The Teaching of Psychology in Autobiography: Perspectives from Exemplary Psychology Teachers (Volume 5)

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Preface

A total of 106 outstanding teachers have contributed to the first four volumes of *Teaching Psychology in Autobiography: Perspectives from Exemplary Psychology Teachers*, published by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. These stories represent the development and reflections of some of psychology’s very best teachers who provide insightful anecdotes and lessons learned for anyone seeking to improve his or her teaching.

Volume 5 of *Teaching Psychology in Autobiography: Perspectives from Exemplary Psychology Teachers* extends the mission of the first four volumes by including 17 more invited autobiographies. In keeping with the ideals of the first volume, we invited recipients of all five of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) teaching excellence awards [Robert S. Daniel Teaching Excellence (Four-Year College or University) Award; Wayne Weiten Teaching Excellence (Two-Year College) Award; Mary Margaret Moffet Memorial Teaching Excellence (High School) Award; Jane S. Halonen Teaching Excellence (Early Career) Award; and the Wilbert J. McKeachie Teaching Excellence (Graduate Student) Award], all recipients of the American Psychological Foundation’s Teaching Excellence Award (now called the Charles L. Brewer Distinguished Teaching of Psychology Award), all Editors-in-Chief of *Teaching of Psychology*, and all past-presidents of STP to contribute chapters to this volume. New to the fifth volume, we invited the STP Presidential Citation recipients and recipients of the CASE award (psychologists only).

To provide consistency in both content and style across all chapters and volumes of this series, each contributor responded 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 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?

Each of the 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 thank all the authors who contributed to this volume for their wisdom and insight. Their cumulative years of experience can serve as a collective inspiration for new and veteran teachers alike. We also thank the STP leadership and Publications Committee; without their steadfast support this volume and other services like it would not exist. Finally, we would like to thank you, the reader, for taking the time to reflect on our common vocation as teachers of psychology.

As you read the chapters in this volume, we hope that you enjoy them as much as we have in preparing them for publication. In the pages to follow, you will find amusing anecdotes and quirky accidents alongside serious reflections and heartfelt recollections. Common across all the chapters is a driving passion for our discipline and an earnest desire to become a better teacher. And, at the heart of it all, exists a profound caring for our students; after all, it is for them that we have ventured along this path in the first place.

Robert Bubb
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May 2014
1. Paying it Forward: Continuing the Care and Student Engagement in College Teaching

Stephanie E. Afful
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It is not a coincidence that I am both a social psychologist and a college professor. I am very much a product of my environment. Currently, I am an assistant professor at Fontbonne University, a small liberal arts university in St. Louis, which hosts around 1000 undergraduate students. My undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology is from Drury University (also a small private liberal arts university) and Master’s and PhD in social psychology are from Saint Louis University. I also have a graduate certificate in University Teaching Skills from Saint Louis University.

In 2011, I received the Joan Goostree Stevens Teaching Excellence Award at Fontbonne University and the Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award. In 2013, I was awarded the Society for the Teaching of Psychology’s (STP) Jane S. Halonen Teaching Excellence Award for early career faculty.

My service to the university and to the discipline has also centered around my role as a teacher, specifically as the chair of the STP Early Career Psychologists Council, helping faculty within the first 7 years of their career balance teaching, research, and service. I also serve on the advisory board for our university’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

My Early Development as a Teacher

As an adolescent, I had lofty visions of being a cultural anthropologist and traveling the world with National Geographic. As I realized the reality of bug bites, camping, and eating mysterious food was not as romantic as I once envisioned, I redirected my focus on psychology and sociology. I attended a small liberal arts university for my undergraduate education, which had a large international student population and general education curriculum that emphasized global studies (thus scratching my itch for anthropology). I did not realize at 18 years of age that declaring my major as psychology would lead to pursuing a doctorate in psychology nor to emulating the professors that I had just met. It was as an undergraduate that I realized that I wanted to teach and it was in graduate school that I realized what I wanted to teach. At Drury University, I enjoyed the small classes, getting to know my professors, and the feeling that I was part of the learning process. I had great professors who held me and themselves accountable. In a statistics class one semester, I apparently did not get the memo of the self-directed sick day and was the ONLY student to show up to class. I thought “Sweet, no class” but that was not the case. My professor lectured the entire class period to me and me alone. The next class period, unbeknownst to me, I taught the class the previous lesson. It was then I realized that I would love to be a professor.

In my graduate training at Saint Louis University, we were fortunate not only to have a course in our department that prepared us for teaching but were also encouraged to pursue a graduate
certificate in University Teaching Skills through the Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning. This program included attendance at teaching seminars, creating a teaching portfolio, working with a teaching mentor, reviewing feedback from peers and a mentor along with a 3-credit hour course on Teaching of Psychology.

Mentorship was also key at every stage of development in my career. We were fortunate to have a model in graduate school of what professorship looks like when also invested in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Jim Korn taught our course on Teaching of Psychology and was active in STP, serving as a past-president for the society. His course and mentorship was my first introduction to appreciating the science behind pedagogy as well as raising the bar on using active learning and creativity in the classroom. As graduate students, we were relatively good at articulating our research interests but not nearly as competent at framing our teaching interests and philosophy. It was also important that the Teaching of Psychology course was offered our second year—early in the program—which prioritized our development as teachers.

Another component of the graduate certificate was working with a mentor and being observed while teaching. My graduate mentor, Richard Harvey, served as both my research and teaching advisor. As nerve-wracking as that first guest lecture was (not to mention watching myself on video tape), the feedback from students and my mentor were critical in learning to be flexible early on in the development of my courses. My success is in no small way a function of the academic and professional support I gained in graduate school. My graduate professors continue to mentor me in the next stage of my career and prove to be relationships I benefit from to this day.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher
Just as graduate school can be a humbling experience, teaching also reinforces our humility as it is not without its challenges. Beyond the failed demonstration, the quiet discussants in a seminar class, or technology distractions, overcoming these challenges within the classroom for me have involved embracing my humility. I have become quite good at dealing with those class periods that did not go the way I intended by invoking a sense of humor with my students and resolving to try again. Students value humor and approachability over course policies and professionalism (Kusto, Afful, & Mattingly, 2010).

Another challenge in defining myself as a teacher was in the initial process of applying to small teaching colleges, which offered heavy teaching loads and little research support. When transitioning from graduate school to the academy, it was difficult for me to feel confident in the choices I made as I compared myself to other graduate student colleagues’ salaries and lab start-up funds. I had to sacrifice my ability to continue research at the same level and frequency in this new position. Once I got my ego out of it (still working on humility), I became more comfortable with my identity as primarily a teacher, secondary to a researcher. This challenge has also been eased by the application of the science of learning in my classroom. SoTL work has enabled me to scientifically examine the best ways I can improve my pedagogy and promote my professional development.
The Examined Life of a Teacher

At the heart of my teaching philosophy is to ignite a passion for psychology in my students, which has actualized in a number of ways including learner-centered strategies, active learning, discussion, etc. If I can get students excited about statistics—then I must be doing something right. If they are engaged and taking responsibility for their learning, it is easier to extend the applicability and scientific literacy we strive for in undergraduate psychology programs.

At Fontbonne, I get the opportunity to put my passion for teaching psychology in innovative ways into practice. I enjoy the small classrooms and opportunities to discuss issues with students. I love being the first introduction to psychology for many first-year college students, to shock them about the vast realm of psychology, and also help them to appreciate the applicability of psychology to their everyday lives. I love teaching upper-level courses with familiar students and savor the moments when they apply information from previous courses to new theories and methods.

Another benefit of teaching at a small university is the continued relationship with students as both an instructor and mentor. I find that one of the most rewarding components of teaching is when students are accepted to graduate school. It is the ultimate feedback loop. (Especially when they “ace” their first-year graduate statistics class!) As they follow in my footsteps, seeking an academic career, I am reminded of how I felt transitioning from my undergraduate to graduate training. It is a constant reinforcement for the confidence in my competence as a professor.

I also recognize that my teaching philosophy has evolved over the years. Initially, as any new teacher might encounter, I felt pressure to comprehensively cover everything in the text while maintaining authority and control in the classroom. As a function of shifting to a more learner or student-centered approach, I am more comfortable relinquishing control and allowing students to take more responsibility and choice in the material and assignments. Weimer (2002) defined learner-centered classrooms are those that shift the balance of power such that the focus is more on learning rather than teaching, which gives students a level of responsibility and autonomy that is greater than most traditional classroom environments. When students are responsible for their own learning, they are connected, engaged, and work harder outside of class. Learner-centered classrooms also focus on teaching less content but more in depth while encouraging students to reflect on how they learn (Weimer, 2002). Depending on the course, I regularly have the students take ownership of the assignment choices, course policies, and discussion topics. After some possible initial hesitation, students appreciate the autonomy and the mutual respect shared in the learning process.

Part of implementing a learner-centered classroom, or any new teaching strategy, requires assessment. I often teach back-to-back sections of courses, which allows me to implement a new technique in one section while the second section serves as a quasi-control group. Assessing teaching is more than asking students if they liked course activities. Rather it should include assessment of not only what they learned but how they best learned. I frequently use formative assessment, which is beneficial in two ways: It forces students to reflect on their own learning while also giving the instructor feedback on the success of techniques used. Another humbling experience for me is when student feedback is not as I might have predicted. Taking
risks in the classroom and implementing change also requires that we not become married to any one particular teaching strategy or activity. We strive for scientific verification of improved learning with such changes because sometimes the flash and novelty of something new can override its actual effectiveness.

Another beneficial tool in improving our pedagogy is to ask for feedback beyond what might be required for tenure and promotion. Feedback from our peers should not be motivated by obligation but rather to provide constructive and substantive feedback. I have invited colleagues to observe my courses for feedback when I am implementing new teaching techniques. This feedback would not necessarily be included in a tenure dossier but it provides extremely helpful information on my skills in the classroom. Dunn (2013) recently gave a talk on expert teachers in which he surveyed personality characteristics and habits of award-winning teachers. The point that stuck with me is that the professors in his sample were committed to continually reflecting and assessing their methods. One form of metacognition applies to our persistence in honing our craft. Halonen, Dunn, McCarthy, and Baker (2012) also offered advice on how to best self-assess using peer, student, and self-feedback.

Advice for New Teachers
If you are reading this e-book, then you are on the right path! One of the greatest assets to new teachers is to take advantage of the wealth of resources available—a vast majority are free on the STP website (teachpsych.org). As I was struggling for an activity or further clarification within my course preparations, searching the website or Teaching of Psychology journal has always been my first route. One of our primary goals through the Early Career Council was to disseminate those resources and links to both new and seasoned professors. And thus the shameless plug for our e-books: So You Landed a Job - What’s Next? Advice for Early Career Psychologists from Early Career Psychologists (Keeley, Afful, Stiegler-Balfour, Good, & Leder, 2013) and The Introduction to Psychology Primer: A Guide for New Teachers of Psych 101 (Afful, Good, Keeley, Leder, & Stiegler-Balfour, 2013). I continue to be amazed at the creativity and generosity that STP members practice within their teaching and scholarship. So please be active within regional and national professional societies such as STP. Sign up for the various listservs, volunteer for service opportunities (see the “Get Involved” link on the STP website), and attend and network at STP sponsored conferences or pre-conferences.

Other advice—find a mentor! Often you might be appointed a mentor within your department or school. If not, you should seek a mentor. It is also acceptable to request an additional mentor if you do not feel rapport with an existing mentor. In addition, seek mentorship connections outside of your university. STP offers a professional development program (see http://www.teachpsych.org/Default.aspx?pageld=1603031) which pairs early career faculty with mentors. There are other opportunities (e.g., social hours, writing workshops) at conferences that can foster mentorship relationships. As we mentor our students, it is equally important that we receive the same sort of professional support.

Final Thoughts
We communicate to our students that science informs practice. As we invest in our pedagogy, then we also must systematically seek to review and renew in the classroom. My role as a
professor has evolved from being Dr. Awful (for those students who automatically spell check my last name…) to Dr. Afful, who *tries* to practice evidenced-based teaching with humility and humor.

Teaching has been my best opportunity to pay it forward. As a social psychologist, I recognize that my success is a product of the environments in which I find myself—from small liberal arts university to a graduate program that emphasized SoTL to a teaching college with collaborative colleagues. When I was a young and naive undergrad, my advisor, Vickie Luttrell, told me “This [professorship] is the BEST job.” It has been my goal ever since to emulate the methods, knowledge, and care I received as a young undergraduate.

References


I am the Nancy and Erwin Maddrey Professor of Psychology Emerita, having just retired after 35 years of teaching at Davidson College and, before that, 7 years at the University of Utah. At Davidson I received the Thomas Jefferson Teaching Award in 1996, and Dana Dunn was kind enough to give me a Presidential Citation in 2010 for my various leadership roles in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP), including being Treasurer (1999-2004), Director of the Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology (OTRP; 2006-present), and member of the Fellows Committee and Fund for Excellence Committee. I have also received a Presidential Recognition from the Society for Research in Human Development.

The two publications that give me the most pride are my books, *Children's Cognitive Development: Piaget's Theory and the Process Approach* (1983, 2nd ed.) and *Developmental Perspectives* (1980).

**My Early Development as a Teacher**

I date my first teaching experience to first grade. I remember finishing some little worksheet and then turning around to the girl sitting behind me. She was not yet finished and because I loved to talk, I decided to “help” her finish so that we would have time to chat. I do not think I was going to do her work for her, but I intended to find out where she might be stuck and give her pointers. When the teacher reprimanded me for talking, I protested that I was only trying to help; the teacher told me that each student had to do her own work in order to really learn—my first mentor’s advice about teaching! The lesson that students learned at different paces was reinforced by our assignment into reading groups: the lions, the bears, and the turtles. I understood which group was fastest when we lions started Book 4 and the turtles had not yet finished Book 1. I do not know if I teased the turtles, but probably so because I was a competitive child. Our teacher, however, treated each group respectfully—lesson #2 in teaching! And when playing “school” with my friends, I most often sought the teacher role rather than the student one. Not only did I like the feeling of authority, I liked explaining things.

I have later snippets of memory that relate to teaching, probably from junior high: Leading songs at summer camp and realizing that my enthusiasm, eye contact, big gestures, and loud voice helped maintain campers’ attention. Encouraging a frightened friend to dive into the lake after me because if I could do it, so could she and I was there to “rescue” her if something went amiss, just as I later encouraged psychology majors to pilot a thesis idea or write a draft of a paper while knowing that I was not going to let them drown/fail.

And memories from high school paid employment: Teaching a physically handicapped child how to type (back in the days of clunky manual typewriters). I do not think my technique involved much more than encouraging her to practice, praising her laborious efforts, and calling out the home-row letters (asdfg ;lkjh) one at a time while she tried to hit the right key. Tutoring a boy in first-year algebra by giving feedback on his homework and re-explaining concepts that
he had not understood from his class. In neither case do I remember how I came to have those jobs. Did I volunteer or did a teacher recognize some budding affinity for the profession?

By my college days at Pomona, my teaching opportunities expanded. Three in particular stand out. During my junior year I volunteered to tutor students struggling with Introductory Psychology. I remember a great feeling of satisfaction when my tutees praised me for explaining concepts more clearly than their professor had (although it did not hurt that they were attacking the concepts for a second time) or for being able to come up with multiple examples when the first one I tried did not connect for them. That year I was also invited to be an assistant to the instructor for the laboratory portion of an introductory class. One memorable lab involved me pretending to have ESP, guessing correctly the pictures on cards the instructor was concentrating on because he was signaling the picture with subtle hand positions as he held the cards. Although most students believed our revelation of the hoax, a few persisted in thinking I really did have ESP. I learned the lesson that teachers should try to anticipate how a demonstration might go astray before deciding to use it. I also learned by observation how teachers prepared their lessons. My senior year I took a Behavior Modification seminar first semester and then enrolled in the lower level Abnormal Psychology class the second semester. To keep me from ruining the curve, Dr. Roger Vogler (who was also supervising my senior thesis) made me an offer I could not refuse: I would attend all lectures and read the text, but instead of taking exams, I would develop exam questions (both multiple choice and essay), provide a grading rubric, and help grade the exams. He would give me an A if my questions could discriminate levels of students’ learning. They did, and he did. Our conversations about teaching as well as my careful observation of him as a teacher throughout the year clearly shaped many of my later teaching efforts.

Despite all those experiences and indicators that I should become a college professor, I actually thought I wanted to be a high school guidance counselor. However, when I explored that career path, I was told that I would first need to become a high school teacher and be promoted many years later into the counselor role. Psychology was not yet being taught in any high school that I knew of (in 1968), so I temporized by going to graduate school in developmental psychology at UCLA. Because my husband was also in graduate school, 4 years ahead of me, I kept expecting his imminent graduation would precipitate a relocation and I would decide then how or if to finish my graduate training. Instead, when he graduated and got a job in Los Angeles, he encouraged me to finish my degree at UCLA and become a college professor. When I finished, my faculty advisor, Dr. Wendell Jeffrey, invited me to teach a summer session of Child Development at UCLA so I could “be prepared” for my first assistant professorship job that fall. I had not had any formal teaching experiences during graduate school, and that summer I was completely on my own for course preparation and delivery, so I just appropriated teaching techniques that I had liked, shunned those I disliked (e.g., pop quizzes), used the teacher’s manual that accompanied my textbook, and muddled through.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Two obstacles early in my career come to mind. The first occurred when I was at the University of Utah, teaching Child Development to a broad age-range of students. As a childless, newly minted PhD, I looked like an undergraduate on good days; on bad days people thought I was in
It is never easy to convince some students that their personal experience does not necessarily contradict research results that describe averages, but I struggled particularly with older, male parents who challenged my credibility. There is not much one can or should do about one’s looks and parenthood status, but as I collected anecdotes from friends and relatives and sprinkled them more liberally into my lectures, I became more credible and my lectures became more interesting for all of my students.

The second difficulty was my inability to lead good class discussions consistently. Self-reflection had merely produced the judgment that some classes went well and some went poorly, and I was prone to attribute the difference to the students – their motivation or preparation or academic skill. (We all know about attribution theory!) I wish I could recall who solved the puzzle for me by suggesting an article by Andrews (1980). Andrews developed a typology of questions, tested which were most productive in generating student discussion, and explained why the various types of questions worked or did not. Although I cannot say that asking good questions has become second-nature and spontaneous for me, I have learned to plan my discussions in advance with deliberate consideration of what goals I am trying to accomplish and what kinds of questions will make it more likely to achieve those goals.

A third problem that all of us share is balancing our time. A brilliant colleague at Davidson, Dr. Julio Ramirez, coined the term “teaching” to indicate how professors could combine their teaching and research activities so that they did not have to sacrifice one activity for the other. I hope many of us have discovered this strategy even if we did not have a label for it. Especially in a liberal arts college environment, professors can pick research topics that attract undergraduates into their laboratories and can do SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) research that enhances their own teaching efforts. I found, however, that when I added service into the mix, especially in the form of administrative duties such as chairing a department, my teaching suffered. Without control over my office time during the day and without the ability to limit the number of administrative tasks that got pushed down the chain of command, I did not have time to develop new courses or implement the latest technological advances if they entailed a learning curve. Teaching definitely became more enjoyable again after I stepped down as Chair.

**The Examined Life of a Teacher**

My entry into teaching predates the requirement that job applicants have to articulate their teaching philosophy, and I confess to being perfectly happy without crafting one now. If pressed, however, I would probably say that the principles guiding my teaching choices were (a) “Teach to your strengths,” (b) “Model the behaviors you want your students to learn,” and (c) “Aim for depth of understanding over superficial breadth.” For the first principle, my strengths happen to be explaining concepts clearly, presenting information in organized and succinct ways, and developing moderately creative assignments that ask for application of principles to new situations. My strengths do not include using a lot of humor, being up on popular cultural references, or operating technology. Although I do, in fact, show video clips in class, especially in my child development course, it is never without heart-stopping moments and a willingness to have some student come to the front of the room and show me yet again where the on-
switch is located. Rather than interjecting humor that falls flat or cultural references that do not connect to students’ lives, I do without. They do not seem to be the worse for my choices.

For the second principle, I spend a lot of class time illustrating how I arrived at some answer or detected flaws in a research article or revised a piece of writing or searched databases for relevant readings. I reward students for the process of doing science rather than the results they obtained from an observation or experiment. I check their data entry and statistical calculations because I want them to value accurate and careful handling of data. I check their papers for overall logic, wordiness and redundancies, grammar, and spelling because I want them to value good writing. I give “free feedback” before a paper’s due-date because I want them to see immediate benefits from not procrastinating and from revising. In other words, I try to model how to be a scholar.

