Specific ideas are not only investigated in relation to a program of research or a particular topic; they can be located in historical and cultural contexts as well. Ideas have practical and experiential consequences. When these consequences leave the pages of textbooks and come alive in the day-to-day experiences of students, the ideas and their implications cease to be only academic. Demonstrations provide powerful tools, particularly when they can be expedient, efficient, and poignant (i.e., quick, cheap, and personal). For example, theories of human memory come to life with the addition of a small team of volunteers and a few squirt guns. Students can then feel their own inability to identify assailants instead of simply reading about encoding difficulties. To teach therapeutic techniques in our General Psychology classes, Britt Mace, a graduate colleague who is now a successful teacher at Southern Utah University, played Cinderfella to my Fairy Godperson, and we demonstrated and discussed fundamental elements of seven types of therapy in a single class session (see Kaminski & Haynes, 2000). Fundamentally, I encourage students to think and discuss critically and freely and about psychological theories, ethics, experiments, and conclusions. Watching my mentors struggle with ideas left an indelible impression upon my early academic development. I try to inspire students in similar ways by showing my genuine struggle for knowledge and motivating students with actions as well as with words.
In addition to developing the mechanics of my teaching, I also strive to improve the fit of my teaching to each class session and course topic. I now see teaching as less of an activity that I pursue and more of activity that we—students and myself—share. This vision of teaching requires that I integrate my presentation with what students bring to class. For example, I expect seniors to know more psychology than freshmen, to show more maturity than freshmen, and, therefore, to be able to handle more vivid examples, more discussion of contemporary society, and greater freedom in class and on assignments. I conduct class in a circle, and I expect students who choose to take the senior-level Psychology of Prejudice class to engage me and their classmates in conversation on challenging topics in psychology, our history, and our culture. I let students’ questions and comments shape the form of the materials I present in class. The classroom experience becomes a living, organic whole, and I let it grow freely instead of forcing it to conform to a specific mold.

Another prominent change in my teaching has come from a greater reliance on my cultural background. I continue to develop a better fit between myself and the teaching context. I encourage all teachers of psychology to examine their own unique cultures, family backgrounds, and expectations. The more we examine our lives, the better we will be prepared for the challenging environment of the university classroom. Both sides of my family come from the Appalachian Mountains. Culturally, this background implies that I may find comfort in hard work and choose to clarify ideas with stories. The extensive efforts I dedicate to the details, timing, and pauses of story telling in class reflect my familial culture. Word-craft and story telling remain artistic expressions in some cultures, and I try to bring them into the classroom.

I assess my teaching in many ways. First, I consider the quantitative teaching evaluations generated each semester and compare the numbers with evaluations from other classes and from previous semesters. Second, I evaluate qualitative comments from students at midterm and again at the end of the semester, and I track trends within each class and across classes. Third, I invite colleagues to my classes to promote the exchange of ideas across classes, departments, and disciplines, and so that others in my department, college, and university can provide feedback on my courses. Fourth, when possible, I seek teaching opportunities across the university and within the larger community. Feedback from scholars with differing academic expectations and from people with very different teaching goals (e.g., K-12 teachers, members of student organizations, and social activists within the community) illuminates my teaching.

On a smaller scale, I assess my own teaching in and after each class session. After class, I will often ask students for feedback regarding the day’s class session, particularly when the topic has inspired difficulty or controversy. I also follow the lead of a colleague.
from UWEC. Steve Baumgardner (personal communication, September, 1999) claimed that the most important teaching evaluation is completed at the end of each class session, when the instructor takes a moment to reflect and ask “did the instructor amaze himself or herself in today’s class?”

As I push myself toward higher standards of teaching in terms of topical mastery, presentation mechanics, organization, and story telling, I remind myself that I walk a long road. Although I once heard a nationally recognized teacher accept a major award with the words “I have long argued that teaching is not an inborn art but a perfectible skill, and I believe this award signifies that I have done so” (Anonymous Famous Teacher, public statement during awards ceremony), I find more inspiration in such luminaries as Viney, Vattano, McKeachie, Halpern, and others who continue to strive for improvement despite stellar teaching success. Like many others, I find joy in the long journey.