In some ways, my third principle is an extension of the second. Because there is always more “information” than time available to present it, I think it is more important to teach how to find, evaluate, and create information than to superficially cover material. It is liberating to believe the data showing how few facts students remember after finishing a course and to adopt, instead, course goals that emphasize students’ learning critical thinking skills. I find it rewarding to see their moments of discovery, when the pieces fall into place, when they have an “aha” experience. I am thrilled when graduates tell me, years later, that they succeeded in their chosen career because they learned how to learn and learned how to communicate. On the flip side, I am frustrated when students focus narrowly on arguing for one more point on a quiz rather than understanding the concept that they missed, when they prioritize extracurricular activities at the expense of academic opportunities (it is rarely the opposite problem), and when they engage in self-destructive behavior.

All teachers’ lives are, of course, examined by others as well as by the teacher’s own introspection, usually by some form of formal course evaluations. Early in my career I paid a lot of attention to evaluations, both from students and from senior faculty visiting my classes, to help me improve my teaching. When those stabilized into the same sort of feedback course after course, I switched to focus more on picking up teaching tips from colleagues through attending teaching conferences, visiting other professors’ classes, reading the scholarship of teaching, team teaching, and sharing supervision of students in independent learning situations such as thesis projects both within psychology and for interdisciplinary majors. My best guide to assessing my own teaching practices is to look at students’ performance—the ultimate goal of all my efforts.

**Advice for New Teachers**

What separates good advice from platitudes? If I knew what issues a new teacher faces, I would feel more confident offering advice, but one size does not fit all, and my way of teaching is undoubtedly not right for all others. Therefore, I suggest new teachers cultivate a few people on their own campus who will answer the questions that are specific to their own situation and students. For general help, utilize the mentoring services offered by STP. Attend teaching conferences and faculty development activities. Read *Teaching of Psychology* articles and the classic *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips* (Svinicki &McKeachie, 2014). Get ideas from all the resources
STP offers on its website (http://teachpsych.org). Be thoughtful about how you ask students to spend their time. Find balance in your own life.

**Final Thoughts**

Although I hope to go on having thoughts about teaching psychology, this probably is my final opportunity to express those thoughts in such a public venue. I therefore want to extend my gratitude for the colleagues and students who have become a special part of my life. When all is said and done, teaching affords a wonderful opportunity to affect the hearts and minds of others and, in turn, be affected by them. I found it a completely, thoroughly satisfying career and wish the same sense of satisfaction for all teachers, no matter what setting they teach in.

**References**


I am currently a professor at James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where I also serve as Assistant Department Head. Over the years I have taught a variety of courses, ranging from introductory psychology to senior seminars, but currently I spend most of my time teaching comparative animal behavior and introductory psychology. I also supervise students doing research with deer mice in my laboratory focusing on projects ranging from spatial learning to social behavior.

I majored in psychology at Davidson College, where I also took biology courses, leading to my interest in animal behavior. I earned both my MS and PhD in biopsychology/comparative psychology from the University of Georgia (UGA), after which I spent some time doing post-doctoral research on macaques on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia. My first faculty position was a 1-year job at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. From there, I went to Weber State University in Ogden, Utah for a year before joining the faculty at JMU in 1992.

My Early Development as a Teacher

When I was growing up, I never thought about being a teacher. My secret dream was to be a writer. I loved reading so much that I would convince my mother to drop me off at the library while she did her Saturday errands; usually I was not close to being ready to leave by the time she returned to pick me up. Friends knew that I could easily spend an entire trip to the mall in the bookstore. And I read everything—fiction, non-fiction, science, arts, history, biography, everything.

My experiences as an undergraduate were key in my decision to pursue a PhD with an eye toward becoming a faculty member. I knew I loved being in a classroom (although my only experience at that point was as a student). Like many psychology majors of that era, one of my most memorable experiences was shaping a rat to press a lever in an operant chamber. My time in the animal lab in the psychology department and my experiences in my animal behavior class were major influences on my career choice.

I also had (and still have) tremendous respect for the faculty at Davidson. Their lives seemed wonderful—they were intelligent; engaging; and got to spend time reading, writing, research, and discussing interesting ideas—it really seemed like a terrific life. I am lucky to have found a profession that allows me to continue to read widely and spend time interacting with smart people about interesting topics; it even provides me with lots of things to write about!

When I was in graduate school in the 1980s, few institutions focused much on training graduate students to teach. Thankfully, things are different now! My experience in graduate school was that learning to teach involved doing lots of work on my own. Faculty and fellow graduate students were supportive, and we frequently compared notes and shared resources, but I did not receive any formal training. The psychology program at UGA offered a course that covered issues related to being a faculty member (including topics such as tenure and the job
application process) and higher education in general, however. I remember really enjoying the course, as it encouraged me to begin thinking about the type of career I wanted, and how best to get experiences that would prepare me for it. In particular, discussions in this course made me understand the importance of teaching experience as a graduate student. I was lucky as a graduate student to get to teach my own sections of introductory psychology on multiple occasions, as well as serve as a teaching assistant for research methods. Along with a fellow graduate student, I was able to team-teach courses in biopsychology and animal behavior.

I am a little sorry to say I think I learned how to teach mostly by trial and error! I am sure there was a lot of error at the beginning. However, I also quickly learned to seek out resources that would be helpful. Once I started working at JMU, I was extremely fortunate to be surrounded by other faculty who were dedicated to teaching. I also had department heads early on (particularly Virginia Andreoli-Mathie, Jane Halonen, and Michael Stoloff) who were very supportive of faculty development in the teaching realm. Ginny Mathie and Jane Halonen, in particular, encouraged my involvement in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology and in activities like the Educational Testing Service’s Advanced Placement Psychology Reading, where I was able to get to know many amazingly talented psychology teachers. Working in a department that supports activities such as faculty travel to teaching conferences, as well as engagement in scholarship related to teaching has been essential in helping me develop as a teacher. In addition, being surrounded daily by many talented psychology teachers (including Bryan Saville, Tracy Zinn, Jim Benedict, Kristzina Jakobsen, and Natalie Kerr Lawrence, among many others) is a constant inspiration. I am also incredibly lucky to be able to interact with psychology teachers at other institutions on a regular basis, and I learn something from these folks almost every time I see them. In particular, Dana Dunn, Maureen McCarthy, and Sue Frantz have provided great ideas and inspiration for me over the years.

**Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher**

One of the most rewarding things about teaching is the opportunity to continually be working toward self-improvement. Dedicated teachers can always think of ways they could do it better “next time.” Obstacles that crop up or problems that occur with a particular class can serve as teachable moments that spur us to change our approach to a particular topic or our teaching behavior in general—and there are plenty of obstacles. I think that many of us face similar obstacles as teachers: how to find the right level of challenge for a particular class or student, how to teach so learning occurs, and how to keep teaching fresh over a lengthy career.

I am by no means an expert at dealing with any of these challenges. But one general principle that seems to work for me is the willingness to change things up, sometimes repeatedly. If a class lecture or demonstration does not get the point across—I change it or eliminate it. (I dropped one of my favorite demonstrations of dominance hierarchy from my animal behavior class when I realized from my students’ test performance that all it was doing was confusing them.) Being willing to change things up also keeps me constantly thinking about new examples about which I might talk, new assignments that might better meet my learning objectives, and even new courses I would like to teach. These things also keep teaching fresh and exciting for me—not always a simple task when one has been doing something for more than 20 years.
One of the main challenges of an academic career is, of course, “balance.” Teaching, service, scholarship—all three are technically part of our jobs, and yet devoted practice of any one of these aspects by itself can easily consume a 40- (or 60-) hour work week. Indeed, the working at being the best possible teacher has the possibility of taking over one’s entire week, month, year, or career—spare time and all. After all, teaching is a craft that we never perfect. There is always room for improvement, and the demands are often immediate; we have to meet a class full of students tomorrow morning and attempt to impart the finer points of cognitive dissonance or neural transmission to them in a way that will be comprehensible, relevant, and memorable.

So, teaching has a tendency to take over one’s life. I would be less than truthful if I said that making time to pursue writing, research, and service was not a challenge, but these activities are also essential to my life as an academic and to my career satisfaction. I have found that there are times when I have to convince myself that the carefully constructed demonstration, activity, or lecture I have prepared for the next class is probably not perfect, but is most likely good enough to accomplish my goals, and then it is time to move on to other aspects of my job.

I have come to the conclusion that time spent on scholarly writing, research, and service, while it sometimes is not directly related to teaching, makes me a better teacher. Teaching is not the only rewarding part of my job, and making time for other academic pursuits allows me to come back to teaching refreshed and eager. The inverse is also true. When I have had a semester when I have needed to spend more time than usual on teaching (e.g., a semester spent prepping a new course), I find myself feeling anxious to spend some quality time on writing and scholarship, and I am able to come back to those projects with renewed energy.

Most academics are lucky; a variety of activities are part of our jobs, and we tend to enjoy all of them. It is a bit like being at a buffet where most of the dishes are old favorites that we know we love or interesting-looking new options. It is important to remember that we cannot fit everything on our plate at once. Luckily, though, each semester or academic year provides an opportunity for another trip to the endless buffet line of academic life. As one of my early mentors told me, “You can probably do it all, or at least most of it; you just can’t do it all at the same time.” Finding time to engage in service or scholarship is challenging—I have learned that I cannot find time; it is never lying around somewhere unused and ignored just waiting for me to discover it and put it to use. I have to make time for the activities that I know are important to me.

The Examined Life of a Teacher
I do not think my approach to teaching has ever been systematic enough to be considered a “philosophy.” However, I do have some themes that have served me well during my teaching career. One is to focus on communicating my enthusiasm for the subject matter. As someone who has spent years reading about and studying animal behavior, I find just about every aspect of the subject truly fascinating (as in, yes, please ask me about evolutionarily stable strategies, or sex ratio allocation, or sequentially hermaphroditic fish)! But, truth be told, in the daily grind of activities I can lose touch with that enthusiasm. I try to remind myself on a daily basis of how amazing the stuff is that I get to teach. My students may not remember the different types of
mating systems and how they are related to parental care (and I do not expect them to) but I do want them to leave my courses with a sense of curiosity and wonder about the subject matter.

Another theme that has served me well is to be a continual learner, not just about teaching but also about my subject matter. Reading the primary literature, tracking down research about a recent animal behavior study reported in the news, following up on an interesting animal behavior-related question—these are some of the reasons I was attracted to an academic life in the first place. Making time for continuous learning keeps me enthusiastic and engages my scholarly side when I cannot be in the lab as much as I would like to be. It also serves as a reminder for students that learning and indulging one’s curiosity should not stop after graduation.

A third principle that guides my approach to teaching is for me to engage my creative side when possible. As a kid, I liked drawing and painting and writing poetry and stories. As an academic, it turns out that I enjoy developing new assignments and class activities to try to accomplish learning goals, possibly because these tap into the same creative forces. I find that if I am trying to accomplish something in class (maybe even a not-so-enjoyable something, such as a writing assignment), but I come up with a creative approach, I enjoy it a great deal more, and the students usually do as well.

Like most teachers, I use multiple methods to try to evaluate my teaching. I frequently get input from students, particularly about specific activities or assignments. Student feedback has been one of my main tools for designing and tweaking class techniques over the years. I pay attention to end-of-semester teaching evaluations, recognizing that general questions on a “one-size-fits-all” instrument may assess overall student impressions but probably will not give me the level of specific feedback I need to help construct the class better in the future. I also do not read these evaluations right at the end of the course. At that point, I am a bit too invested in the class (and, let us face it, too tired!) to be able to interpret any negative feedback. The time to take a good look at the feedback is when I am planning the course for the next semester.

Direct measures of student learning or understanding are also a great tool for assessment of my teaching. Are students able to answer a test question about a particular topic? At the end of a class period, can they put the concept in their own words or answer a multiple-choice question about it? If not, perhaps that demonstration I used failed or my explanation of the concept did not quite communicate what I wanted it to.

Resources abound for improving one’s teaching, and I have used them all at one point or another. Teaching conferences and teaching-related sessions at regional and national conferences are great sources of inspiration. Teaching journals, not just in psychology but also in other disciplines, are another obvious source of ideas for techniques to try in class. STP’s website (http://teachpsych.org) houses an encyclopedic array of teaching resources, and I have stolen great ideas from it on multiple occasions. Of course, colleagues who excel at teaching are another great resource. When it comes to improving teaching, one of the great joys of the
endeavor is that most dedicated teachers are enthusiastic about talking about teaching, and sharing tips, ideas, successes, and failures that turned into successes.

**Advice for New Teachers**
Seek out resources and help from multiple sources. Observe classes of colleagues who are known to be excellent teachers, and “steal” their techniques (they will be flattered!). Peruse syllabi from other instructors to get ideas for teaching strategies that work. Go to teaching conferences and get to know colleagues who are passionate about teaching. Find colleagues at your own institution or others with whom you can talk about teaching. Be open to trying new ideas, to assessing the outcome of those ideas, and changing ideas if they do not work. Ask students for input; sometimes they learn surprising things from our classes, even if it is not the things we expected or hoped they would learn. Make time for scholarship, service, and other related activities; your involvement in them will renew your enthusiasm for teaching. Be a continual learner. And of course, give yourself a break. Recognize that you may never be a “perfect” teacher, but you can use the tools that are out there to always become a better one—maybe even an excellent one.

In addition, it is important to be aware of the ebb and flow of rewards and frustrations that accompany a teaching career. As we all know, teaching is tremendously rewarding. Few things are more thrilling for a teacher than that moment in the classroom when a student (perhaps even more than one) actually gets a concept or demonstrates mastery of a skill. There is not much that is more fulfilling than hearing from former students about the long-term impact of their time spent in the laboratory or classroom with you. These are the moments that make us glow inside and walk around the halls for a few days with a smile on our faces.

However, teaching is also frustrating. Sometimes there are extremely long periods of time between reinforcement. Everyone who teaches has days when they would like to quit. Luckily, those days are fairly rare. I have two suggestions for dealing those days (or semesters). One is to seek out teaching mentors and colleagues for a good old-fashioned venting session. I find it oddly comforting when my colleagues have faced the same difficult teaching situation that I am dealing with. Another suggestion is to just “step away” for a while. Focusing energy on a different class that is going well (rather than the problematic one), or spending some time writing or engaging in service or committee work, can be a productive approach to handling the frustrations of trying to teach well.

**Final Thoughts**
Although I did not start out wanting to be a teacher, I am very lucky I ended up one. A life in academics has allowed me to spend my professional time interacting with smart colleagues and students who are enthusiastic about learning. Teaching inspires me to think creatively in ways that make my job more enjoyable. I get to spend my days thinking, talking, and writing about topics that fascinate me. Really, it is hard to imagine something better!
4. A Late Bloomer: Confessions of a Recovering “Lecturer”

Joan T. Bihun  
University of Colorado Denver

As of December, 2013, I was appointed to the non-tenure teaching track position of Assistant Professor, Clinical Teaching Track, in the Department of Psychology at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD). I spent more than a decade before that as a part-time instructor at UCD and other universities and colleges. For a brief time I worked a 9-5 job at a research hospital, and although the research component of the work was exciting, the fixed hours were a challenge for me. I am not a “behind the desk” sort of person. As my students (and chair) would tell you, if I am not moving around or rearranging the classroom, I am having an off day.

I have been a college lecturer for about 17 years; but maybe only 5 or 6 as a “teacher.” I have been “teaching” psychology for years, but only recently have I given much thought to whether the students have learned any of it, or what they thought about it, or how they have actually used it in their own lives. It was time for a change.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I did not have any official teaching mentors during my undergraduate years, although there were people who have influenced how I teach and how I interact with students today. I lived at home and worked 20-30 hours a week while going to school full time to help pay for college. I did not have the time, awareness, or know-how to avail myself of my professors’ expertise or mentorship outside of class. However, several professors left strong impressions on me. John Kotre’s introductory psychology class at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (UM-D) taught me the value of being an engaging storyteller. I did not realize until years later that he wrote a book and developed a PBS television series about the “Seasons of Life” (Kotre, 1990). Although not a psychology major at the time (I soon switched from journalism after receiving a scathing peer evaluation of my “Educating Rita” review), I earned my PhD in developmental psychology largely due to what I was introduced to in Dr. Kotre’s class.

Dr. Bruce Gardner learned his students’ names and treated us as professionals. I learned to “own” my learning in his social psychology class. If we were slacking, he would let us know. I once asked him a question during a test and he responded with a quizzical look. He replied, “I know what you’re asking me, Ms. Bihun. I just didn’t think a student such as yourself would have to.” He was right. I never came to his class unprepared again. It was while sitting in one of his classes that my career “light bulb” went off and I decided I wanted to teach psychology. I had a lot of other committed and engaging psychology teachers at UM-D, but for the most part, my teaching models were lecturers, who encouraged (to varying degrees) questions from students during class.

I had other experiences that taught me what not to do when teaching. For example, I tested into engineering calculus for freshman math (where all the journalism-soon-to-be-psych majors place). There were only a handful of women in this class, and I was the only one not majoring in engineering. The one and only time I visited the professor during his office hours, he did not invite me to sit down to discuss my questions, nor can I remember him ever directing his
attention my way during class. It was, unfortunately, a great example of stereotype threat (Aronson & Steele, 2005). I earned my first and only D (maybe it was an F?) on a college test that first semester. Classical conditioning explained why I felt sick whenever I looked at my calculus book lying on my bedroom floor. At some point I decided I was not going to let calculus beat me and asked an engineering major friend to tutor me. Through lots of practice, I started developing the skills I needed to master the problems. I ended up with a C in the course because I aced the final. I walked out of that class feeling really empowered….about my C! I could not do much calculus today without some serious reviewing but I do know that I can master whatever I need to. I tell this story every semester to emphasize the importance of a “growth” rather than “fixed” mindset when encountering a challenging subject (Dweck, 2002). Because of my experience, I do not let students “hide” from me in class. If they do not understand a concept, method, or calculation, I want to help them develop the skills to change that.

Probably like many graduate students who were working toward their degrees in the late 1980s or early 1990s, I received no formal preparation for teaching in my graduate program. My first semester of graduate school I was one of two first-year teaching assistants (TA) for a large introductory psychology course at Wayne State University in Detroit. I designed and graded exams and “taught” a one-credit introductory psychology laboratory that met once a week. I had absolutely no idea how to conduct a class and spent most of the time walking students through the assignment for the week. I was 21-years old and felt overwhelmed and grossly under-qualified. Most students were around my age although there were a handful of non-traditional students in the class. One man was starting college after spending some time in prison. (He came to my office hours in the basement of the psychology building to tell me his story.) He rattled me during laboratory by sitting in the front row and purposely giving incorrect answers to questions. Another sent me flowers during the semester and I had to learn how to deal with personal versus professional relationship conflicts. I was way out of my element. After finishing one semester as a TA, I was beyond thrilled to obtain a research assistantship for the rest of my graduate school years, quietly closing the door on teaching.

After my brief stint as a TA in graduate school, it was not until my post-doc years at the University of Wisconsin, Madison that I found myself in the classroom again, teaching an infancy course with about 20 students. My preparation entailed staying up late amassing copious amounts of information the night before each class. For the first few weeks, each class started with a heat wave traveling from my feet through my body up to my face. At the moment I felt “I’m going to pass out,” it dissipated and I was able to start the class. I lectured with packed overheads and too-small font, and assigned challenging reading material. I did a lot of things wrong, but the feedback I received from the students was mostly positive. One thing I did right was to bring a lot of enthusiasm for my topic (infant cognition). I went from a 20-student upper-level course to a 200-student child development lecture hall a few semesters later. I did things I thought would be fun to see and hear about—I showed video clips, brought in babies, told stories and walked the room. I never consciously considered how to teach nor did I purposely model my classroom behavior on any of my past professors. I was just excited about the material and I guess it showed. I sought out opportunities to teach in different departments at the university: psychology, education, and child and family studies. The
graduate students with whom I worked at UW-Madison went on to tenure-track research positions while I sought out teaching ones. Years later, after I won a national teaching award, one of these former graduate students (who was once my TA) told me, “Joan, I can’t image you not teaching undergraduates.” It was much-appreciated validation.

Why do I feel I am a “late bloomer?” Because I did not meet my only true mentor until I started teaching regularly at the University of Colorado Denver. I was lucky enough to land in a department with Mitch Handelsman. I call Mitch the “black sheep” of our department because for as long as I have known him, he has held fast to the message that teaching is more than lecturing. When I first started going to him for advice, he had all these revolutionary ideas about teaching skills as well as content, not lecturing in classes (what, no slides?), helping students learn the responsibilities of being young adult learners, and that delivering information is not really teaching. He models transparency in the classroom by clearly expressing his goals about how and why he uses the assignments and measures the outcomes that he does. He is extraordinarily generous with his time, ideas, and exercises. I have taken away a lot of great ideas and received a lot of morale-boosting support from Mitch. He meets students where they are and is very patient in giving them time to generate their own ideas before giving his own. I ask more questions and give fewer answers to students as a result.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher
I have had to learn to adjust my teaching and assignments to the different classroom dynamics I encounter. Just like different children require different types of parenting, my teaching has become less “one size fits all.” In my early days, I gathered information and gave it out. I followed the book closely (although I prided myself in bringing outside information into the class), and I did not consider who my “audience” was. This strategy backfired once teaching in a department outside of psychology when one-third of the students dropped my class after the first week. I used a course pack of empirical articles (which I spent many hours compiling) and required “poster sessions” in the class. One student actually called me at my home to tell me she was “worried for me.” I did not have the confidence or even the awareness back then to explain the reasons for my assignments. As I have become more experienced, I have become more flexible. I do not orient class solely toward budding researchers with graduate school in their future. I do not stress about material “I must get through.” I can still conduct class when I do not have overheads or a projector and I can hold class in a variety of environments. A few years ago I even taught statistics in the movie theatre attached to our student union. I started the class with popcorn and the MGM Lion on the “big screen.” The majority of my test questions that semester related to the movies. I also received the highest evaluations I have ever gotten in my teaching career in this course.

Outside the classroom, I serve as a Psi Chi advisor and a co-leader of an undergraduate research team. These settings give me opportunities to practice the “teaching in the teaching,” as my colleague Bethann Bierer likes to call it. I can demonstrate in greater detail the thought processes that go into evaluating studies, discussing ethical considerations, and collaborating with peers and across university departments. Students learn to tolerate ambiguity when they see the co-leading professors taking different sides of an argument. As Dr. Handelsman reminds
The Examined Life of a Teacher

Before my teaching “bloomed,” the guiding force behind it was solely to be prepared—know the material and be able to answer questions. Good preparation means keeping my courses updated with recently published research and relevant current events, but nowadays I am much more comfortable about not knowing the answers to questions that come up in class. I use those opportunities for students to generate hypotheses and talk about how we would conduct a study to find it out.

Now the bigger picture includes making it clear to students that psychology is something worth studying, both for its scientific value, and for increasing their understanding of human behavior. I have tried to expand my strategies for engaging students who come into my courses with different levels of experience and interest. The end goals are always the same—spark an interest, shift a perspective, expose a misconception, and open a mind to something it had not yet considered when the student first walked in the door on that first day of class.

I serve on our department and college outcomes assessment committees so I have been doing a lot of assessment over the last 2 years. Doing these assessments is probably one of the main forces in moving my teaching in a new direction. Often, it is getting the feedback that students are not showing proficiency in an area I appreciate the most. It is hard to run from changes that need to be made when the evidence is staring you in the face. I have moved beyond assessing only content knowledge (students get content) and application to assessing skills acquisition and reflection.

Over the years, one thing that has not changed is the level of energy and engagement I bring into the classroom. Put me in a small room and we will be sitting together; in a large lecture hall, I walk the aisles or sit down among students to ask about their work. Not only does it keep them on their toes (and off their Facebook and Twitter accounts), it encourages them to move around or work with a classmate, especially when the material is becoming particularly challenging to understand. I remind students that talking things out and working with others are handy life skills as well.

I remember when I was a post-doc, a colleague lamented over the difficulty she had engaging her class. “We went to graduate school, not acting school,” she told me. That is very true but over the years, one way my teaching has changed in a significant way is that I have let my guard down. I am a bit introverted naturally (I am always surprised to find out how many of the teachers I most admire are) but when I go into class, I pretend I am not. I can play multiple characters while telling stories, have students act out a neural network, demonstrate the conflict inherent in dialectical thinking, and explain parallel play by showing what it would look like in adults on the dance floor.

I rarely use notes anymore (well, besides my slides). I never hold papers in my hand unless I have something I need to quote and I want to be sure I get it just right. I admit I still “lecture” quite a bit but I try to keep the tone conversational and make a point of doing some activities each class. These activities are often brief (e.g., think-pair-share; reflection papers) but
sometimes lengthier (peer tutoring or poster making). I recently started stating learning objectives at the beginning of each class. It is such a basic thing to do, yet I had not been doing it. For many years I just launched into a lecture. Being more explicit and transparent about my goals concerning what we will cover and what I hope students will take away from that class has better framed each class so students can organize and retain the information we discuss.

By far one of the most rewarding things I get from teaching is e-mail from students sharing links to TED talks, journal articles, or news stories they hear related to class topics. I value this type of feedback more than good evaluations or end-of-the-semester e-mail from students saying they enjoyed the class. The links they send show that they thought about the material from outside the classroom. They recognized something in other media they used during the day, and saw the relevance to what we had been discussing. I end up incorporating many of the sources they have found into future classes and always credit those students for finding them.

I enjoy when students stop by my office just to chat, which often happens outside of office hours, but if I have the time, I stop what I am doing and we talk. I believe faculty-student interaction outside the classroom is a key component to learning. I am lucky to work in a university that has an ethnically, racially, socioeconomically diverse student population, as well as many returning students and veterans. I am amazed by my students’ life experiences. I usually learn something new and enlightening when they stop by.

One of my greatest frustrations is trying to convey the idea that education is more than just good grades. I would really love to shift that perspective, but grades are a reality and often the number one goal in students’ minds. I make a point to discuss the value of critical thinking, internships, service, research experience, professional relationships, and extracurricular activities as well as getting good grades for a well-rounded education. For that reason, I include little projects that involve doing some of these ideas (alas, for points). For example, students attend organizational meetings or a talk on campus, visit different student service offices on campus, and conduct interviews with people in the community. Encouraging such activities is an on-going effort in my teaching.

I want to do a better job helping students’ develop critical thinking. When students turn in written work, I can assess whether it shows critical thinking, but I still struggle with how to help them improve when it is lacking. I realize the obvious—I need to shut up, and let them talk, but some students do not know where to start. I have been asking my students more about the origins of their knowledge, “epistemic cognition” (Perry, 1998). To be able to reflect on our thinking and justify our conclusions is class time well spent. My teaching has become less about the specific information, which they can get from the text and the Internet, and more about mulling over what it means or how it looks in our lives.

I learned from Mitch Handelsman to shift my perspective from “What am I going to do in class today?” to “What are my students going to do in class today?” Each week I work to include a new activity I have never done before. Sometimes I make this activity up on the spur of the moment. I worry these may flop, but as Mitch reminds me, “How much more of a flop can it be than standing there lecturing to your students?” He is right.
Advice for New Teachers
If something were to happen tomorrow and you were not able to teach anymore, your classes would go on. You are not indispensable. Other people can teach the material you do. Try to leave your mark with your students in another way. Have them remember the passion for learning you bring into the classroom, your enthusiasm for the subject material, your genuine interest in what they think, and awareness of how they arrived at the thoughts they have. Let them see there is a real person behind the “professor” persona. Make sure they are not too intimidated to talk to you outside of class. Learn something about as many of your students as you can (easily done in the time before and after the class period). If all else fails, maybe even dance in the classroom now and then. Actually, scratch that last one, it does not always work that well for me.

Final Thoughts
My teaching has dramatically evolved in a short period of time—probably the last handful of years. Perhaps because of my original plan to major in journalism, I have always felt more comfortable being a “reporter” of information. That is the way I approached most of my years of teaching—investigate multiple sources and report information. Basically, I was a glorified Table of Contents and I taught my classes that way. I was (and still am) an “information junkie.” I have always prided myself on “not teaching the text,” but what I was doing was not much better. I was still pushing information, just information from sources outside of the class text.

Over the last handful of years, I have started “turning the ship.” I would like to say “That lecturing ship has sailed!” but as the title of this autobiography notes, I am a recovering lecturer. To be honest, I do not think I will ever be one of those teachers who never lectures but I do not have to be. I am learning a new balance in my teaching and it is proving to be satisfying. One of my favorite quotes, commonly attributed to Dr. Maya Angelou, sums it up best: “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better” (“Quote by Maya Angelou,” n.d.).

References


5. Why Teach?

Jeanne A. Blakeslee
Mercy High School

The young mind is amazing. It is curious but quick to judge; confident, but often lazy. An adolescent wants to know everything, and can suss out a lie instantly. I met the adolescent mind by accident. I never intended to become a teacher, but I needed a job, applied, and was hired. Because I majored in psychology, I was asked to teach a psychology course the following year. I earned a Master’s degree in liberal education from St. John’s College (studying the Great Books) and then pursued a Master’s degree in clinical psychology from Loyola University Maryland. In addition to teaching, I took on administrative positions and then changed schools. But teaching psychology was always the best part of my day.

During the authentic assessment movement, I wondered about the ways in which high school students could behave like psychologists. Of course, they could not meet and diagnose patients or help them through current life stresses. Given the limitations on their time and knowledge, I was not convinced they could conduct creative research. However, psychologists attend conventions and share their work with colleagues, so I planned a convention for psychology students. Now in its 14th year, How to Make the World a Better Place for Adolescents is a showcase for students from multiple schools in Maryland and Delaware and occasionally from as far away as New York, Virginia, or North Carolina. Typically, over 100 student presenters demonstrate their knowledge on topics ranging from the importance of laughter and the science of humor to the problems of suicide, self-injury, and racism. Largely due to organizing and overseeing this convention, I received the Teachers of Psychology in the Secondary Schools (TOPSS) Excellence in Teaching Award in 2002. In 2009 my school also recognized me with the Linda L. King Excellence in Teaching Award. In 2013, the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, Division 2 of the APA presented me with the Mary Margaret Moffett Memorial Teaching Excellence Award. That same year I earned an APA Presidential Citation from the APA because of my work on TOPSS and commitment to incorporating social justice in high school psychology.

My Early Development as a Teacher
I had heard from some of my colleagues that reading for the Advanced Placement (AP) exam was a powerful professional development experience, so I applied to be a reader to grade the free response questions on the exam. Student responses to these questions supplement what is tested on the multiple-choice section of the exam, and require faculty conversant in the science of psychology to read and assess them using a common rubric. I was accepted as a reader, and later I was asked to assume the role of table leader, becoming responsible for inter-rater reliability for an identified group of readers. Over time I was occasionally able to be on the advance team to create the rubric for the free response questions. Meeting colleagues at the AP reading who were intent on sharing best practices was exhilarating. Every year I learned something new and important, from how to write more precisely to honing a concept I had not realized I needed to hone. My years as a reader helped me grow as a teacher and contributed to my depth of knowledge of psychological concepts.
I became a College Board Consultant, teaching day-long and week-long workshops to teachers preparing to become AP teachers or wanting to improve their skills. I ran for a position in Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS), a unit of the American Psychological Association (APA). I lost the first couple of times that I ran, but was eventually elected and discovered yet another challenging dimension of professional life. TOPSS has created over 20 unit lesson plans so that high school teachers have access to cutting-edge knowledge and best practices to teach the science of the discipline. During my time on the TOPSS Board, we developed problem-focused lesson plans, crafted a diversity mission statement, and worked on promulgating the National Standards for high school teachers of psychology.

I have just been named principal of the Catholic girls’ school where I began teaching; I will no longer be able to work daily with those insatiable, capable minds of adolescents. Rather, I will work with their teachers while filling in for cafeteria duty, just to mingle with adolescent joy and angst.

Nonetheless, teaching is my first love. In the classroom, we are all students and all teachers. The teacher is the leader in the classroom, the one who sees and knows the most, at least about the content being studied. I plan to continue teaching, for in my new role I will merely have different content to teach and a different set of learners. As the leader in the room who respects the range and variety of learners before her, I will have the same goals that the classroom teacher does: moving every single person forward in their discipline.

Defining Myself as a Teacher
Because of the particular path that I took when I began my teaching career, my preparation did not include formal education in the science of teaching or its applications. Whatever it was that I was teaching, I immersed myself in the content and tried to help the students connect with the material in a way that they understood and appreciated. Fortunately, in psychology, that is easy enough to accomplish—but to connect the content with the students we teach, we have to know them. This challenge is perhaps the hardest and most important lesson I learned as a teacher.

I have to know every student in the classroom. Every student in each classroom. Every student for whom I am responsible. The structure of the school day, the pace of the calendar, the enormity of the content (both in depth and breadth), the number of students in my care—these are all obstacles to the kind of authentic, personal interaction required for good teaching. Overcoming those obstacles requires focus, but we cannot let anything get between us and the students we teach. Overcoming the many daily obstacles between ourselves and our students takes an act of will and a plan. Like any good plan, the best course of action is to start small and be persistent. I have learned to take one classroom at a time, one row at a time, one mind at a time until something is known about each person I teach. This particular insight is, to my mind, the key to successful teaching, and it is one that is too often overlooked, given the pace of school life and the number of responsibilities teachers have.

Another obstacle to my success, as I have defined myself as a teacher, was the time it took for me to thoughtfully grade and provide feedback for the writing that I assigned. In order for students to become better thinkers and writers, they need to write, but they need careful, constructive feedback on the writing that is assigned. Fortunately, it is sometimes in grading
papers that one comes to know a student, so a stack of papers can be seen as a window into a mind rather than a chore to finish. Occasionally, I get a glimpse not only into what students know but who they are and some of what they bring to the table as a teacher and a learner.

In my evolution as a teacher, I have developed several strategies for easy-to-grade writing assignments (Blakeslee, 2005) so that my students could write a fair amount and I did not have to spend hours grading their writing. What I most love about grading papers is that I get right inside my students’ head. There it is. What she knows about the topic, the connections she makes, and the holes in her understanding. Her mind is right in front of me. The paper to grade is a gift, at least most of the time.

In addition to grading papers to get into students’ heads, a good teacher attends to all of the dynamics in the classroom. After setting up protocol and clarifying expectations, I need to know how my students’ heads work. Why is Shakiera not talking when her quiz reflects depth of knowledge? Why cannot students explain how I chose that particular demonstration? After Caroline explains the application of a psychological principle, why does Noelani repeat an idea so similar to it that she must have either not understood it or not paid attention?

Despite careful planning, while in the classroom, a teacher continuously makes decisions about what to explore and what to cut short; what media to choose and what to forget; what behavior to call out and what to ignore; what news headline to bring in or not; and what among the glances in the room to cull and share.

Reflecting on what happens each day, pondering the elements of the decisions one made and the potential mistakes inherent in that decision—these end-of-day reflections are critical to becoming a better teacher. So, if it is at all possible, it is important to build into the day some time to think about teaching—some time to think about each classroom and each class. Some time to think about the lesson crafted. Why is any particular concept I teach important? Given time constraints, can I eliminate it without limiting students’ understanding of the material? What is the big take-away message for my students? Why did my lesson go well in first period but fall flat later in the day? What actually is at the heart of my teaching? What is the point of my job? What is the mission of my school? Why did Rebecca still interrupt when I have tried so hard to teach her to exercise self-control? These are the sorts of reflective questions that have helped me develop as a thoughtful and effective teacher.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

It is easy to say that teaching is all about the relationship between the student and the teacher. How teachers reach all of their students when there is such disparity in capability, readiness, socioeconomic status, language facility, and health? How can a teacher assign enough writing to get inside each of her students’ heads and have enough time to read and grade each essay? How can we teach enough content in our discipline so our students appreciate its complexity and still cover the breadth necessary to pass the test? After all my years of teaching, there is never a lesson I have taught that I could not figure out a better way to teach it the next time.

In teaching, there is a decided tension between having high standards and providing enough support for every student to meet those standards, even for students who are most challenged. Known now as differentiated instruction, this kind of support is tied to knowing each and every
student in our care. Of what is she capable? What interests her? How can I catch her attention? How can I make her read more carefully? Why is she not paying attention today? When we organize our teaching into a division of skills, content, and big ideas, it becomes easier to meet each kind of learner. Some students need more work than others on particular skills and, for these students, skill-building is where we need to focus our attention. Other students meet content through the big picture and understand material through the lens of an overarching question or principle. Still other students build their understanding of the big picture through the details, starting first with the nuts and bolts and ending with the structure we helped them build. Because of this kind of diversity in the classroom, it is important to know, understand, and use concept-based instruction as a framework within which to teach. There are several models that schools and school systems have used for concept-based instruction (Erickson, 2014; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) but they share important elements: What do I want my students to remember 10 or more years from now? What knowledge do students need to master to remember particularly important ideas? And what do students have to do to be successful in this discipline?

The most effective classrooms have teachers who know their content thoroughly, but they also have to love every minute in the classroom. We need to laugh a lot. We have to inspire our students to love the discipline so much that they cannot wait for class. We have to set high expectations and support every student as well as we can manage. We have to assign and grade as much as we can. We have to encourage students to work as hard as we work. We have to create efficient systems and procedures so we have more time to play. We have to be flexible about schedules and deadlines when we can be. We need to instill in our students a desire to think about applications of psychological science all the time every minute of the day. We have to be willing to take a risk, even if we make a mistake.

Advice for New Teachers
When I teach teachers how to teach AP Psychology, the guiding principles I use are that

- I want them to understand how effective concept-based instruction is.
- They should know that psychology teachers have to use psychology in the classroom to teach it effectively.
- I want them to see how important writing is for their students to become critical thinkers.
- Naturally, every unit should be enhanced by two or three carefully chosen demonstrations or activities.
- And, of course, as psychology teachers, we want our students to apply psychology to their lives.

Because many young people assume that they will leave the world in better shape than the previous generation has left it, a teacher is wise to demonstrate how psychological science can assist them in that endeavor. I want my students not only to reduce prejudice and bias in their world, I also want them to become good parents. I want them to realize that they need more sleep and actually get it from time to time. I want the young people in my care to refrain from experimenting too much with alcohol and other drugs. I want them to study more effectively.
After taking psychology, they should be able to recognize why therapeutic drugs are effective and advocate for their friends who may need them. Once they have understood behaviorism, they might be able to create the techniques necessary to convince us all to stop using plastic water bottles! Essentially, I want my students to make the world a better and more equitable place for all of us to live.

Final Thoughts
So I had better assign a good paper. What questions do I need to ask to get into Shakiera’s head? What application of psychological principles might empower her to speak up the next time she has a thought to share? How can my explanation of that demonstration be more carefully put into context? How can I best teach Noelani and Caroline the importance of conversation, so that they, too, can build on one another’s ideas, see relationships when they occur, and apply what they know to the world around them? And how can I get Rebecca to stop interrupting?

Why else teach?

References
6. Teaching is Scary

Robert Bubb
Auburn University

The amateur believes he must first overcome his fear; then he can do his work.
The professional knows that fear can never be overcome.
--Steven Pressfield (2002)

It is 7:30 Tuesday morning, 2 hours before class begins. I close the office door and power up my computer. The next hour is dedicated to rehearsing class activities even though I have taught the same concepts at least 20 times before. I deliver my talking points out loud while pacing around the office. Gesturing with my hands in the air, I imagine my students sitting in their respective seats in the classroom. With 30 minutes remaining before class starts, I sit down in the office chair. I lean back, place my feet on the desk, and close my eyes. I try to relax and clear my mind. I count the beats of my heart, ignoring the skipped beats that started the previous night. My heartbeat normalizes and the palpitations reduce. I open my eyes, review the class picture roll, pick up my teaching materials, and tell myself, “You can do this.” I then leave to teach my first class of the day. Such is the ritual of a teacher who has a history of social phobia. However, I am proud to say that my pre-class preparation no longer includes nausea.

Despite my fears of public speaking and evaluation, I have found moderate success in my profession. I have a Master’s degree in applied social psychology from Brigham Young University (BYU) and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Industrial and Organizational (I/O) Psychology Program at Auburn University. In 2009, I received the First-Year GTA of the Year Award and in the following year I received the PsyGO Most Helpful Graduate Student Award at Auburn University. Most recently, I was the 2013 recipient of the Wilbert J. McKeachie Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology of the American Psychological Association. I am also a full-time statistics lecturer for the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Auburn University.

My Early Development as a Teacher

When I started graduate school, I had no desire to teach. Instead, I wanted to be a consultant for a large organization—preferably working with datasets rather than people. Imagine my surprise when I learned that my graduate assistantship required me to teach the I/O psychology course at BYU. I hesitated to accept the assistantship until the graduate student coordinator informed me that I was accepted into the graduate program, in part, to teach the course. I felt cornered and obligated, so I begrudgingly accepted.