I also seek to improve my teaching at a larger level. I have recently devoted writing opportunities to discussions of the pressures that lead to mistreatment of graduate students (Woody, 2004b), possible difficulties in the transition from graduate student to academic (Woody, 2004a), and ethical teaching (Woody, in press), particularly the ethical treatment of students. I hope to continue to serve as an advocate for graduate students who must face a stressful time in their lives with few options for independent oversight. I continue to stress the importance of respect for the integrity of each student, and I hope that this general aspect of my teaching inspires others and extends throughout my professional identity.

Advice for New Teachers

I suggest that aspiring teachers observe others attempts at communication whenever possible. I consistently observe speakers in a variety of contexts. I listen to speech rates, pauses, filler words, and dynamic changes or the lack thereof. I also watch organization, timing, story construction, and audience interaction. Sometimes, observing others helps me improve my own teaching, but other times I can only hope that I do not utilize any of the methods I observe. I watch exercise instructors, dance teachers, artists, and grandparents, among others; each individual in each context has a unique approach, and I encourage aspiring teachers to search for teaching hints in a wide field of possible models.

I also suggest that teachers further examine themselves and their own unique cultures, family backgrounds, and expectations. The better we know ourselves, the better we can fit our topic material to ourselves as well as our individual class and its members.

Final Thoughts

Teaching remains important beyond everything else we do in the academy. A few memories anchor this concept for me. In 1997, I received one of six Colorado State University
Alumni Association Teaching Awards. One award was given posthumously, one recipient had retired in the early 1970s, three recipients were tenured faculty, and one award went to me, a graduate student at the time. At the awards ceremony, I was approached by a former member of my department who had faced reduced raises and limited accolades due to his emphasis on teaching instead of research; he had suffered for his dedication to teaching. He simply said “Never apologize for teaching. Never apologize for teaching.” Then, he walked away. This instruction stays with me today, even as teaching limits my ability to set aside time for other academic duties. Across everything I have learned from Wayne Viney, similar ideas emerge. I vividly remember his impassioned statement: “Teaching is the most important thing we do; teaching is more important than any article.” Although these views are not popular across all of academia, they drive my world.

The traditional relationship of teacher and student, in which a student travels and suffers personal, physical, and/or financial hardships to sit at the feet of a teacher, existed long before the university. The modern university system evolved in part to provide structure for the mentoring process, and we now teach in a bureaucratic culture. Despite almost a millennium of change, students continue to justify our existence and the existence of the university. We serve as the speculum mundi (the mirror of the world) for our students. Students place immense faith, hope, and trust in their teachers; our responsibilities are to help students improve in every sense of the word. Their success becomes our achievement; progress is when our students go beyond us.

References
My first foray into teaching was over 40 years ago. I remember standing in front of the class, my knees shaking, terror building, scanning my mentor's face for encouragement, and then I read my essay to the first-grade class. I was in second grade and my first-grade teacher had invited me back to "teach" that day. I remember the students sitting there listening intently to the "older girl" who had come in to present. I am not sure how much I really taught that day but it was fun. Forty years later, it is still fun.

My graduate education began at Saint Louis University in applied-experimental psychology with a focus on adult development and aging. However, over the years, my professional identity has changed dramatically. Today, I consider myself to be a peace psychologist and I have completed coursework in Israel and Eastern Europe related to understanding the psychosocial roots of the Holocaust and other forms of mass violence.

Currently, I am a Professor of Psychology at Webster University, and I teach a broad range of courses including courses on the Holocaust, genocide, political psychology, women and global human rights, war, terrorism, and peace psychology, all from a psychosocial perspective. Additionally, I teach more traditional courses such as statistics, personality theory, and history of psychology. One of the truly great things about my university is that there are opportunities to teach and conduct research in a range of interdisciplinary areas. Thus, my courses are often cross-listed with the women's studies, multicultural studies, and international human rights programs, which facilitated my ability to expand traditional psychological coursework and curriculum development into new areas.

I feel fortunate to have been honored several times for my work as both an educator and a scholar. I received the McKeachie Early Career Award for Teaching from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; Division Two) of the American Psychological Association (APA). Since then I have been honored with additional teaching awards including the Emerson Electric Excellence in Teaching Award (Regional Teaching Award) in 1990 and 2000 as well as the Kemper Outstanding Teaching Award (University Teaching Award) in 2000. Additionally, I have been the primary author on two Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology, Instructional Resource Award projects: *Expanding Student Boundaries with International Psychology: Textbook Evaluations, Strategies for Integration, and Resource Guide* (2000) and *Genocide, Ethnopolitical Conflict, and Human Rights: A Path to Internationalizing the Psychology Curriculum and Promoting Social Responsibility* (1999).
Professionally, I am also a Coordinator for the Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights at Webster University, 2006 President of the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology (Division 48 of APA), 2003-2005 Secretary for STP, member of the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP) program committee, and an editorial board member for H-Genocide.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Imagine standing at the edge of an ocean cliff, staring wide-eyed at the cold, swirling waters below, and being told to jump. Also, imagine that you have never had any swimming lessons and there are no lifeguards to assist with that first swim, although there do appear to be sharks circling. This picture describes my first experience as a teaching assistant while in graduate school. I was put in charge of a physiological psychology laboratory course, a laboratory course I had never had the opportunity to take while an undergraduate. I was to coordinate sheep brain and other dissections, run estrous studies with rats, teach stereotaxic surgery and perfusions, and other assorted activities—all of which I had never done before. It was clear that I was on my own and I was panicked. Fortunately, a fellow graduate student, who had taught the course previously, bailed me out by volunteering to assist me during that first semester.

I received little teacher training or mentoring while I was a graduate student. However, I was provided many teaching opportunities. Based on my success with that first physiological psychology laboratory course, I was offered the opportunity to teach additional laboratory courses followed by more traditional courses. I then began teaching as an adjunct faculty member at a number of universities in the St. Louis area.

All of these opportunities were important; I knew from the first day of graduate school that my primary goal was to prepare myself for a career as a psychology professor. I have always found psychology, with its underlying theoretical and philosophical ambiguities, its methodologies, and its concern for human beings, a challenging and important discipline. I love studying, exploring, researching, talking about, and teaching psychology. I think students can sense my intense commitment, excitement, and wonder, and it serves as a catalyst for their own developing journey. Fundamental to my passion for teaching is the belief that what I teach is important; it has value to people’s lives individually and collectively within a multicultural global community. I knew that teaching psychology would allow me to blend these loves and interests into one career path.

Although I had the goal and the opportunities, I was not a "born teacher." In essence, I still had to learn to teach while on the job. I employed five strategies in my efforts to become a more effective teacher. First, I worked hard. I spent more time on the classes that I was
teaching than the classes that I was taking. Teaching involves a responsibility to others and inevitably any time I have tried to "cut corners," the students have paid the price. Second, I tried out lots of new activities and methods. I was prepared to see what worked and also what failed. Third, I listened. I listened to my students and my fellow teaching assistants. They did not always say what I wanted to hear but more often than not, their comments were beneficial. Fourth, I reflected on the good and bad teachers I experienced through the years and then endeavored to model my teaching style on those professors who exemplified excellence in teaching. Finally, I allowed myself to have fun in the classroom. I began my undergraduate career as a theatre acting major and I enjoy letting the ham out of the closet every now and then. Of course, I should add that the quest for teaching excellence never ends.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I sometimes joke that I do not have too much on my plate because I have expanded it to a tray—and yes, I probably have too much on my tray as well. Finding a balance between teaching, writing, research, professional obligations, and the other aspects of life is my most challenging struggle as an academic. There simply is not enough time to do everything that I want to do or to do what is expected of me. Therefore, it has been important for me to learn time management skills and also to learn to say “no.” With regard to the latter, there will always be another committee, another task force, another project that either someone else thinks you should do or that looks incredibly enticing professionally. However, it is important to learn to be selective about where to place one’s efforts. For me, the criteria upon which I select projects include not only what will bring the most meaning to my life and perhaps, open the most doors, but also those projects that translate back into creating a more dynamic classroom.