Teaching undergraduate students at BYU required that I pass a summer teaching course. It was a pragmatic course focused on activities such as writing syllabi, creating lectures and exams, and so on. The course activities were supplemented by readings from the book McKeachie’s Teaching Tips. In absence of faculty oversight, Bill McKeachie, via his book, soon became my teaching mentor.
As might be expected of a teacher with a history of social phobia, a book for a mentor, and the
completion of one short how-to summer course on teaching, my instruction for the I/O course
in the 2005 Fall semester at BYU was something truly awful. My first lecture experience
resulted in an abrupt recess mid-lesson. I excused myself to dry-heave in the restroom.
However to my credit, I regained my composure, reentered the classroom, and finished the
lecture. The rest of the semester was not much better; I depended on notes to lecture,
overworked the students, and created much-too-difficult exams. As one student indicated on
my end-of-semester evaluation, “Robb has no idea how to teach.” Amen! That student could
not have been more correct. I really did not know how to teach. My heart still aches for those
poor students.

Despite that awful first semester, I was hooked on teaching. I realized at the end of the
semester that I could teach better. I consulted with my teaching mentor, McKeachie’s Teaching
Tips, and found teaching strategies that matched my abilities. I reduced the class size by
creating three smaller, discussion-focused courses rather than one large lecture course and
changed the location of the class from the traditional classroom to a conference room. I also
divided students into peer-learning groups and instituted a variation of contract grading (see
Svinicki & McKeachie, 2013). Additionally, I voluntarily taught an undergraduate practicum
course on teaching where I learned a great deal about quality instruction by listening to
students’ perspectives. Essentially, I learned that students want caring teachers who know
them.

The adjustments to the I/O psychology course created a more collaborative learning
environment and reduced my anxiety by deflecting students’ focus from me to their fellow
students. In addition to the changes in the classroom, I also sought professional counseling and
learned coping strategies for public speaking. As a result, the next four semesters were
progressively more successful than each previous semester and I soon realized that my calling
was to be a university teacher.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher
Discovering my calling in life came serendipitously; however, honing my teaching skills took
continuous evaluation and modification. As my time at BYU came to a close, my thesis chair
informed me that if I was serious about teaching at the university level then I needed to gain
my doctorate at a different university—as to not have all of my degrees from one school. I
immediately started to fill out applications to I/O programs at Clemson, Bowling Green,
Colorado State, Portland State, Michigan State, and Auburn Universities. I researched the
faculty at each of the schools and one university stood out above the rest—Auburn University.
In addition to having an I/O psychology program, Auburn University employed Bill Buskist—a
distinguished professor in the teaching of psychology. As an undergraduate at BYU, I had the
privilege of attending a memorable talk that Bill gave on the teaching of psychology. Upon
seeing his faculty status, I immediately knew I would be attending Auburn University for my
doctoral degree. I was so confident that I did not complete the graduate applications to the
other universities.
One of my main goals—as indicated by my letter of intent to Auburn University—was to gain the skills necessary to present in front of large audiences. I avoided teaching large classes while at BYU by redesigning the I/O course; however I knew successful university teachers taught in front of large groups of students. What better person to mentor me than a master teacher like Bill!

I was accepted to Auburn University’s I/O program despite putting all my graduate application eggs into one basket. The psychology program required graduate students to take two teaching of psychology courses. As part of the courses, the department assigned graduate students to serve as teaching assistants for introductory psychology and required them to teach three break-out sections every Friday consisting of 30-40 students each. Bill observed each graduate student twice a semester. I still remember my first observation vividly. I was terrified. Bill took notes with a seemingly stern facial expression. Following the observation, we met in his office and he informed me of many opportunities for improvement. I was devastated. It was the first time my teaching skills had ever been evaluated, but despite the needed criticism I knew one thing, I finally had a teaching mentor who was not a paperback textbook.

Under Bill’s guidance, I learned how to effectively manage the classroom environment to make it less anxiety provoking. Strategies such as using all of the classroom space by walking around reduced the distance between me and the students and created a more personal environment; calling on students by name and thanking them for their comments developed rapport and built personal, authoritative rather than hierarchical, authoritarian relationships with students; and initiating conversations with students prior to the start of the lecture fostered concern and interest in the students’ lives. Each of these techniques helped ease my anxiety and created a psychologically smaller teaching environment even though there were many students.

The mentee-mentor relationship with Bill not only developed my public speaking skills in the classroom, it also developed my research skills as a teaching scholar. Collaboration with Bill provided many opportunities for involvement in the scholarship of teaching and learning. In turn, those collaborative opportunities indirectly honed my teaching skills.

One collaborative effort was an empirical analysis of student assessment in introductory psychology courses (Boyd, Bubb, Scruggs, & Buskist, 2011; Howard, Bubb, Buskist, & Daniel, 2010). I reviewed and categorized thousands of exam items. In the process, I learned how to develop effective assessments based on course learning objectives. The experience led to the authorship of a book chapter on assessing student learning (Bubb, 2012).

My experience with the assessment research directly led into an opportunity to secure a research grant with McGraw Hill Higher Education. As part of the grant, I worked with several undergraduates, and realized the importance of motivating students through encouragement, challenging but manageable workloads, and opportunities to present their work outside of class. I continue to use similar motivational strategies to encourage students in my current courses.

I have since collaborated with Bill on additional scholarly work including a book chapter on the development of teaching skills (Bubb & Buskist, 2012) and the current Teaching in Autobiography series (Bubb, Stowell, & Buskist, 2011). The teaching in autobiography series
may be the most enlightening of our collaborative efforts. The tips provided by award-winning teachers are invaluable. Karen Naufel’s (2011) chapter discussing her journey to overcome her fear of public speaking helped me see that I am not the only teacher affected by anxiety. Additionally, Lynne Kennette’s (2011) chapter identified what is truly important in teaching—students’ feelings of empowerment, accomplishment, and pride—regardless of the grade they achieve. I now feel humbled by those students who received a “C” grade in my statistics course and wrote on their course evaluations “it may not seem like it based on my grade, but I really did learn a lot from your course.”

Ultimately, both my teaching experience and my collaborative efforts with Bill directly led to my current position as a lecturer in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Auburn University. My current position is an excellent fit because I am privileged to teach full-time, yet pursue my research agenda at my own leisure. I believe that my research efforts have informed my teaching practices and vice versa.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Writing this reflective essay made me realize just how much my teaching has changed over the years. During the first few semesters my instruction was focused on covering the content of the textbook and surviving to teach another day. I was heavily reliant on notes in order to limit the potential for making mistakes and being asked questions to which I did not know the answer. I struggled to deliver the course content within an already-too-short semester, and generally, I tried to appear competent. I did not know nor attempt to learn all of my students’ names, let alone care about their success in and outside of my courses.

Gradually, I moved away from reliance on notes and opened the classroom to more discussion. However I maintained a strict adherence to covering content. After all, if students did not hear the course content from me, then how could they possibly learn it? I now realize that undergraduate students know how to read. Even with a course like statistics, students can gain many of the basic terms and concepts on their own if they merely crack open the textbook. This self-discovery has allowed me to spend more time in the classroom focused on teaching students how to think critically, support arguments with statistical evidence, and make sound decisions rather than spending precious class time on definitions and formula memorization.

I suspect my teaching style will evolve as I continually evaluate and revise my teaching. At the end of each semester, I gather valuable input from student, teaching assistant, and faculty-peer evaluations. I also glean useful teaching strategies from conferences and journals on the scholarship of teaching and learning. Student evaluations provide an indicator of my relationship with students and if the course assignments are manageable and useful. Teaching assistant evaluations provide information on the frustration level of students as they proceed throughout the course. Teaching assistants are the first to hear student grumblings. Faculty-peer evaluations provide discussions about teaching strategies and enlightening suggestions from a qualified professional colleague (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2013). Additionally, faculty evaluations often provide useful tips that have worked in other courses. Finally, the scholarship of teaching and learning provides evidence-based techniques that will help students succeed at meeting learning objectives. I hope through continual evaluation of my teaching effectiveness
that I will one day, as I grow old in the teaching profession, conclude that I have done some
good in the lives of the students whom I have taught.

Advice for New Teachers
I provide my graduate teaching assistants with much advice over the course of a semester,
however, there is one piece of advice that I emphasize over all others. Each semester I inform
the course teaching assistants, “that if you accomplish only one thing this semester, let it be
that you know your students.” I obviously expect much more from my teaching assistants, but
my emphasis on building relationships with students is at the center of my teaching philosophy.
My advice for new teachers is the same.

A genuine knowledge and caring for your students’ academic and personal lives will cover a
multitude of teaching sins. I advise new teachers to know each student by name by the end of
the semester. I teach nearly 150 students a semester and I challenge myself to know each
student by name within 4 weeks. To help meet my objective, I have students fill out an
information card with their name, major, and an interesting fact at the beginning of the
semester (see Svinicki & McKeachie, 2013). I review the cards once a week. I also review the
picture rolls before and after every class and address students by name when they participate.
When I get a name wrong (which often happens at the beginning of a semester), I inform the
students in the class that much—if not more—is learned from mistakes than from successes
(Madsen & Desai, 2010). I hope that students understand that mistakes are okay as long as
those mistakes lead to changes in thought and behavior. My course mirrors that philosophy by
providing many make-up opportunities. I test my memorization of student names publically at
the end of the 4 weeks and much to the students’ surprise, I always get at least 95% of the
names correct.

I also recommend that new teachers care about their students’ learning. All too often I hear
faculty attribute poor student performance to apathy, lack of preparedness, or laziness. I check
student progress at least two times during the semester. Students who are excelling receive an
encouraging e-mail thanking them for their efforts. Students who are underperforming also
receive an encouraging e-mail with the invitation to visit with me. Most students accept the
invitation. We then work to develop successful strategies for the course.

I think that it is important for new teachers to challenge their students. I believe students want
to be challenged. Statistics is a difficult course and I am always encouraged when I read a
student evaluation that states the course met their expectations. Auburn University
recommends that the average student spend 2-3 hours studying outside of class for every hour
spent in class (Auburn University, 2013). That equates to the typical student spending between
9 and 12 hours a week on a three-credit course. Unfortunately, few students report meeting
that expectation. Instead, many students passively sit through lectures and do not study until 1-
2 days before the exam. New teachers should not be afraid to give students intellectually
challenging, out-of-class assignments that require more time for critical thinking. The general
fear among teachers is that if the course is difficult, then the end of semester course
evaluations will be lower. This perspective is certainly an empirical question, but my experience
is that course evaluations do not suffer when students are challenged intellectually.
Finally, I advise new teachers to embrace new teaching strategies. Academic freedom is the life-blood of evidence-based instruction. Too often teachers use the same strategies and techniques over and over again because they are too comfortable or too afraid to risk failure by trying to find a more effective strategy. I remember taking a course from a philosophy professor who lectured using notes that were yellowed and crinkled from age. How much more intellectually stimulating could the class have been if students were broken up into buzz groups, wrote minute papers, or just held a philosophical discussion on the learning objectives for the day (see Svinicki & McKeachie, 2013)? Varying teaching strategies seems to keep students engaged in the course and the teacher refreshed. If the strategies are based in empirical evidence, then the risks for failure are minimized.

Final Thoughts
Teaching is as scary as it is exhilarating. Like a roller coaster, the dreaded anticipation while waiting in line is overshadowed by the thrill and excitement felt upon surviving the ride. So it is with teaching. The excitement felt for every students’ “Aha!” moment; every demonstration that captivates and initiates critical thinking in students; every success that the students have both in the course and outside; and every student evaluation comment that reads, “I learned a lot in Robb’s class,” overshadows the crippling anxiety felt from standing before 150 sets of eyes. It is that exhilarating feeling that keeps me eagerly anticipating the next class session. I have learned much from my limited teaching experience, but perhaps most importantly, I have learned that much like a roller coaster, teaching gets a little less scary every time you survive the ride.

References


7. If the Only Tool You Have is a Hammer, You Treat Everything Like a Nail

Deborah A. Carroll
Southern Connecticut State University

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you treat everything like a nail
-- Abraham Maslow (2002)

I began filling my teaching and learning toolbox at around age 7 from unlikely sources, including the town dump. I love bargain hunting and the creative processes involved in re-purposing simple everyday discarded items into unique new treasures. I learned early on to ask questions from trusted sources (e.g., my depression-era grandparents) about the actual value of my “bargains” before spending hard-earned money on them. I also learned that mistakes are valuable teaching tools.

Education was highly valued in my family of origin, though the majority of my relatives did not have opportunities for formal education. Rather, they worked hard in low-wage jobs and gleaned their wisdom from the “school of life.” I have come to appreciate that the school of life is not only the repository of teaching and learning tools, but also the ultimate arena for applying what has been learned.

My early school-of-life lessons have contributed greatly to my success as a teacher. Working as a house cleaner taught me the value of organization and time management. It also taught me how to relate to people who did not share my socioeconomic status. Working as a nurse’s aide taught me empathy and understanding that doctors treat people, not diseases, and led me to question why socioeconomic and cultural factors greatly impact the quality of care patients receive, particularly patients with mental illness. Working in a homeless shelter (a second job to forestall my being homeless) taught me that everyone has a story or lesson to share, and fostered my interest in others’ stories.

I acquired some of my teaching and learning tools from formal educational settings. After receiving a degree in psychology from Fairfield University, working in the pharmaceutical industry fueled my passion for neuroscience. Adjunct teaching at Quinnipiac University while I was a graduate student afforded me hands-on practice teaching in a classroom setting, most likely at the expense of my students.

My teaching journey has led me to the Psychology Department at Southern Connecticut State University for the past 20 years. I continue to fill my toolbox by teaching courses as a professor of psychology, and serving as the director of the Psychology Bachelor of Science Research Specialization Program, and as co-director of the University Writing Across the Curriculum Program. My teaching has been recognized by a Carnegie Foundation Case U.S. Professor of the Year, State of Connecticut Award (2012); the Connecticut State University System Trustee Award for Outstanding Teaching (2012); the Southern Connecticut State University J. Philip Smith Outstanding Teaching Award (2011); and two Society for the Teaching of Psychology Best Teaching Poster Awards (2001; 2010).
My Early Development as a Teacher

My graduate program in developmental psychobiology at the University of Connecticut did not include teaching preparation; in fact, the department discouraged teaching. I was very interested in teaching, so I sought adjunct teaching positions for on-the-job training. I was hired to teach Introductory Psychology at Quinnipiac University. I will never forget my very first class (PowerPoint and the internet were not yet invented). I spoke so quickly that I delivered a 50-minute lecture in 25 minutes—not an ideal experience for either the teacher or the students. Yet, I truly wanted to cultivate students’ interest in psychology and the brain. So began my quest to improve my teaching.

For my first class I had relied on only one major tool from my formal educational experiences: the lecture, a.k.a. the hammer. I thought my job was to pound knowledge into students’ brains. I wanted students to feel connected in some way to the course material, but I was not sure how to make that connection happen. I tried pounding more gently with a rubber mallet instead of a hammer, which resulted in my lowering of standards and further frustration. I needed different teaching tools.

In order to foster connections, I adopted a story-telling approach to teaching in which I explicitly related the course content to practical examples. This approach increased student interest and engagement and in retrospect was my attempt to tie classroom learning to its ultimate application: real life. Many of my students were first-generation undergraduates with poor study skills. From my own life experiences, I recognized the impact of socioeconomic status on my students’ learning needs, and developed study guides and work-to-criterion practices to provide more structure for underprepared students. I expanded my collection of teaching tools and my skill, but my focus was on teaching tools and what I could do differently. I had not yet realized that I needed to also acquire and learn to use learning tools and explore what my students could do differently. My students were essentially still being treated as nails, or passive learners.

I can identify three pivotal events that had major impacts on my teaching. In 1994, I attended my first Northeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology (NECTOP) meeting and simultaneously discovered the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. I have “stolen” many ideas and practices from NECTOP presenters; I still regularly assign a VanVoorhis (2002) article on statistical jingles. The article provides a great “first” article for teaching students how to summarize primary sources.

In 2000, I attended a summer workshop on my campus sponsored by the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, which introduced me to the idea of “Writing to Learn,” the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), and John Bean’s (1996) Engaging Ideas, which has become my teaching Bible. Bean introduced me to problem-based assignments, informal writing activities, and hands-on practical strategies for engaging my students in their own learning process. This book was my first introduction to learning tools, tools that changed my students’ status from passive learners (nails) into active learners (tool users).

In 2006, I attended Bryan Saville’s NECTOP presentation on Interteaching, which expands on active learning practices and puts students in charge of their own learning. I was so intrigued
and inspired by Interteaching that I applied for and received a Davis Foundation funded Teaching Innovation Fellowship to develop Interteaching materials.

Over and above what I directly learned from each of my pivotal experiences, I met teaching colleagues with whom I could discuss ideas, brainstorm, and problem solve. Networking and sharing of ideas about teaching practices has guided my development as a teacher.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Early in my teaching career, I struggled with reading papers and providing effective feedback. Initially, I was a compulsive editor, but a turning point for me was a student’s Experimental Methods paper that contained the sentence: “The participants took a test.” In the margins I wrote “ambiguous” because I wanted the student to explain what type of test the participants took. The second draft came back with the following sentence: “The participants took an ambiguous test.” When I asked the student why she included the term in her revision, her response was “because you wrote it in red pen.” I quickly realized that my students’ papers improved because in my compulsive editing practices—I was essentially rewriting their papers.

I have learned to master minimal marking and substantive feedback, and regularly teach these practices to other faculty. As Bean (1996) suggested, I have become a writing coach on first drafts, and a judge on final papers. Sharing rubrics with my students clarifies the students’ task. I require my students to score their drafts with rubrics and to indicate two rubric areas that they feel they have mastered and two rubric areas with which they struggle. I also encourage students’ meta-writing on drafts. I provide feedback on the same rubric students use to facilitate tracking of feedback and targeted comments. I have also developed peer-review strategies. To be effective, peer reviewers must be trained and their reviews must be graded.

Continual assessment of my teaching practice has informed me that although students report liking my story-telling approach to teaching, they more often than not remember the “story” I told, but not the construct that I intended the story to illustrate. For difficult to learn concepts a much more effective practice is to ask students to develop stories and examples of their own. My stories can serve as prototypes, but the students’ own stories provide a scaffold on which they build their own understanding of concepts in meaningful ways. In my statistics course I ask my students to give an example from everyday life of a situation in which they test hypotheses. They must include a description of the variables, statements of both the null and experimental hypotheses, a description of a significant effect, and the results of both Type I and Type II errors. My assessment data inform me that the practice works.

I, like many of my colleagues, have struggled with getting students to read their textbooks and other assigned readings. If readings are assigned, the content should be relevant and included in course assignments or exams. I incorporate outside of the classroom online quizzes that require students to complete assigned readings prior to a class meeting in order to successfully complete the course. Online quizzing can be very effective if the teacher employs empirically tested parameters (see Daniel & Broida, 2004).

I teach at a public state university with a 4/4 course-teaching load. In my early career years I definitely felt that I had to sacrifice research activities in order to teach effectively. Conversely, I felt that my dedication to teaching was undervalued and interfered with my research progress.
Although I attempted to include students in my research, time in the lab was for the most part stolen minutes between classes and during the summer.

I have been able to combine my interests in teaching and learning by engaging in SoTL. I have moved from studying learning in non-human animals to studying learning, currently reading, in humans. I have been able to include undergraduate students as research participants in my scholarly activities.

I developed field practicum and lab practicum courses for which I receive teaching load credit for engaging students in research. The practicum courses afford students hands-on experiences with research. Additionally, practicum courses provide research assistants for faculty research, promote faculty-student collaborations that enhance faculty research productivity, support student presentations and publications, and improve students’ graduate school acceptance rates.

The Examined Life of a Teacher
At the heart of my personal philosophy of teaching is my view that I am a general contractor overseeing student-centered “Habitat-for-Humanity-like” building projects. At the very core of Habitat’s success is voluntary active engagement and shared participation to achieve a common goal (Baggett, 2001). The students or “builders” on each project are different people with unique needs, strengths, weaknesses, experiences, and interests. For an optimal build, students must actively engage in their own learning process, and they must provide me, the general contractor, with continual feedback on our shared building’s progress. As with any project, you get out of it what you put into it; and also as with any project, the experience changes you. Ultimately, the students must claim ownership of the building, customize it to fit their own needs, and hopefully continue to develop their skills to build bigger and better things in the future.