Some individuals I know approach the issue of overload by cutting back on one aspect of their professional identity. For example, they may scale back their teaching or reduce their efforts towards research and writing. For me, this strategy does not work. It is much more important to achieve an active identity that includes all facets of my work and to balance them. I find that I am a much better teacher when I am involved in research, writing, and other professional activities. Conversely, I think my teaching improves the work I do in other arenas. If nothing else, my students ask questions and challenge my worldview, causing me to reexamine my hypotheses and theories. In a nutshell, I define myself as a teacher, but I would be a shadow of a teacher if my work did not expand beyond the classroom.

Another challenge that I have had to overcome through my years has been the lack of mentoring. Many graduate programs have designed programs to assist, guide, and mentor graduate students and early career teachers. Such a teacher-training program did not exist in
my graduate education and the old boy network may also have still been in place. During my assistant professor years, I think the issue became a bit more complex. Because I did or at least appeared to do things well, my colleagues assumed that I needed no assistance or mentoring. I sometimes wonder how much quicker my career and abilities would have advanced if I had been mentored. Ironically, I think I have received more mentoring in recent years as a result of my affiliation with divisions within the APA as well as other professional organizations. Thus, the lessons learned may be: Ask for assistance, develop positive interactions with your colleagues, and seek out resources through organizations such as the STP for professional growth and development.

My greatest challenge in defining myself as both a psychologist and a teacher has been the result of my focus on peace psychology, a nontraditional area of study. It is difficult to swim against the tide of tradition, and it can be lonely. For many years I would regularly be asked at both research and teaching conferences, "What does ‘this’ have to do with psychology"? The "this" being genocide, terrorism, war, peace, or other topics related to mass violence that I happened to be presenting on that day. Since September 11, 2001, the relevance of psychology to the understanding of terrorism, war, torture, and other topics within the realm of peace psychology has become transparent. However, during my early years, support for my teaching and scholarship related to peace psychology was infrequent and I had few collegial relationships within peace psychology. Support and relationships have grown dramatically over the years, but it would not have been possible had I decided to give up my nontraditional identity and focus.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Three primary principles rest at the heart of my personal philosophy of teaching: Diversity, global human rights, and teaching students the "how" of learning. We live in a global community marked by increasing interdependence and mutual influence. Incredible diversity, both locally and across borders, exists within this global community. Issues of diversity include: race, national identity, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical and cognitive abilities, religion, economics, ideologies. The list goes on, and all create an ever-changing and evolving tapestry called humanity. Psychology teaches us about the commonalities within this tapestry, but can also teach us about our differences, the impact of culture, and both the benefits and challenges that human diversity brings to relationships and communities. Therefore, in all of my classes, I strive to address issues of diversity.

I feel strongly about integrating concerns of global human rights into the psychology curriculum. Psychology has much to offer as a science toward the promotion of universal human rights, the documentation of benefits or risks for individuals, families, and
communities associated with the maintenance or violation of essential human rights, respectively, and the development of models aimed at the promotion of more peaceful communities. With knowledge, our students may be more likely to accept the mantle of social responsibility and become actively involved as citizens and future psychologists within the global community. For this reason, I have developed and teach several unique psychology courses including Holocaust; Genocide; Nazi Science: Human Experimentation vs. Human Rights; Women and Global Human Rights; Psychosocial Roots of Terrorism; War and Peace; and the Psychology of Peace and Conflict. I integrate issues of social responsibility, global concerns, and human rights into all of my courses.

Learning should be an incredible journey marked by sparks of insight, emotion, and imagination. As Abraham Joshua Heschel (1951) wrote, “Wonder, rather than doubt, is the root of knowledge” (p. 11). Thus, one of my teaching goals is to spark this wonder and to foster the development of independent, critical thought, evaluative skills, and depth of learning. Much of my class time is spent critically evaluating theories and research, examining the philosophical biases inherent in each. In addition, I encourage students to think for themselves, to explore ideas, and to question. Anyone can simply parrot information, but doing so does not demonstrate learning. Independent thought applied to acquired knowledge represents learning and opens the door to discovery. Therefore, during assessment, the answers are rarely “in the book.” Students must know complex information, trust their understanding of this knowledge, and create unique problem-solving applications. Through this process, students learn how to learn and thus open the world up to themselves forever. I believe that individuals who critically evaluate information, independently analyze situations, and who know how to learn and self-teach are better equipped to face the challenges posed by our rapidly changing society and world.