My approach to teaching has changed significantly over the last 27 years since I taught that first introductory psychology course. I know it sounds cliché but I have come to embrace a “less is more” approach. I now talk less and have the students do more. Colleagues who walk by my classroom often stop to see “what is she doing now!” Just last week in my statistics class we drew random samples from large bags of M&M candies to test the central limit theorem.

My students are no longer the recipients of my tool choices. Rather, they play active roles in choosing and even designing the tools that support their own learning. Peer-learning strategies and problem-based assignments expand learning beyond the classroom setting into the arena of life, the ultimate application of learning. Here is a sample assignment from my Brain and Behavior course:

Your parent, sibling, spouse, or child has been diagnosed with a brain tumor on a Friday afternoon. Your family member must decide by Monday morning whether to undergo radiation, chemotherapy, surgery, or refuse treatment. What is your recommendation? Why did you recommend this treatment?

I tell my students that the purpose of this assignment is to develop practical skills that they can use in their real lives. In response to this assignment, students research verifiable, primary
sources of information and write comprehensive well-organized essays. Students do not rely on the first five sources they find (as they typically do for term paper assignments); they do not waste time reading materials that are incomprehensible to them. They carefully consider the pros and cons of their choices, and consider alternatives that were not mentioned in the assignment, because the answer has practical significance in their lives.

Teaching technology has changed tremendously since I began teaching. I think it is important to stay current with technology, but to carefully evaluate the efficacy of technology on learning outcomes. There is no one multi-purpose teaching tool. I adapt my teaching strategies to meet the learning needs of students who are currently sitting in my classroom. To that end, I may write out math problems on a chalkboard in statistics class, use interactive Internet-based software in behavioral neuroscience, incorporate PowerPoint slides or YouTube video clips in psychopharmacology, or utilize course management systems such as Blackboard for outside of the classroom online quizzing. Or, I may bring a bag of M&M candies or a Jello brain model to class.

I feel strongly that technology is a tool that should enhance learning, but the tools should not become the focus of pedagogy. During a recent power-outage on my campus, I was appalled that a few younger colleagues cancelled class when the power went out because they felt they could not teach without their PowerPoint slides. PowerPoint can easily become the pneumatic nailer of teaching: pounding in more information, faster.

What I find most rewarding about teaching is students’ sharing in my enthusiasm for learning. My best teaching experiences involve students’ getting so engaged in their learning that they lose track of time, read more than I ask of them, and chat with me and each other about the course content outside of the classroom. As we tackle practical problems together, my students’ hard work dramatically increases their self-efficacy, motivation to learn, and appreciation of the value of learning. Recently, a student who has been struggling with course content in an upper-level neuropsychology course told me “I don’t care that this course is hard or what my grade is because I am learning so much and having fun at the same time. Time in this class just flies by.” Several years ago, a student wrote the following evaluation comment in my Brain and Behavior course: “Dr. Carroll didn’t just teach me about the brain, she taught me about life.” Such comments are humbling and make me realize the gravity of the impact teachers have on their students.

I feel frustrated when students do not seem to put in effort to succeed. My experiences working with homeless people taught me that everyone has a unique story to share; reluctant learners often have specific circumstances or experiences that interfere with their learning. They may have to learn how to learn or manage time and resources. I will go out of my way to help struggling students, but they have to meet me half way. I am a “tough love” teacher and hold students accountable for their actions or lack thereof.

Although I have always valued assessment of my teaching, I have become much more systematic about soliciting feedback, analyzing outcome data, and using those data to modify my pedagogy. The process is iterative and endless. A technique or assignment that worked well in a particular course or semester may not work well in a different course or semester. I solicit
feedback from students throughout the semester and at the end of each term. I also track students’ access of course materials, monitor progress toward learning goals, and evaluate the efficacy of course components. I regularly attend teaching workshops and conferences, share ideas and problems with colleagues, and read teaching journals.

**Advice for New Teachers**

My advice for new teachers is to be open to learning from your students as well as teaching them. Design assignments and activities to obtain your specific learning goals and objectives. The majority of learning and application of learning occurs outside of the classroom. Design activities that extend beyond course, discipline, and campus boundaries. Design activities that build skills and allow students to fill their own teaching and learning toolboxes. To that end, share learning goals and objectives with your students and evaluate the efficacy of your pedagogy. Share rubrics with your students and ask them to evaluate their own work from the perspective of a “reader” prior to their submitting it for grading. Seek input from your students; listen to their concerns and learning problems. Maintain high standards for yourself and your students, but always be flexible with your methods. Be creative and do not be afraid to build a scaffold to facilitate students’ reaching their learning goals. Remember what it is like to be a student. Do not be afraid to make mistakes, but learn from them.

**Final Thoughts**

Teaching is truly a transformational experience. I look forward to sharing with my students the joy and excitement of learning new things and new ways of seeing the world and each other. I look forward to our ending the semester better acquainted, better informed, and better people than when we began. I look forward to our working together to build a better world.

**References**


8. Transformational Learning: Beyond the Classroom Context

*Gary Creasey*

*Illinois State University*

I have recently won the Outstanding University Teaching Award at Illinois State University and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Illinois Professor of the Year Award. For media spots, I get probing questions about my upbringing to uncover the childhood roots of this successful journey. I dodge them—I do not know the answer.

I grew up in a poor community and attended substandard schools. I thank my parents, who lacked formal education, for reading to me and finding ways to afford vacations (always camping) to show me places beyond my home. Other than that, I did not receive much support. Our town residents had a fundamental distrust of education, as uttered to me by a neighbor, “Have to watch those good grades Gary, it will ruin your popularity.” Mindful of this wisdom, I would purposefully miss test questions so I would not be teased for getting good grades.

Only 20 percent of my high school class applied for college. Desperate to escape my small town, I applied to Virginia Tech and somehow got in despite poor test scores. I was admitted due to my class rank, which was easy to achieve given the low educational aspirations of my classmates.

At Tech, I was on academic probation my first 2 years. I was just about to pack it in, and then a stray comment by a professor changed my life. My biology instructor, David Stetler, after receiving class applause for winning a major teaching award said, “This is amazing for a guy who was on academic probation for 2 years.” I felt like he was speaking to me, and at this moment, my life changed. *If he could do it, I could do it.* With very hard work, I pulled up a 1.4 GPA to 2.8 by my senior year.

My career at Tech was so checkered that I was advised not to apply to their graduate school. My advisor encouraged me to apply to a new graduate program at Virginia Commonwealth University—he felt there were a lot of young professors who were looking for graduate students. I applied, and was quickly at home—on academic probation—due to my low undergraduate GPA.

I was not awarded financial assistance and advised I would be “out” if I garnered even one “C.” However, I loved the energy of the place and had professors who believed in their students. I hit the ground hard and finished my Master’s and PhD degrees in 5 years. I exited with a doctoral degree, an Outstanding Graduate Student Award, and a Postdoctoral position at The University of Vermont (UVM). I never made that “C”!

I worked at UVM for 2 years and then accepted my current position in developmental psychology at Illinois State University where I have worked for 25 years. I connect with my students because most are first generation, and many have grown up in small towns and rural communities. I never set out to win teaching awards, but it is time to let you know what put me in the position to do so.
My Early Development as a Teacher

My graduate advisor, Barbara Myers, wanted all of her students assuming full course responsibilities once they had their Master’s degree. She advised us that in a given year, there were only a few faculty openings at Research 1 universities. Indeed, most VCU graduates at the time were obtaining jobs at Research 2 universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges. Thus, she advised us not only to teach; but also take on different course preps during our graduate career. She also insisted that we “shadow” her for a semester and observe her teaching techniques.

The first thing I noticed about Barbara was that she could form connections with her students and displayed strong teacher immediacy (effective communication skills). That is, she was not locked to the podium. She walked around the room, made eye contact with students, and was respectful of student opinions. Good teaching is theorized to encompass at least three core dispositions, including the ability to form connections with students, good communication skills, and good content knowledge (e.g., Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). Most instructors have the latter, but the other two require patience, practice, and training.

I was assigned to teach child development, and after the first day I was convinced I wanted to teach at the university level. Following Barbara’s advice, I was always organized and tried to stay a “week” ahead of my class. I believe my mistake was that I did not pursue more training opportunities in teaching, and just assumed content knowledge and enthusiasm would be all that was necessary for good instruction. I knew nothing about the fundamentals of good course design and transformational learning. More or less I thought content acquisition was the primary goal or outcome of any class.

Working to Define Myself as a Teacher

My primary teaching challenge began when our state changed teacher certification requirements. As a result, I was required to teach service courses, and no longer had the luxury of teaching only psychology majors. It was a struggle for me. I noted that the majority of my students had little interest in basic research, did not strive to go to graduate school, and demanded application. I was stubborn, and did not reflect well on basic reality. Most education majors are going to become teachers, and most students—in any major, do not go to graduate school or assume research positions.

About 8 years ago, I ran across an internal grant announcement that seemed to pertain to my courses. The announcement invited faculty to apply for funding to re-design their course with a focus on diversity and the urban context to better prepare pre-service teachers to assume positions in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). We have one of the largest teacher education programs in the country, but only a handful of graduates have assumed CPS positions. The concern was that our primarily white college students were not prepared to teach CPS students due to cultural, ethnic, geographic, and economic divides.

I applied for the grant and my teaching philosophy and identity shifted. Several things had to change. First, I had to shift from what I wanted in my students (e.g., motivation for research; pursuit of graduate school) to what was best for them and other course stakeholders. Second, I learned that good communication skills, enthusiasm, and content knowledge only scratch the
surface for transformational learning. In order for such learning to occur, students have to see a comfortable space for themselves in the classroom, envision the relevance of the course, and be confronted with objectives and authentic out-of-class assignments that scaffold the process.

There is no question that accomplishing these goals took a lot of time and work on my part (workshops; professional development opportunities; cross-college collaboration; re-training). However, I vastly improved as a teacher, and my scholarship advanced as well. I began conducting more systemic research on my pedagogy and that of others (e.g., Lee, Creasey, Showalter, & D’Santiago, 2010). The opportunity to work with the Chicago Public School District also opened up doors for my disciplinary research. Teaching and research should never be viewed as separate entities.

The Examined Life as a Teacher

My primary teaching philosophy rests with the assumption that courses should result in transformational learning. That is, rather than having students assemble a catalogue of knowledge and facts from a class, there should be some personal shift in students’ identity and professional growth. Put simply, when a course is “working,” students should encounter transformative cognitive, social, emotional, and professional change. I first heard of this concept when a student indicated that she felt different as a woman as the result of taking a Women and Society class.

For transformational learning to occur, the course has to “matter” to both the instructor and students. It can greatly assist the process if students can envision how the course material and activities may result in professional growth that could impact others. For example, I encourage my teacher education, psychology, and social work students to consider that they are not the only “stakeholders” in the class. That is, the skill set they gain from their course work could influence the children and families with whom they may eventually work.

On the first day of class, I have students read and consider the transformational goal that is in my course syllabus. This statement is akin to a “mission statement” and I indicate to them if they feel themselves “changing” on any level (e.g., emotionally, socially, mentally) then the process has started. As stated in my Adolescent Development syllabus:

*The transformational goal of this class is to understand adolescent development from an intrapersonal, interpersonal and professional perspective. The final student outcome concerns the ability to work with adolescents across different settings (urban, suburban, rural) with a specific focus on contexts that represent under-serviced areas. By taking this class, it is expected that you will demonstrate changes in thought (more awareness of social justice issues), emotions (more empathy for adolescents who reside in under-serviced areas), and behavior (more openness to working with adolescents in under-serviced areas).*

This goal is then followed by the course objectives, and then each objective is tied to a class activity or assignment. In that manner, students can envision the relevance of the assignments because these activities are the logical outgrowth of the course objectives. This issue is an important one as I have learned via teaching workshops that many students do not understand the purpose of class assignments. I believe this issue is a systemic problem and the result of
enthusiastic instructors who come up with lots of activities, without considering how they tie in (if at all) with course objectives. Consider the marriage between a course objective and an assignment in the following example:

**Objective 4: Identify fundamental developmental changes (identity, autonomy, intimacy, sexuality, achievement) that occur during adolescence.**

To address this objective, you will consider issues concerning identity development in undocumented adolescents via a one-minute paper.

Note that once the course goals and objectives are first considered, then class assignments can be tied to each objective. As a capstone activity, I have learned via workshops and pedagogical theory (e.g., Murrell, 2008) that some form of service learning, civic involvement, or clinical experience that places students outside the classroom context can facilitate powerful transformational growth. Thus, I arrange for my students to conduct observations in Chicago schools and communities so they can directly experience the assets located within these contexts. This addition has had a major impact on my course evaluations as I routinely witness statements such as, “I had never considered working in an urban area until I had this class and the field experience.”

Can instructors achieve a transformational shift in their students by keeping them in the confines of classroom context? In spirit, I would love to say “yes.” However, it should be noted that our university currently has over 60 courses that have been re-designed with an urban context in mind that have out-of-class clinical or service learning components. In addition, there are parallel courses taught by excellent instructors that do not have these external components.

Our research team has noted that student learning and content knowledge improves with time across all of the courses. However, changes in professional growth, identity, and commitment to work in urban areas are more likely to occur with the added value of the out-of-class assignments (Lee et al., 2010). As a student recently reflected, “In order to understand an urban school, you have to directly experience it.” Another potent finding is that these out-of-class experiences empower students as they begin to express more and more confidence in living and working in urban areas. It is well known that such confidence often translates to future competent behavior in professional environments (Bandura, 1977).

These observations have also led me to develop course assessments that measure not only the acquisition of content, but also changes in occupational aspirations, multicultural awareness, and efficacy appraisals. It has been our experience that the latter appraisals are more diagnostic of students assuming positions in Chicago than memorization of course content and facts. These assessments also allow me to critically reflect on my own teaching methods, which are evolving constantly over time. I continue to keep my teaching “fresh” using these assessments, and attending workshops at our Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology.

**Advice to New Teachers**

In terms of advice to new teachers, I am a stickler for knowing your course stakeholders. That is, where are your students coming from and where are they going? If you are teaching a
service course, what majors do most of the students possess? What types of careers will they eventually pursue? This type of information can help you better define your course objectives and content.

In terms of mentoring future instructors, I constantly encourage my college students—many of whom will become public school teachers—to gather as much information as they can about their future students (e.g., culture, ethnicity, social class, geographical backgrounds) and use it to inform their practice. A thorny issue for most instructors is if their demographic/cultural background differs dramatically from their student base. I am grappling with this issue at the present because more and more students of color are gravitating to my class. This issue is one to embrace and not fear—it is important to be honest with your students if you yourself are grappling with issues such as race, class and privilege. This honesty will allow yourself and students to better tackle such issues in class as probably everyone has similar anxieties about hot button topics. The key is to provide a context in which everyone is comfortable with expressing their views without the fear of anger or ridicule.

One notable observation is that many instructors who are honored with teaching awards often have participated in teaching workshops offered via campus units designed to support instruction. These workshops are an extremely valuable resource, and for the most part, such workshops facilitate thinking and practice in evolving areas (e.g., technology, culturally responsive teaching, service learning). Participating in these workshops keeps your practice fresh and cutting edge.

Also, consider assessment practices beyond the standard department evaluations (see Savory, Burnett, & Goodburn, 2007). Think about what you wish your students to achieve in the class and where you want them to be in 5 years. As my class has a strong diversity focus on urban education, I am a stickler for assessing multicultural awareness, openness to experience, intentions to work in urban areas, etc. Strong assessment practices can also lead to scholarship: My colleagues and I routinely publish in journals that focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).

Indeed, publishing and presenting such SoTL work can have a local, regional, and national impact. This type of work is often recognized as scholarship via promotion and tenure committees, and bodies that evaluate teaching awards often heavily consider such outcomes (e.g., Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). In terms of a major clearing house for SoTL information, I encourage readers to refer to McKinney’s (2007) book that overviews exemplar methods in SoTL research, as well as journals, conferences, and grant sources that support this work.

One final tip. One of my students recently commented in an evaluation “I felt myself really changing as a person a result of this class.” I encourage readers to consider this comment because it embodies the start and end point for positive instruction.

In closing, critically reflect on your undergraduate and graduate classes when you were a student. How many courses had a transformational impact on your life? What exactly happened that encouraged this change? I conclude that the most effective instructors
encourage some form of transformational goal (cf., Bain, 2004)—it is now your job to envision it for your own class and students.

Final Thoughts
Our grant team recently had a meeting to discuss the outcomes of students who had taken courses that had been re-designed with an urban education emphasis. The team members that host visits to our partnering Chicago schools and communities remarked that engagement levels of the students tended to differ. That is, some groups were quiet, did not ask questions, and seemed disengaged, whereas others were highly charged, interested, and full of interesting questions and comments. They wondered aloud why there were such disparities.

As the current director of the re-design program, I think I have one opinion. All of the instructors in this program take the same workshops and produce high quality syllabi that carefully outline transformational goals, objectives, and relevant activities. All of the instructors also know their content, and are comfortable with diversity issues. The difference is some of the instructors themselves have transformed as educators, and others have not. That is, the former not only care about their students, but also can envision that these students, as graduates, will be living and working in the contexts we discuss in class. These instructors have a major emotional investment in their students, and the lives they will touch after they leave the confines of their courses. In short, for students to transform, we as instructors must do the same.

References
9. Always a Work in Progress

David B. Daniel  
James Madison University

I have, and hope to continue to have, a circuitous path in academia. I began college wanting to train dolphins in San Diego. Primarily because of my own naiveté and the admonishments of a really poor excuse for a faculty member, the dolphin thing did not quite work out. I paid for college myself, including working as a teaching assistant at an elementary school. Working with these children fueled my interest in how people think, and in developmental psychology in particular. I moved across country to West Virginia University for graduate school, one of the best graduate life-span developmental psychology programs in the country, where I did much more teaching than research. During this time, I also became a stand-up comic with no intention of going into academia. In fact, I had no intention of finishing my doctorate until my advisor called me and dared me to.

As my income in comedy became very comfortable, I started working on the Lower Brule Sioux Reservation in South Dakota as a way to escape the self-absorption of show business. My first step back toward academia was helping to develop a tribal college to serve the needs of the local community. It was a great experience, but also incredibly challenging for a younger person like myself with little experience in the business of academia. I helped build the college in many ways, chairing the Human Services Department when we finally had one.

I took my first tenure-track position in 1996 at the University of Maine at Farmington (UMF), a small public liberal arts school catering primarily to first-generation students. They took a huge risk on hiring someone like me with a very non-traditional background. The position emphasized teaching and one-on-one student mentoring, which is the kind of academic work that I continue to value today. I was fortunate to receive their teaching award several consecutive years, eventually retiring from contention.

Most of the UMF faculty were wonderful and deeply committed to the students. I was, too. Although I eventually became chair of the department, I was far from a finished product as an academic. I was invited to be a visiting scholar at Harvard for my first sabbatical and I became invigorated. I also was restless, curious, and perhaps a bit cocky. There was simply too much “out there” for me to learn about teaching and learning. Retrospectively, a position at UMF would be a wonderful position for me now that I have developed a bit more as a professional. But, at the time, there was more for me to experience, and to learn about myself, before I would be ready to settle down.

After 10 years at UMF, I moved to the University of Northern Colorado for a few semesters. I received more recognition for my teaching there. But, it just was not a good fit and I went back on the job market very quickly. I am now a full professor at James Madison University (JMU). I have received numerous teaching awards at JMU at the department level as well as for Excellence in General Education teaching. I have even received “Favorite Professor” recognition from students. I was also been very fortunate to receive the 2012 Society for the Teaching of Psychology Robert S. Daniel Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, thanks to my
colleagues who graciously nominated me for this honor. I have received national awards for my efforts to bridge teaching practice with scientific findings and am invited to speak internationally. Life is good.

It would be poetic, if not cliché, to be able to discuss my dream of becoming a university faculty member and my single-minded pursuit to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to reach my goal. After all, I am a first generation college student from a family in which many family members did not even graduate from high school. I grew up in low-income Latino areas near Los Angeles and went to schools that did not discuss college as a viable option for most of us. I began college at 16, after skipping a few grades and the kind intervention of a school secretary who stepped in when my guidance counselor told me “good riddance” after I informed him of my plan to drop out of high school. I had to work full-time to pay for college. What a conventionally inspiring story I could tell! The fact of the matter is, though, that I never set out to be university faculty. Like many things in life, if I am honest, I got wherever I am through a series of indecisions, failed attempts, and random successes sprinkled with a good dose of luck culminating in eventual acquiescence.

My Early Development as a Teacher
Just as I did as an undergraduate, I came to graduate school relatively naïve about academia. I went to one of the last, and the best, programs focusing on life-span development. Life-span development is the study of everything that makes us who we are at any given point in time. It is a broad and rich perspective that honors complexity, acknowledges context, and emphasizes interactions over simple main effects. It is a fascinating area and certainly a wonderful background for teaching. However, no one in my graduate program during my first few years was pursuing research that I found particularly exciting. So, I continued without the passion and drive for research inherent in many of my peers. That sort of drifting left me ripe for a teaching assignment in my second year, as research assistantships were reserved for those special few graduate students who really gelled with a particular faculty member’s research agenda.

I took to teaching with a fair amount of enthusiasm, but no preparation whatsoever. We had access to a faculty member who was not known for her teaching prowess (actually, quite the opposite). Keep in mind that I am old. My graduate career spanned a period before universities had teaching and learning centers and before the Internet. I knew what I was exposed to locally. After asking a few questions early on, it was clear that I was in this game by myself, as were my peers.

Toward the end of my first semester teaching, protocol dictated that my supervisor be invited to watch me teach a class. I arranged for her to visit a class that I was not entirely confident teaching. I figured that I could use some pointers and that was her job. Big mistake. Apparently, you are supposed to invite supervisors to see your best class, the one with which you do not need help. That just seemed backwards to me. But, a big part of academics is looking good and there was little room with this particular person to play the game differently. She was not happy and took the opportunity to teach me about the politics of my decision rather than my teaching. During graduate school, I had no inkling of a broader community of teachers beyond my university, and no particular need for one.
Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I developed my teaching style co-dependently, using student feedback and assessment to guide me. My technique developed in concert with my developing knowledge of cognitive psychology and my primary source of income at the time, stand-up comedy. Like comedy, a teacher has to be a cognitive (and emotional) guide. Both have to get people to understand the world the way they want them to. Both involve the ability to simplify concepts without bastardizing them paired with very strategic scaffolding. Stand-up and teaching also share other essential qualities: an appreciation for individual differences, the necessity for results, creativity, and the essentialness of semi-strategic risk.

If you watch comedy, you will note that there are many styles deployed by comedians. Some comedians are hyper, and some are very laid back. Some are physical, and some are cerebral. They come at the world from a variety of angles. Yet, they all make people laugh. In teaching, like in comedy, there is no one style that is superior to another. I learned to cultivate my own identity as a teacher without the constraints or guidance of models. My style is rather unorthodox, very authentic, and idiosyncratic. Most importantly, it works for my students. No one can teach like I do, and no one should try! I wonder what would have happened, had I had formal training. At the time, learning to teach the way I did was lonely and often demoralizing. But, this developmental process has been the key to whatever success I have had.

The second lesson from comedy was the need for results and, in teaching, this became a requirement for some sort of assessment. A comedian gets immediate results after every joke. A teacher, on the other hand, has to look at things over a broader slice of time with less immediately tangible results. I developed a keen desire to make sure that what I was doing in the classroom actually encouraged the results I intended. In comedy, if they do not laugh, you are not a comedian. A sad, flop-sweat laden, speaker. Likewise, if students do not learn in the classroom, you are just a presenter. A sad, flop-sweat laden, speaker. I wanted to be a teacher. My students were, and are, supposed to read the book. I would never, therefore, regurgitate the information in the book in class. I made it a challenge to try and figure out how to explain core concepts, and their relationships to each other, in the most memorable and effective ways possible. Creativity is another ethic that I have come to value. It keeps me always vigilant for better ways to explain concepts, including leveraging popular examples and non-obvious applications. It also keeps me open to various tools and strategies that develop over time. For example, the use of multimedia allows me to show, not just explain, examples and metaphors of concepts we are learning. It also allows me to use video examples as formative quizzes, showing students a video and asking them to make connections to what they were seeing and learning.

Creativity is not worth much without the ability to risk failure. Sometimes, the best plans can have unexpected results. Most often, the result leads one back to the drawing board. The feedback I receive when things do not quite work out helped me fine-tune my pedagogy. Sometimes, however, a risk can lead to dynamic teaching and learning experiences. But, you never know until you try. I have learned to take strategic risks and to leave time to allow things to happen organically. Whether planned or serendipitous, risk is how we grow. These were all qualities I cultivated as I have developed on my own.
The Examined Life of a Teacher

As my enthusiasm for teaching increased in graduate school, the faculty voices rightly urging me to show more dedication to research grew louder. These voices included my undergraduate supervisor and a number of graduate faculty wiser than I. My resistance was immature.

Teaching does not get you a university job. Research does. If you can teach well, that is a bonus. Professionally, my dogged focus on teaching cost me dearly then, and still does. The decision to emphasize teaching had its greatest negative effects earlier on in my career. It constrained my professional options and led me to positions that I was not very well suited to excel.

It was not until a conversation I had with a senior faculty member in a small state university during my second position that I found out about the National Institute for the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP). Apparently, there was an entire community of teachers who supported each other out there! I saved up enough money to attend NITOP and made an instant connection with Doug Bernstein, who more formally introduced me to the world of teaching. Over the next few years, I learned through formal means and informal. I discovered the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP). I met literally dozens of teachers who both inspired and challenged me. Listing the names of those who took me under their wing, pushed me to examine motives and methods, or simply made a keen observation at just the right time would be far too extensive for this venue. I felt that I had finally found my academic home.

Contact with reflective teachers also led me to the realization that teaching and scholarship were not necessarily mutually exclusive. I began to tackle big, often conceptual, questions in my scholarship. My trailing in life-span development offered a contextual perspective on the complexities involved in generalizing findings from controlled studies to the more complex classroom environment. I was invited to spend a year at the Harvard Graduate School of Education developing these ideas and began to move from university teaching to pre-12 contexts. After nearly 15 years of struggling to develop a professional identity, my rather feral perspective on teaching finally led me to a place where my teaching and scholarship aligned. Though I finally found my niche with respect to scholarship, actually a few, my greatest reward professionally remains teaching.

One thing that I was supposed to have learned is that articulating a teaching philosophy is much more than an academic exercise. It allows one to make assumptions explicit, and therefore offer them up for reflection and development. It can serve as a guide to refer to and a measure of growth as it is revised with time and experience. By the time I finally articulated my first teaching philosophy, I had been a teacher for over a dozen years. I had already gone through several, thankfully undocumented, phases of development. For example, I began my teaching career drastically over-emphasizing content. It was a wonderfully safe addiction. I could surround myself with content, filling every second of class time. But that really is not teaching. This phase taught me to prioritize and leave room in every class for learning, not just for disseminating content.

I went through a phase where the pedagogy was more important than the learning. Pedagogy can include strategies and techniques as well as tools, electronic and otherwise. I would read or hear about the newest thing, be it clickers or group work, and assume it would work in my classroom because it worked in someone else’s classroom, which led to a real dip in my
teaching self-esteem when the techniques did not work for me as they did for others. I assumed it was me. In a sense it was: I was not them, and my students were not their students. This phase culminated in a form of liberation. I concluded that teaching is personally empirical. It allowed me to understand that I, the teacher, was a powerful variable unaccounted for in the literature and that teaching contexts can differ considerably (especially if I am in the room!). I was free to be authentic and to try things to see if they worked for me, in my context, before committing to them.

I even went through a phase where I did not care. My administration wanted happy students, not smart ones. My students seemed to want things easier each year, doing less work themselves and demanding more work from me. The only person who seemed to care was me, and I felt that it was an uphill battle with little support or commitment from others to fortify my efforts. I had really lost focus of my role as a teacher and the developmental level of the students in this phase. I learned the lesson of commitment. I learned to allow for criticism, even if unwarranted, without taking it too personally, which is more difficult nowadays given the way students often express themselves in the anonymous online culture. More importantly, I learned to allow for the discomfort for many students that goes hand-in-hand with disequilibrium and to scaffold learning to resolve it rather than avoid it. In this phase, I learned to be a teacher.

I learned that I am not student focused. Rather I am learning focused. These two approaches to teaching are not mutually exclusive. An unmotivated, unappreciated, or scared student does not learn well. But, the goal of teaching cannot just be a happy student. I prefer for students to earn their satisfaction through personally mastering the skills and content of the course and then reflecting on their success. My job is to make success possible, even probable, but not to universally guarantee it. Rising to meet appropriate challenge is an important life-skill.

**Advice for New Teachers**

Let us be clear on something before I offer the advice that the editors require me to offer: I do not know you as a teacher. Any advice I offer must be taken as a suggestion to ponder, nothing more. Below I offer several components that I feel essential to good teaching. Although I have met good teachers who are missing one or more of these qualities, they have developed unique compensatory characteristics. My suggestions cover the basics.

**Be Your Better (Teaching) Self**

The second thing that I would like to make very clear is that, not only do not I know you as a teacher, you probably do not either. This task, then, is the first task of a truly great teacher. In stand-up comedy, it takes years to finally figure out who that person is up on stage. The same goes for teaching. That is not to say, however, that you should be 100% authentic all of the time in the classroom! Sometimes enthusiasm needs to be faked. We all develop a character, an idealized version of a teacher for the classroom. My advice is to do so reflectively. Once you settle on who you comfortably are in the classroom, you will be able to develop much more effective methods of teaching.
Know Your Content
I cannot emphasize enough the importance of mastering the content you are charged with teaching. Knowing the content has several advantages. For example, content mastery allows a teacher to consider the material from multiple angles and levels-of-analysis, which is the foundation of creativity and good lesson planning. It allows teachers to see, and therefore make, connections to real life or other concepts. Content mastery also allows teachers to offer multiple potential explanations, an especially valuable ability when your best attempts do not connect to every student! This is a valuable foundation to flexibility. The flexibility and creativity that comes from knowing content is an invaluable tool in a good teacher’s arsenal.

Teaching is a Conversation
Content mastery, pedagogical knowledge, and an authentic teaching voice yield a very important product: reduced cognitive load, which frees up a teacher to teach in the moment. It is not enough to present information. Good teachers listen to their students and adjust accordingly. They watch student faces and seek cues to let them know if they are on track. Even in a class of 500 students, it is not difficult for the attentive teacher to sense when the collective attention waivers or when students are confused. As cognitive resources are freed, a good teacher devotes the remaining resources to actively monitor the room. If things are going well, I might go deeper than planned, or move on. If things are challenging, I can slow down, back-off, or develop more effective examples on the fly. In fact, it is not uncommon for me to sense that I am not connecting the material to the students as I had hoped and simply ask them what I can do to help them learn in the moment. Knowledge of content and prioritizing student learning over vanity can go a long way in the classroom.

Know Your Craft
It is a very misguided, but widely-held, belief that content mastery alone is a prerequisite to good teaching. We can all remember faculty when we were in college who were obviously brilliant in their field but who did not seem skilled at facilitating, or maybe even very concerned, with student learning. There is one important difference between students and their teachers on the first day of class: Instructors know the content and students do not. Our job is to bridge that difference. The bridge, therefore, is a key component to connecting material to students. The better the bridge, the more efficient and well developed, the better the flow of information.

For a teacher, the bridge between student and content is our pedagogy. Our goal is to meaningfully connect the material to the student and we need to develop methods that work in our context. Fortunately, we are in a field with an increasing knowledge-base with respect to effective pedagogy and evidence-based methods. Be cautious, however. The most you will ever get from an article or conference presentation is a hypothesis for practice. Because your style, context, students, and material may differ from others, you still need to reflectively try these ideas within the context of your own teaching before confidently committing to it. Remember, all learning is local and all teaching is personally empirical.

Be Daring
Which leads me to possibly the most difficult piece of advice for most teachers: One must consistently, and strategically, risk failure to be a great teacher. There are no best practices that
You can magically adopt to be an effective teacher. No two teachers are alike, nor are any two teaching contexts. Like the perfect pair of jeans, you have to try things on to see if they work for you. I have learned that everything can work, for a while. Most effects fade as they become mundane. You change, students change, technology changes, and your teaching needs to change. Complacency is just as dangerous as random experimentation, however. Unlike the development of biological organisms, our development should be targeted, not random. Develop a meaningful learning objective and strategically risk achieving it in the most effective way possible. Then, revisit your techniques periodically. Revisiting is important. As we grow, things change. What was once a successful strategy can lose its edge, or even be counterproductive, as we combine it with other strategies, lose (or gain different) passions, or our contexts shift. We need to check every so often to make sure what we are doing is working as intended in the context of our current teaching.

Final Thoughts
No matter how in vogue my research may be for the moment, or how much attention I get for other endeavors, my primary professional identity is that of a teacher. I receive my greatest satisfaction, as well as greatest doubts, in my role as a teacher. If you are looking for a challenge, teaching is a wonderful profession. Keep in mind, though, that you will never get the recognition, grants, or other perks associated with academia. But, if done well, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you took on the most sacred charge of academia with the commitment and thoughtfulness of someone truly committed to assisting students to realize their potential. That is what I am supposed to say. It sounds good and may be true for many teachers. That is part of it. For me, I thrive on doing better day after day and year after year. The inherent complexity related to teaching captures my intellect and passion. Whatever sort of recognition I may receive for my efforts, be they from individual students or through awards, I doubt that I will ever be satisfied with my teaching...I can always do better. I love that feeling!
Teaching with Three Cs: Creativity, Connections, and Critical Thinking

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I have taught psychology in Hong Kong since 2007. I am a licensed clinical psychologist and a former faculty member at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC). My path to teaching psychology was by no means a bullet train toward my current destination. I did not actively seek teaching as a career, but around every corner, it seemed teaching was finding me, even from the get-go! My family is strongly involved in education—one parent was a certified teacher and avid reader, the other modeled life-long learning by taking one graduate course a semester with patience and persistence, eventually accumulating three Master’s degrees. Prior to my arrival at teaching, both of my siblings had established careers involving formal teaching. I received BS in psychology from Tufts University, and an MS and PhD from the University of North Texas (UNT) in clinical psychology. After completing an internship at MUSC, I stayed on for post-doctoral training and then a faculty position focused primarily on research in sport and health psychology and clinical supervision of graduate students. I have been honored to receive professional awards throughout my career from an undergraduate research award, to the Laura Griffin Memorial Internship Award, the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Faculty Scientist-Practitioner Award at MUSC, the American Psychological Association’s (APA) TOPSS Award for Excellence in Teaching (2011) and Society for Teaching Psychology Mary Margaret Moffett Award for Teaching Excellence (2012).

I was fortunate to have formal teacher training during my graduate and post-doctoral training. At UNT, there was a well-developed teaching training program including a required course focusing on teaching basics: syllabus and assessment development, practice lecturing, and providing effective feedback to students. Before becoming an instructor of record, teaching assistants (TA) assisted with an existing class allowing for mentorship and modeling. After this traditional TA role, my funding shifted to purely research: I was selected to be a research assistant for Michael Mahoney. Mike’s friends were people I had read about in textbooks and journal articles, and such exposure helped me realize the dynamic nature of psychological research. Again, opportunities for a focus on teaching arose during internship and post-doctoral training at the MUSC. My clear favorite was a 3-day workshop I attended at a beautiful beach resort near Charleston titled, "Effective Teaching: Improving Your Skills." In addition to the obvious content, the beautiful and informal setting facilitated networking among faculty across experience ranges and content areas.

There are several people who more or less served as mentors for my teaching. The first was Britton Brewer, who invited me to teach part of a lecture for gifted high school students when I was an undergraduate. After spending many hours honing my knowledge base and planning, I taught part of the class. I was very nervous and unsure in my first time addressing a class. The presentation was uninspiring, yet I received warm and positive feedback on the content and level of preparation, as well as a recommendation to share my enthusiasm with the class and
practice varying my voice tone. Incredibly useful advice, but even more fundamental was way Britt modeled giving feedback in a way that enhances skills, facilitates self-efficacy, and increases the likelihood of further effort toward improvement.

Presenting research at conferences along the way also offered more opportunity to enhance my public speaking skills. Britt and Judy Van Raalte have provided long-term research mentorship for me over nearly two decades. In 2007, I found myself teaching as the instructor of record for the first time, and I again turned to Judy for guidance. Judy shared lecture notes, her favorite activities, her enthusiasm, and emphasized the importance of students making connections between material and their lives.

There have been many unintentional and tangential mentors—people who have impacted my teaching in brief or limited circumstances around the world. For example, Jane Halonen, during an afternoon in Bath, UK enthusiastically describing the process of reading Advanced Placement (AP) exams and the importance of critical thinking; Sue Franz at AP readings, by her relaxed style facilitating technology for academics; Alan Feldman with his vast knowledge base and tremendously creative activities; Jen Oates whose passion and organization modeled the degree of preparation for dynamic inquiry-based learning at any level of expertise, and Michael Kersten in Hong Kong who invited me to experience the impact of service learning.

**Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher**

Strengths can also be our greatest challenges. My strength? Comprehensively researching a topic. My weakness? The same. For example, the breadth of content in an introductory psychology class creates a monstrous challenge. When I decided to teach psychology, I took it on fully. I attended a 5-day AP workshop, read every activity in the *Activity Handbook for the Teaching of Psychology* (Benjamin, Nodine, Ernst, & Becker, 1999; Benjamin & Lowman, 1981; Malosky, Whittemore, & Rogers, 1988; Malosky, Sileo, & Whittemore, 1990) perused listservs, and consumed instructor’s manuals for several textbooks. To continue at this pace would demand no sleep at all, and of course, I had read extensively on the cognitive and other problems associated with sleep deprivation! Stopping continues to be one of my challenges. For example, in preparing to write this chapter, I started to read an example (or two) from the 3rd edition of *Teaching in Autobiography* (Keeley, Stowell, Beins, & Buskist, 2010) but I ended up reading the entire volume cover-to-cover. I enjoyed and learned from the entire book, but with limited time available, the challenge is selection.

One of the great strengths of secondary school teaching is that the emphasis of the job is teaching, and other responsibilities are secondary. In comprehensively researching materials to create and select for my course, my second challenge is to maintain engagement and interest: both mine and my students’. Although there is always new research to incorporate into class, the basics of introductory psychology are fairly static. My personal need for novelty creates some challenges, but I allow room for creativity as I find myself looking to revise existing exercises and create new ones (e.g., students’ role playing famous psychologists in a speed dating activity, cupcake review assignment). In so doing, I offer students more opportunities for creativity with their assignments by providing choices.
Choosing to shift to teaching psychology was a definite trade-off in the research area. Shifting to teaching secondary school in 2007 resulted in the near elimination of my research program. However, through collaboration with mentors, I have stayed involved in research, grants, curriculum development, and serving as research mentor to faculty pursuing doctorates. Recently, I was asked to be a content development specialist regarding mental health referral for a grant funded by the NCAA and worked with the APA-TOPSS on developing curriculum units on psychological disorders and memory. Several faculty/administrators at my school are pursuing doctorate degrees and I have worked with them on research design, statistics, and survey development.

With reduction of research, there have been opportunities for other experiences that happen more easily at International Schools. Teachers lead annual school trips primarily around the Asia-Pacific region focused service, adventure, and culture. Both on the trips themselves and in processing of the experience together afterwards, situations relevant to psychology abound. For many students who are involved in service to orphanages, review of child development and principles of learning come into play. For all, cross-cultural sensitivity is an issue within the group and between our school and local communities. Discussions of communication, body language, and emotion abound. Although not officially evaluated as part of the teaching role, service is highly valued. For example, over the past 4 years I have accompanied students to the Child Rescue Center in Kranglover, Cambodia as part of a service learning course. This course involves two trips to Cambodia, part of the first is a needs assessment, and the second is to implement the project. While in Cambodia working with children at the Child Rescue Center, we participate in activities highlighting each group’s strengths. There is overlap (musicians and dancers everywhere), but in outdoor soccer, navigating the trails, and agricultural efforts, the local students are clearly experts. Hong Kong students, English experts, are often surprised by the range of emotions they experience when they leave technology behind and engaging fully with others. Nearly always there is some adventure: a bamboo railroad ride into a thunderstorm, getting lost and found on a jungle trail, or several small children balancing on you and your bicycle while you ride. On these trips in particular, it becomes easy to find ways to connect in-class material to everyday life and further development of relationships with students.