The kernels of these three principles were visible in my early teaching but have evolved over time. Moreover, changes have occurred in my approach and methods of teaching. For example, I worry less about cramming in all of the details on a topic and focus more on a broader understanding of concepts. Ultimately, the details are easier to comprehend within the context of a concept. Second, I am less critical of my students’ work and seek to build more on their strengths. In other metaphorical words, the red pen has been replaced by pink and on occasion blue. I find that students have greater skill development and learn more by stressing what they have done right than a focus on marking everything they have gotten wrong. Additionally, I have learned to listen more in class and to examine why a student may have questions about a particular concept. I have come to recognize that students' questions are not always directly about the material. Although I strive to maintain focus on the course material and topic, I am more sensitive and careful in my answers than I think I used to be. In
other words, I am getting better at recognizing my students as individuals beyond just their "student" identity.

Of course, technology has also changed my teaching. Advances in technology have opened new doors within the educational process. Multimedia, if used well, can foster a highly dynamic classroom. I am still learning and exploring, succeeding and failing, as I seek to discover best practices for technology in the classroom. Additionally, for each of my classes I have developed Web sites and e-mail discussion lists. Thus, I am able to remain in contact with students throughout the semester by sending them relevant news articles, questions or study guides, and highlight information from around the globe concerning course material. Students also engage in the dissemination of information, discussion, and inquiry. Class no longer ends at the threshold of a university building.

Although I do not engage is a high degree of self-assessment beyond my, at times, extreme introspection, I do work to improve my teaching. First, I strive to improve my teaching in the classroom. Thus, I never cease to try out new teaching methods and activities and I continuously update my class materials. In other words, I rarely teach the same class twice. Second, I study the current scholarship of teaching in forums such as the STP journal, *Teaching of Psychology*, and conferences. Third, I engage in the scholarship of teaching through my own research, conference presentations, and curriculum development. Finally, I network and regularly converse with colleagues around the globe who also share a passion for teaching.

**Advice for New Teachers**

*Study the scholarship of teaching.* Approach the scholarship of teaching as one would the learning of any discipline. Read journal articles, books, and other sources of research related to teaching and if possible take a class on teaching.

*Be a joiner.* Professional organizations such as APA and STP are a great way to network, particularly if one attends the various conferences and conventions. Additionally, the publications are invaluable. They provide the budding academic with information about everything from jobs to teaching tips!

*Find mentors.* Teaching mentors are invaluable and can aid in finding direction, avoiding pitfalls, and working through classroom and student difficulties.

*Get experience.* Look for opportunities to teach and then get feedback. Although it is important to not get locked into a “professional adjunct” status, it is also important to gain teaching experience. Look to other local universities and colleges for opportunities to teach and invite colleagues to sit in on your classes to provide feedback.
Attend and present at local, regional, or national teaching conferences or institutes. These conferences provide unique opportunities to learn from a variety of individuals ranging from graduate students to experienced “pros.” Some of my most valuable mentoring experiences have taken place within the context of these conferences.

Break the Rules. Okay, I am not advocating doing anything illegal or fundamentally stupid. Rather, I am encouraging you to be innovative. Much of my career has involved breaking the implicit rules about what is appropriate within psychology to study and to teach. Certainly, most psychology programs do not include coursework on genocide. Innovation in relation to what you teach, the methods used to teach, your research, and so forth come with risks but it also opens the doors to great personal and professional rewards. If you are always comfortable with what you are doing, chances are you are not testing your limits or expanding your abilities.

Find your passion. If you love what you teach and you are excited about it, students will find themselves caught up in the learning process.

Reference
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