The Examined Life of a Teacher
What has been effective in my teaching? Creating collaborative engagement with students in a positive and relaxed atmosphere allows opportunities for students to learn, question, and further develop critical thinking skills. Coming from a decade of working with graduate students, I was used to working together in learning in a casual, yet professional student-teacher relationship. Graduate students entered courses anticipating the content of the course would be interesting and applicable to their lives and professions. With high school students, working together and mutual respect are the building blocks. With a warm and inviting environment and a sense that the instructor truly cares about students and their learning, the stage is set for learning content and developing students’ continued academic development. I have the luxury of small classes, allowing for an easier path to developing personal
relationships with students. I try, often through humor, to help instill students with a sense of curiosity and an air of skepticism that I hope will extend to lifelong learning.

There are always challenges in translation of information. Like others have written (e.g., Sternberg, 1997, Keeley et al., 2010), a common problem for teachers is focusing primarily on the delivery of information and not attending enough to student understanding of that information. I certainly want to make sure my students leave my classroom knowing the information and being able to apply it, and what better way than to engage them in activities that enhance their understanding of psychology’s usefulness in everyday life? The AP Psychology curriculum is broad and thorough, but because of time limits, this breadth can result in limited depth. It took me a few years of careful consideration of student feedback and observation to fully realize that increased student engagement results in deeper learning when students can also be creative and discover material themselves. Having read about so many effective psychology class activities, I was quick to implement many to keep variety and interest in each of my classes. Merely participating in an activity is often not enough. As I learned over time, holding group discussions to process class activities fully is at least as important as the activity itself. Increased emphasis on processing has significantly enhanced the value of the exercises.

The applied nature of psychology makes it relatively easy for students to relate the discipline to their daily experiences. Helping students make connections between their life experiences and course content is one of my primary goals as an instructor. In recognizing the importance of expanding schema, long-term potentiation, and the dopaminergic bursts of anticipation of reward as students figure things out, these connections add value to student experience and make it more likely they will enjoy and remember content.

For example, one of these moments came during a prejudice awareness exercise adapted from Lawrence (1998), in which different student groups are given access to varying levels of resources, but evaluated equivalently. For this assignment, success in certain categories is essentially impossible without access to more "expensive" resources. For example, some groups are not given colored pencils or pens. In this exercise, typically it is the "have nots" that quickly notice they have fewer good resources, whereas the "haves" do not notice they are privy to additional resources. A have-not student approached me politely, "Excuse me, Dr. Diehl? I think we might be missing a few things from our packet of materials?" I quietly responded, "No, you are not missing anything. Please use what is available to you." He paused, looked confused, paused again with a quizzical look, then a slow, quiet, "Oooooh, I see." He led the class discussion/debriefing of the activity.

Sharing moments of increased understanding of more complex application of a concept are some of my greatest teaching moments, although I admit that sometimes connections can be difficult to facilitate. However, by attending student extra-curricular activities, I find it easier to offer create examples of connections between psychology and student experience during class, such as referring to specific pre-game routines during discussion of arousal-performance relationships, in group bias or discussing attribution theory as it relates to a windy day at a tennis match.
There are both formal and informal mechanisms in place that help me reflect on my teaching. Two less formal mechanisms are especially helpful. First, at the end of each unit students anonymously evaluate the unit content in terms of assignments, activities, class demonstrations, and video clips to identify what was fun and/or deepened their learning. I share the results with students and also occasionally share how previous feedback led to, or removed, certain exercises. The involvement in improving the class for themselves and for future classes gives students a sense of control and ownership that seems to facilitate personal commitment and responsibility to the class. The second informal mechanism is during physical exercise, which provides me with distance from the classroom in time and space and allows me with the opportunity analyze how expectations and plans match with the reality of presentation or activity. My best evaluative moments are during morning runs in the park.

At my school, there is also an explicit formal process for evaluating teaching that is directly tied to salary. Every 3 years, this process involves colleagues and administrator observations, post-observation meetings, and the submission of an extensive portfolio including sample student work, lesson plans, and a 20-page personal reflection on different domains including, for example, pedagogy, collaboration, classroom management. The observations and the reflective, collaborative, conversations that follow observations are helpful to focus strengths, opportunities, and observation of student responses from a different perspective. I value the focus on pedagogy and in tying the evaluation process directly to salary although it has created some challenges related to inter-rater reliability, difficulty with independence of observations, and finding and applying appropriate measures of validity.

Advice for New Teachers

- Observe: Visit classes of differing age groups and content matter such as physics, elementary school science, and/or well-respected colleagues in your department. Ignore the content and focus on the process. What is working in the room? Why? What strategies might fit with your style?
- Incorporate student learning goals into the curriculum. Several respected professors (e.g., Jane Halonen) begin by asking students what they would like to learn about and find ways to incorporate their interests into the course wherever possible.
- Consider your strengths and capitalize on them. Most professors are content experts, but may have had limited training in teaching skills. My early presentation in Britt Brewer's class is something I remind myself of before each semester begins.
- Keep academic honesty in mind. To the extent that you can, create environments and assignments that minimize the likelihood of such problems.
- Read journals (e.g., Teaching of Psychology) and books (e.g., Sternberg, 2007) to provide solid grounding for your teaching.
- Provide many testing opportunities for your students to take advantage of the testing effect.
- Offer novel or unconventional ways to learn specific topics (e.g., drawing neurons with sidewalk chalk).
• Find a mentor locally or remotely who has a well-designed course. Adapting aspects of someone else's course to meet your teaching objectives is a great way to avoid reinventing the wheel.
• Share personal anecdotes with your students as these experiences relate to your topic, especially if they are funny. Invite students to do the same.
• Ask students for feedback often, and demonstrate to them how past student feedback has guided course.
• Be flexible: begin class with a clear purpose, and then diverge as student interest/questions allow.

In sum, focus on connections, use your creativity, and facilitate student critical thinking. Teaching can be extremely rewarding and dynamic. Be flexible, and ... Enjoy!

References
11. ...Involve Me and I Learn

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I am currently a professor of psychology in the Psychology Department at Lorain County Community College (LCCC) in Elyria, Ohio, where I teach classes in Introduction to Psychology, Adolescent Psychology, Social Psychology, Personality Theories, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Quantitative Methods, Research Methods, and Advanced Research Methods (although not all in the same semester). I also have taught as an adjunct professor at John Carroll University, Hiram College, John F. Kennedy University, and Dominican College. At LCCC, I serve as the faculty director of the Center for Teaching Excellence and chair of the Institutional Review Board. I have served in several positions for the American Psychological Association, including the Chair of the Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC), Secretary/Treasurer of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Division (Division 47), candidate for the Member-at-Large Position for Division 47, and the Public Relations Committee for the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. I have also been awarded numerous grants for innovations in teaching, and was recipient of the Alumnus of the Year from John F. Kennedy University (2005), LCCC Faculty Excellence Award (2010), LCCC Outstanding Faculty Award (2011), National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Teaching Excellence Award (2011), and the Wayne Weiten Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (2013). I am an Accredited Interscholastic Coach through the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), and have been a boys and girls high school basketball coach for over 24 years.

**My Early Development as a Teacher**

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I Learn.” This quote has been credited to everyone from Xunzi, a Chinese Confucian Philosopher to Benjamin Franklin, with critics not sure who said it (Popik, 2012). Regardless of who said it, I find myself utilizing its philosophy in my own teaching, and it has served as a basis for my early development as an educator.

I did not always think of myself as a teacher. I wanted to be a sport psychologist who worked with athletes and coaches. After finishing my bachelor’s degree from John Carroll University, I moved away from the Midwest to California for my graduate work. Having majored in psychology as an undergraduate, I wanted to stay in psychology as a graduate student, but most of the sport psychology programs in the early 1980s were housed in sport science and kinesiology departments. At the time the only schools that allowed students to focus on sport psychology within psychology departments existed on the west coast. I did my Master’s degree at John F. Kennedy University with a specialization in sport psychology.

My Master’s degree program required the completion of sport psychology internships where we taught athletes skills such as imagery, goal setting, stress management, cognitive restructuring, and concentration. My internships were with high school football and volleyball teams. It was at this time that I also started my coaching career as a high school basketball
coach. One lesson I learned from all these experiences was if I spent too much time talking, the athletes quickly became bored and tuned me out. Because these were all high school students, there were several teens who were skeptical of what I was presenting. I was forced to incorporate active exercises to keep their attention and convince them the value of what I was teaching.

When I started my doctoral program in psychology at Saybrook University, I was asked to serve as the field placement coordinator at the school at which I completed my master’s degree. I also started teaching a few classes with some of the program’s faculty. One person I met was Betty Wenz who served as the first sport psychologist for the United States Olympic athletes (Granito, 2002). Betty and I team-taught several 1-day a week, 3-hour graduate level classes. Neither of us had the energy nor the desire to talk for three straight hours, so we developed our classes around group discussions, with the two of us circulating around the room providing feedback. Our student evaluations suggested that the students appreciated this format.

In 1998, my family and I moved back to the Midwest to be closer to our extended family. With help from my undergraduate faculty (David Rainey, Beth Martin, and Janet Larsen), I was hired as an adjunct faculty member at John Carroll University teaching Introduction to Psychology and Theories of Personality. I was also contacted by the chair of the Social Sciences Division at LCCC and asked about my interest in teaching psychology courses. I continued my active approach to teaching and also consulted with several teaching resources such as the Handbook of the Teaching of Psychology (Buskist & Davis, 2006), Teaching Introductory Psychology (Sternberg, 1997), The Professor’s Guide to Teaching: Psychological Principles and Practices (Forsyth, 2003), and all four volumes of the Activities Handbook for the Teaching of Psychology (Benjamin & Lowman, 1981; Benjamin, Nodine, Ernst, & Broeker, 1999; Makosky, Sileo, Whittemore, Landry, & Skutley, 1990; Makosky, Whittemore, & Rogers, 1987) to help teach some of the topics with which I was unfamiliar. Although I had already started to change my thinking about becoming a sport psychologist because of the relatively few job opportunities, it was these early adjunct teaching experiences that propelled me toward a career as a college level teacher.

**Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher**

My initial years as an adjunct professor were spent traveling from one college to another. One semester, I was teaching at three different colleges that involved over an hour-long commute. Because I was teaching at both 4-year and 2-year schools, I also noticed differences in the types of students I taught. There seemed to be a great deal of diversity in the community college students in terms of age, academic preparation, and scholastic ability. The differences between the best and worst students at the 4-year level were slight, but the gap at the community college level was significant. I learned to appreciate the community college level, because this diversity forces faculty to emphasize the teaching and learning process.

The diversity among students is just one of the complications faced at community colleges. Traditionally, community colleges have been open access institutions that attract a large percentage of at-risk students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), although I think this trend has started to change since the financial meltdown in 2008. Many students are choosing to start their
college career at community colleges to save money. My problem has always been that an activity approach to teaching means less time spent covering concepts. Students are responsible for reading material, but several of my students read at a below college-ready level.

To deal with this struggle, I take time at the beginning of the semester to provide information on how to prepare for my style of classes, things to which to pay attention, and how to plan for tests and assignments. I have created student success folders that I post on my course management system. These folders contain pages on class expectations, videos that I have created on test taking tips and how to read the book, and the video series How to Get the Most Out of Studying developed by Stephen Chew (2011). I think it is important to get students thinking about their thinking and take responsibility for their learning.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Albert Einstein once said, “It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge” (Einstein, Mayer, & Holms, 1996). My philosophy on teaching starts with an approach to “awaken joy in knowledge,” and getting students excited about learning. The discipline of psychology makes this job easy, because it is relevant to every aspect of the human experience. I have always tried to display a passion for the science of psychology. One of my favorite open-ended comments on a student evaluation came from a student who said, “It looks like you are having fun talking about the topics and showing a great deal of enthusiasm for what you are teaching.” For the introduction to psychology students, it is awakening a curiosity to learn more about the field and relating course content to their lives; for the research methods students, it is fostering zeal to ask research questions about human behavior.

My institution recently opened a new building in which all the classrooms are set up as learning studios as opposed to traditional classrooms. A learning studio is characterized by flexible student learning areas and the absence of a fixed faculty point. Tables are configured in pod type seating that encourages collaboration among students (Granito, 2011). These new learning spaces have taken my student-centered, active learning style of teaching to another level. I utilize a “flipped classroom” (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) approach in which students get lecture material outside of class, and we spend class time on learning activities. My classes typically involve group activities, games, projects, and problem-based pursuits. This format allows me to engage with students and provide immediate feedback. If I do lecture, it is usually only for a short period of time, because I want students to experience the material in each class.

This teaching approach and philosophy requires developing responsibility and communication with students. Because so much of the learning becomes dependent on students, they must develop a responsibility for their own learning process, and the ability to communicate to me what they failed to understand. The APA Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology (APA, 2011) outlines how students must take responsibility for their learning. I believe my role as a faculty member is to demonstrate this responsibility. I start my Introduction to Psychology class with a slide that asks “Do I have any questions on the reading?” and “How do I go about answering the questions I have from the readings?” This metacognitive process helps me build communication with my students. I treat all my students as adults, and set the expectations of responsibility and communication so students can be
successful in my classes. My goal is to make things easy to understand, which is not the same as making the class easy to pass.

One of the biggest transformations to the teaching environment over the years has been the evolution of technology to aid teaching. I have used the course management system in land-based classes, the iPad to develop the video lectures for the flipped classroom, student mobile devices as clickers, and laptop computers in the classroom. This proliferation of technology has increased the modes of delivery methods available for faculty. Institutions are always looking for new ways to reach more students and my school is no different. Although my most common (and preferred) method is face-to-face, I have also taught online, hybrid, cable television, and interactive video distance learning classes.

My “involve me” approach becomes increasingly limited with different delivery methods, and presents complications for my teaching. For example, I teach an Introduction to Psychology class in an interactive video format. I have one class at the main campus and two rooms at our outreach sites. These students often feel isolated from the class because they are watching me on a screen as opposed to having me in-person at the front of the class. The format disrupts the engaging atmosphere of my teaching style. I am constantly looking for ways to break down such barriers. One technological tool that I discovered is Poll Everywhere, which is a web-based clicker system, allowing students to use their mobile phones, Twitter or computers as the clickers. The answers appear on my screen live as the responses come in, thus helping the remote students feel more like they are part of the class (this system works well for online classes too!).

I believe faculty should continually try to improve their craft by keeping current on new research related to psychological concepts, new pedagogical methods, political factors impacting the way institutions operate, and innovative technologies. I constantly try to improve my teaching methods and strategies by utilizing the latest knowledge available from several different sources: attending conferences, reading journals, taking webinars, accessing the STP’s resource website (teachpsych.org), teaching myself how to use technology involving YouTube videos, and attending roundtables provided by my school’s Center for Teaching Excellence. I also adjust my teaching by examining student feedback and informal conversations with them on what enhances their learning. I also engage my colleagues and my dean in conversations about teaching. Finally, I frequently take time for self-reflection over my teaching.

Advice for New Teachers
Most of this chapter has focused on my active, student-centered approach to teaching, but I also think faculty need to assess their comfort level with this style of teaching. I teach the same way I coach, with energy and at times with a very loud voice. Not all faculty teach with this same level of energy, which is not a bad thing. I know some faculty members who are extremely effective lecturers who interact and connect with students while presenting the information. There is no reason for these faculty to change their style. New teachers should assess their style of teaching according to their comfort level, while measuring it against how well students are doing in the class.
There have been times when I come back from class with props used for an activity, when adjuncts questioned what I was doing. After explaining my activity, they might tell me they are going to try the activity as well. I often will ask “why” or “how does the activity fit in with the goals for the class?” Everything I do in class has a purpose, usually connected to the student outcomes listed for the course. New faculty should always keep their student outcomes in mind, and structure all class time and assignments around those outcomes.

One last suggestion for new faculty members is to not sweat the small stuff, especially when change happens. In my short career as a psychology professor, the one thing I have learned is that change is inevitable. Just as I get comfortable in my teaching style, something new comes along, or political forces change the way institutions do business, or the types of students we get in our classes change. Change is going to happen, and how we respond to change will go a long way toward our peace of mind. We can complain and become apathetic in our approach, or we can use the science of psychology to lead the way in helping others adjust to this change.

For example, a change we are currently dealing with at my institution is a move to performance-based funding by the state. Our financial support from the state is now contingent on students passing our classes. As faculty members we are all feeling pressure to get as many students through our courses as possible, which is difficult for introductory courses where the failure rate is high. I am working on a class level analytic system that utilizes data about students’ performance to alert both faculty members and students when students might be at-risk to fail the class. Our knowledge of both statistical processes and research methods can be a benefit for all the classes on our campus. I believe that psychology faculty should be the leaders on our campuses to help adapt to change.

Final Thoughts
I cannot see myself doing anything else but teaching. I have had several people at my school suggest that I move into administrative roles, but I believe that such a move would take me out of my strength, which is in the classroom interacting with students. My favorite part of my job is the opportunity of watching students from the beginning of the semester where they might be nervous and uninterested in psychology, to the end of the semester where they have a new found curiosity for the field. When students, who I had semesters earlier come up to me and say they decided to major in psychology because of the class they took with me, then I know that I have taken the correct path in life.

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I am an associate professor in the Psychology Department at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), which may seem like an unlikely position for someone who earned a BA in anthropology and minors in French and biology. After graduating from Washington University in St. Louis, the idea of pursuing a graduate degree in psychology was not on my radar. A large portion of my family lives in South Korea, and my plan was to teach English in Korea for at least 1 year and then return to the United States to apply to medical school, get in, and start the rest of my life. All of this changed when I met Roberta Golinkoff, but more about her later. My life map now includes an MA and PhD in psychology (clinical) from Temple University, a Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Training Fellowship from the American Psychological Association (APA), and postdoctoral positions, one with Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (WPIC) and University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine (funded by the MacArthur Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice) and another with the University of Pittsburgh Psychiatric Epidemiology Training Program (funded by the National Institute of Mental Health).

I am now a faculty member at TCNJ and most often teach undergraduate courses on research methodology and abnormal/clinical psychology and courses that involve experiential learning such as internships, research lab experiences, and community-engaged/service learning courses. Since joining the TCNJ faculty, I have received several grants and scholarships to support my professional development as a teacher-scholar. These include career development and faculty travel grants (from TCNJ, the Society for the Teaching of Psychology-SP), and the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology), as well as external grants to support my scholarship with students (from APA’s Society for Community Research and Action and the Pittsburgh Foundation). I am also the proud recipient of the 2012 Jane S. Halonen Teaching Excellence Award (first 5 years of teaching at any level) from STP.

My Early Development as a Teacher
When I applied for the assistant professor position at TCNJ, members of my search committee were, frankly, surprised. TCNJ is nationally recognized for its commitment to undergraduate teaching, and according to my application and CV, I had never taught a course. Ever. I had not even served as a teaching assistant in my pre-TCNJ career. My background included a lot of formal research experiences but no formal teaching experiences. As they tell the story now, my colleagues were wondering how I could know—without ever having taught a course myself—whether I would actually like to teach.

My love for teaching has emerged from a variety of informal teaching and learning experiences. I have always loved to solve problems—all kinds of problems—from fixing a flat tire, to resolving conflict between friends, to helping my parents make sense of the English language. Before starting graduating school, I had a job as a research coordinator, and it was through this experience that I developed a new love—one for solving research problems. Research was new to me, and my mentor, Roberta Golinkoff, seemed to gleam with excitement and passion every
time I saw her. It felt as if every day in the laboratory was a new day to create knowledge, and I wanted to be part of the celebration. While I still remember the nuts and bolts of her research protocol, what I remember most is how I felt during the experience—a true spirit of collaboration and Roberta’s commitment to the development of her students. I was fortunate to have similar experiences during graduate school with my mentor, Larry Steinberg. More than anything, I was struck by Larry’s ability to give his full attention to students and provide them with constructive, honest feedback. Larry made me feel like my ideas mattered; he paid close attention to the message I was trying to send and was fiercely committed to helping me shape my own thinking. Through these, and related experiences I came to understand what a true gift it is to teach in a way that someone feels supported and connected to others and that their ideas mean something.

Although I did not have formal training in teaching during graduate school, I learned by example, especially through my relationships with mentors. I also thought a lot about how I learn most effectively and tried to integrate these gut feelings into my teaching. Finally, I learned by reading books on teaching—for example, On Course: A Week-by-Week Guide to Your First Semester of College Teaching (Lang, 2008), McKeachie’s Teaching Tips (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006), and The Compleat Academic: A Career Guide (Darley, Zanna, & Roediger, 2003)—and articles in the journal, Teaching of Psychology, as well as by attending professional workshops and teaching conferences (e.g., STP’s Annual Conference on Teaching (formerly the Best Practices Conference) and the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology).

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher
When I first started teaching, a major challenge was figuring out how to support students who were struggling in my courses—to grasp concepts, complete assignments, and so on. This issue continues to be a challenge for me. As someone who excelled in school and for whom good grades came—not without hard work—but relatively naturally, it was a challenge to provide students appropriate support. I also found that students who could most likely benefit from additional help were sometimes the least likely to request it on their own. In my department, we have tried to address some of these issues by having undergraduate teaching assistants for particularly challenging courses (teaching assistants earn course credit and students have an additional resource available to them). At an individual level, I have tried to address this challenge by making sure students are aware of resources (e.g., my office hours, writing center, tutoring center) at the beginning of the semester through the course syllabus and class discussions, as well as being clear about my expectations about their performance in the class. I have also provided tips about how to succeed in the course (e.g., how to manage their time effectively, how to layer their learning) and tried to make certain that students understand the collaborative nature of our work. Specifically, I have emphasized that I want students to help me consider ways to help them achieve the learning goals of the course. In general, the “Help me help you” reference from the movie, Jerry Maguire, has helped students understand the importance of their role in the learning process and motivated them to provide feedback that improves the learning experience for themselves, as well as their colleagues.

Another challenge is balancing my responsibilities in the areas of teaching, research, and service. I do not see the work as a zero sum game—for example, time spent in research is time
that necessarily cannot be spent working on teaching—as my efforts in the three areas mutually reinforce each other. My department expects that faculty will not only excel in teaching and scholarship but will integrate these two aspects of their professional lives. So, many of my courses integrate aspects of my research program, and likewise, my research activities are informed by the work that takes place in my courses. Sometimes, the integration is direct—data collected for one of my research projects with urban youth is used to teach students about life stressors in my “Poverty and Well-Being” course. Sometimes the integration is not so direct: A teaching strategy refined in one of my courses is used to train new students in my research laboratory. I try, however, to intertwine my teaching and scholarship in a way that my efforts reinforce one another. The same is true for my service commitments; I try to choose activities that are in line with my teaching and research interests. I believe that the knowledge and skills that I develop in all three areas—teaching, research, and service—reinforce each other and help me to achieve the goals I set across them.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My teaching philosophy is based on the belief that teachers have at least three related responsibilities that are as valuable as they are challenging. First, we should transfer basic knowledge of relevant coursework to our students. Second, we should create an atmosphere that encourages students to be engaged in their own education. Third, we should foster academic competencies that transcend course activities and serve our students as they pursue other areas of learning. Both in and out of the classroom, I try to appreciate the potential impact of my efforts on students. I also take notice of how students impact my own learning as a teacher and mentor, particularly how they challenge me to consider alternative perspectives and find new ways to convey information coherently and effectively. With respect to mentorship, my goal is to help students advocate for themselves so they can access resources and develop skills that will promote critical and independent thinking. As with any effective mentoring relationship, my goal is to provide a balance of support, opportunities, and structure that build on students’ existing strengths as well as promote new professional competencies. Given the diversity and complexity of human problems in the 21st century, I believe that students of psychology can be most effective if they are encouraged to consider the value and application of their competencies across different settings and circumstances.

Although I have been teaching full-time for only a few years (since 2007), I have noticed a shift in my approach during the last year or two. I have the same general goals, but I find that I devote more energy and time trying to remove barriers that may interfere with students’ ability to perform well. Some of the barriers are documented (e.g., mental health disorder), and if students are registered with a specific office on campus, they can receive accommodations. There are some issues, however, that go undetected or may not be eligible for accommodations. For example, some students struggle with anxiety, do not even know it, and let the anxiety “get the best of them.” They start to avoid class, may miss assignments, and then are so embarrassed about their lack of progress in the course that they fall further behind. In recent years, I have explained to students at the beginning of the course how one might handle these situations if they arise. I have found that students appreciate these considerations.
and that the message of prevention helps them, in some cases, to problem solve effectively and advocate for themselves.

For me, the most rewarding aspect of teaching is when students accomplish a task they did not think they were capable of doing or say something that resembles, “That was so hard, and I learned so much.” I also find it particularly rewarding when students feel like the work they did in a course had an impact on real people. Because I often teach courses that involve community-engaged research, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning experiences, my students usually have opportunities to work with youth and families in Trenton, NJ. For some courses, we collaborate with community organizations to develop projects that help to advance the organization’s mission. Throughout these experiences, it is very rewarding to watch students develop the understanding that they can apply their knowledge and skills to address problems in the real world.

What I find most frustrating as a teacher is when students do not respect each other’s time and efforts—for example, talking during a fellow student’s presentation or not communicating with classmates on group assignments. Although I am unhappy if students choose not to pay attention during class, I tend not to get frustrated because these are individual behaviors with individual consequences (e.g., individual participation grade). However, I get frustrated when a student’s behavior affects a fellow student’s ability to perform well—for example, if a student checking e-mail on his laptop distracts the person sitting behind him. If this type of situation arises, I explain my concerns by focusing on the student’s impact on other people. In most cases, students are unaware that their behavior has the potential to impact another person’s performance negatively and, very quickly, the issue becomes a non-issue.

In addition to reviewing official student evaluations of my course, I often request brief student feedback throughout the semester to see what information is unclear, if students have questions about material covered, or if there are other topics that they want to cover. When I first started teaching, I used evaluation to ensure that the information I presented was clear and students understood the course material, as well as to get recommendations about my teaching style. Although I continue to use evaluation this way, I also use it to get feedback from students about the course content and materials.

To improve my teaching, I regularly discuss strategies with colleagues in person (at my institution and other institutions) as well as electronically (via listservs), and request feedback from students formally (via class surveys) and informally (via class discussions and individual conversations). In addition, once per year, I ask a colleague to visit one of my classes and I observe one of his/her classes so we can provide feedback to each other. Currently, the feedback is among psychology colleagues, and I would like to share feedback with colleagues outside of psychology in the future. Finally, I try to regularly read articles in the Teaching of Psychology journal.

Advice for New Teachers
If someone wants to become a good or even outstanding teacher, I would give the following advice:
Get feedback often from students and colleagues. When I first started teaching, I was most anxious when I was not sure about some aspect of my teaching—if my presentation of ideas was clear, if students were interested in the material, if my slides were useful, and so on. When I prepared a new class, I requested brief student feedback after almost every class, and I usually felt more confident about my teaching after reviewing the feedback and addressing it with students during the subsequent class. It was also helpful to get feedback from a colleague who taught the course before because I could get honest evaluations of my own efforts and recommendations from someone who had taught the content before.

Get to know resources that can help you help your students. Most likely, there are resources on campus (e.g., Writing Center, Tutoring Center) that can supplement our efforts. Being able to provide students with appropriate resources and support can maximize their learning and our effectiveness as teachers.

Get to know resources that can help you become a better teacher. Print and electronic resources have been invaluable for helping me to develop and continuously improve my teaching. Resources that have been particularly valuable include STP’s Teaching Resources and Project Syllabus, both available on STP’s Web site (http://teachpsych.org).

Connect with colleagues. In addition to connecting with colleagues on my own campus, I make it a point to connect with colleagues elsewhere. Specifically, I have received valuable teaching advice on teaching from colleagues on listservs, particularly listservs associated with my area of research.

Explain to students what you are doing and why. I have found, not surprisingly, that students appreciate knowing the reason why they are asked to do something. If we connect our assignments and tasks to skill development and explain to students why we believe a particular skill is important, they are more likely to value the work they complete. In addition, the very act of explaining our ideas and actions helps to promotes clarity of thinking. This recommendation extends to how we provide feedback on student work. If, for example, a student is not awarded full credit on an assignment, he/she is more likely to understand how to improve the work if we provide an explanation, especially if the explanation highlights specific ways to improve academic habits.

Help students become effective problem solvers. When I first started teaching, I provided a lot of structure, guidance, and answers for my students—perhaps too many answers. Of course, providing structure is important. But, for example, when students would e-mail to ask a question about an assignment (e.g., How do you want the assignment submitted?), I would often tell them the answer—even if it was clearly included in the assignment instructions. At the time, I am sure I wanted students to think that I was a helpful teacher. In retrospect, I think that I was doing students (and students’ future teachers) a disservice. Although not knowing how to submit a class assignment seems like a relatively benign problem, it is important that we encourage our students to be conscientious, solve problems effectively, and figure out how to
advocate for themselves. Of course, it is important to explain to students what you are doing and why.

Final Thoughts
I commute about 45 minutes to work in the morning, and if I am teaching that day, I spend part of the car ride thinking about the class lesson(s) for the day. Sometimes I even practice the lecture I plan to give or review take-home messages for the class discussion. Inevitably, at some point during the trip, I smile as I get excited to see my students, connect with them, and share knowledge. I feel privileged to call myself a teacher.

References
13. Teaching is Surviving until the Next Class

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I am a Professor of Psychology at Creighton University (Omaha, NE). I received my PhD in Clinical Psychology and my Master’s in Legal Studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I have taught at Creighton for the last 13 years and am a practicing forensic psychologist. I am the author of over 60 different scholarly publications including a textbook on forensic clinical psychology, *Forensic Psychology: Research, Practice, and Applications* (2nd edition). My primary research interests focus on the assessment of violence risk, domestic violence, psychopathy, and sex violence. In addition, I have significant interests in training and education in law and psychology and the scholarship of teaching. I was also the 2013 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Nebraska Professor of the Year.

I remember entering college intending to major in psychology but having no clue what I would do with it after graduating. Teaching certainly was not even a possibility. I only knew one thing, I did not want to listen to someone sitting on a couch and b#&*! and moan. In my mind at that point, that is what a clinical psychologist did. I did not want to be one of those. At some point I realized there was something called forensic psychology and I could go to graduate school and pursue a career in it. However, I did not come to this realization until late in my undergraduate career and it was too late to get into a competitive clinical psychology PhD program with an emphasis in forensic psychology. As a result, the best thing that ever happened to me fell into my lap.

My Early Development as a Teacher

After getting my rejection letters from every PhD program I applied to my senior year, I thankfully received one acceptance letter from a Master’s program that one of my professors at Creighton, Mark Ware, had recommended. The letter was from Emporia State University, a school I had certainly never heard of before Dr. Ware had recommended it because he knew a guy there who could help me get into a PhD program. That “guy” was Steve Davis and I had no clue how important he would become to me. I was not all that enthusiastic about going to Emporia State. In fact, I might, just might, have referred to it as Siberia State on multiple occasions and might, just might, have further viewed it as an exile to an unforgiving and desolate location. At some point Steve contacted me before the Fall semester and said a Graduate Teaching Assistant position (GTA) had become available. He asked me if I was interested in teaching two introductory psychology courses in the fall. I thought initially of calling Mark Ware and asked him for advice as I was trying to collect my wits. I was terrified at having to teach two introductory classes when I had barely just graduated.

I got to Emporia, Kansas before the Fall semester began and got immersed in Steve’s teaching boot camp for GTAs. I had already read *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips* (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011) over the summer. With a dozen other Master’s students, we went through several days of orientation in regard to the basics of making a syllabus, effective grading strategies, classroom demonstrations, handling classroom problems like academic dishonesty, and a host of other
basics. Then school began and we were released into the wild—the classroom. I remember being terrified walking into my classes for the first time. I felt like a total imposter. Despite the amazing preparation we received, the weekly meetings we had all semester, and sharing a giant GTA office with my peers and getting their moral support, I did not feel prepared. I barely paid attention in my own introductory class and now I was going to teach one. I just needed to survive.

I remember very distinctly that there were two students who kept me alive that first semester of teaching. One student was on the left side and one was on the right side of the class. Every class it felt like I would just bounce my gaze back and forth between them like I was watching a tennis match. Each time I looked to the left, there was a smiling face. Each time I bounced to the right, there was another smiling face. It felt like they were encouraging me to keep going. They were telling me I would get better. I would get more comfortable and would not have to change my clothes after every class because I had been sweating buckets. Slowly I was even enjoying teaching. I had very little experience with public speaking beyond a couple of class presentations I gave as an undergraduate. I enjoyed connecting with people though, and teaching was an opportunity to do so and to talk about a discipline that I was getting to really enjoy. I would literally practice each and every lecture in my apartment from beginning to end every night or every morning before I delivered it in class those first two years. Then one day a student from that first class came up to me and asked me a very simple question. “Have you ever thought about being a teacher?” I replied very honestly and said no. “You should,” she said. “You are good at it.”

I started to think about teaching, not simply in terms of survival, but in terms of getting better. The best teacher I ever had as an undergraduate was Nancy Perry. I remember that I initially tried to emulate her teaching approach but I soon realized one thing: I was no Dr. Perry. She taught in a way that worked for her but it did not fit me. I started to tailor my teaching approach to my personality. I reflected on all my teachers. Which ones did I think were good? Which ones did I think were bad? What made each of them good or bad? What could I steal from each of them? Then I experimented in the classroom. At times, things worked. At other times, things blew up in my face. Sometimes I was creative and came up with new demonstrations or approaches myself. Sometimes I stole them from my fellow GTAs, Steve Davis, articles in Teaching of Psychology, or any other teaching materials I could get my hands on at the time.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

I do not remember the exact moment I started to identify myself as a teacher, instead of just thinking about teaching as something I did. However, I know it was at some point during my two years at Emporia State. It might have been when I saw Ludy Benjamin give a presentation based on a book he had written about a psychologist at the University of Nebraska around the turn of the 20th century, Harry Kirke Wolfe (Benjamin, 1991). I was fascinated both because Wolfe was a native of my home state and more importantly because he went about teaching with a dedication and a passion that few have ever matched. His classes were standing room only. His students held demonstrations in support of him on campus for him. That was the type of teacher I wanted to be! I always like setting goals and now I had one as a teacher.
It is amazing how little I know at times and how time teaches me this lesson with every passing year. When I began teaching I was focused on survival. I was focused on not looking like an idiot for 50 minutes twice a day. I was focused on hoping that I would not have to let my clothes dry out after a lecture. Then I started to focus on getting better and learning my craft. I began to look for my own voice and style. I think it was at this point of my teaching evolution that I thought that I would reach a place, maybe a peak, and teaching would become easy or even effortless. I was sadly mistaken. It has certainly gotten easier. I am no longer practicing each of my lectures in my living room or sweating up a storm while delivering a lecture. Although the obstacles have changed, they have also stayed the same throughout my career.

One of the greatest obstacles for me has always been connecting with students. At first, without me knowing it, it was much easier. Students were developmentally similar to me. We listened to the same music, watched the same television shows, and had the same historical experiences. Now, I cannot simply rely on shared experiences to draw examples from or for some common ground. I have worked hard to connect with them as people. As a clinical psychologist, I often conceptualize my classes as clients. That does not mean I am trying to diagnose and treat each of them. However, I believe that each class has a unique personality. My job early in a class is to tap into who they are and connect with them and at times to manage them based on my understanding of them. Each class is different, sometimes in good ways and sometimes in bad ways. Different approaches are going to work for each of them. Some students may be drawn to my sarcasm. Others might be pulled in when I try to encourage and support them. Others might like it when I try to get to know them as individuals, and ask about their hometown or their hobbies.

One thing that I have never believed was an obstacle, though, are the others parts of my job. Long ago I got some good advice that you should never do anything in your job that was not fun (Huss, 2006). I have always tried to pay attention to that and luckily, I love most parts of being an academic. I love the teaching. I love the research. I even enjoy certain aspects of service and try to only do the types of service that I really enjoy. In fact, I think these different aspects of being an academic do not take away from my teaching so much as they add to it. It became pretty clear to me after I started taking on a private forensic practice that it would have a profound impact on my teaching at Creighton. At a very basic level I had more examples to draw from and use as teaching tools in class. However, more fundamentally, I felt better prepared to communicate to my students that the decisions we make as psychologists have a real impact on people. I was better able to understand diverse perspectives and the suffering of others. I was then able to communicate these experiences to my students to bring a fuller depth to all my classes.

The Examined Life of a Teacher
There are certain principles I think my teaching has been guided by over the years. I see my role as a teacher to be one of inspiration. By making the learning process exciting and interesting, both inside and outside of the classroom, students are more likely to become engaged. Students may have all the intellect in the world but if they are lacking the motivation or hunger, they will never fulfill their potential. My role as a teacher is to show students every opportunity open to them. Students must seize those opportunities. There have been many times I have
seen bright students who were lost and unmotivated until they came across a teacher who inspired them. The professors who taught me during my college career inspired me.

Much of the focus in my courses is to allow and encourage students to examine both the beneficial contributions and the shortcomings of the discipline. I believe that by critically examining the field students get a better understanding of the discipline and how they can apply it to their own lives. Students are much more likely to “trust” the content and respect a discipline if they are allowed to point out its faults. Moreover, much of this critical examination of psychology deals with the application and methods used by psychologists in their empirical study of human behavior and in its clinical practice.

Despite these core beliefs, I think my teaching has changed in meaningful ways. Most obviously has been the use of technology and the difficulty keeping up with it. When I arrived at Creighton, I was the first professor in the department to consistently use PowerPoint while lecturing, for good or for bad. I incorporated the use of digital videos in assignments for students along with various other technologies in my class. However, I no longer feel like I am on the cutting edge of technology but that I am constantly trying to play catch-up to my peers. I fear that it will only get worse and that critical examination of technology will make it more difficult to only use technology that can actually assist students with learning.

Despite these changes, the single aspect of the job that is the most enjoyable is the same one that got me interested in teaching, students. It is still rewarding when I hit the right chord for a particular student or even an entire class. Sometimes this is a single moment, a specific lecture, or even an entire semester. For me, teaching is like golf. I am a bad golfer but during a given round of golf, I am probably going to hit one or two really good shots. I might even play well for several holes or even an entire round. However, I am going to hit some horrible shots and have some horrible rounds. I keep playing though because of how great it feels when I hit one of those good shots or string together a few good ones. Teaching is almost addictive at times because of those isolated moments. I take further pride in those moments getting strung together for students and then watching them pursue their own hopes and dreams because of it.

The flip side is always frustrating too. It is frustrating to have a lecture that feels like I am whiffing at the golf ball repeatedly and I think I am confusing the students more than I enlightening or inspiring them. It is deflating when there is a student who drops out or even graduates and I do not think I ever truly reached him or her. Sometimes this situation occurs because of the student but other times I am partially to blame. I did not find the right button to push or worse yet, I did not take the time to really focus on that student or even that class like I should have in order to make a difference.

For me teaching is an iterative process. I am continually evaluating each example, each lecture, each class that I teach. Sometimes I reflect at the end of an especially poor class or poor semester. What did I do wrong? I look to other instructors for inspiration and for ideas. Most of all, I look to my students. I still find narrative comments from students on their semester evaluations as informative. However, it is the more informal interactions where I intentionally solicit feedback from students that is invaluable. Besides the normal breaks in the academic
year, I also tend to reflect on my teaching whenever I am recognized for my teaching ability. It is in these instances where someone or some organization tells me I am doing a good job that I am most critical of my performance and I try to do better, maybe to feel like I actually deserve the recognition. I even reflect on my teaching in instances such as this chapter when I am writing about it. Recently, I gave presentation on teaching statements at a conference. To be honest, I went into preparing for the talk with a pessimistic attitude about teaching philosophies and teaching statements. However, as I prepared my presentation I was much more optimistic about their utility and went back to look at mine, which I had not read for years. I think this examination as even improved my teaching this semester.

Advice for New Teachers
I probably had a lot more advice for new teachers when I first began than I do at this point in my career. I am much less confident in giving advice to new teachers now. I am much less confident in my own ability now than after I learned to survive. I used to think there was one way to be a good teacher and now I know there are as many different ways to become a good teacher as there are teachers. That being said, I think good teachers are willing to work at it. Teaching is both a science and an art. There are definitely aspects of it that can be grounded in research and you can identify certain strategies that will be more effective than others. However, strategies will differ across teachers. What works for me might not work for someone else. I think it is important to never lose site of your own individual talents that make you a good teacher. Accentuate them and work to improve your weaknesses. I also think teaching is not simply what you do but what you communicate. I may really care about my students and really love teaching. However, I have to find ways to communicate that to my students both inside the classroom and outside. Teaching does not only take place in the classroom. It can be done via email, in the lab, walking down the hall, or through various online formats. Good teachers are able to teach well in all of these arenas, not simply the classroom. At least I think so. I have survived this long.

References


14. On the Synergy between Strong Teaching and Strong Research

Robyn L. Kondrad
Appalachian State University

My husband likes to tell people that he knew I was someone “special” when he saw me, an undergraduate at the College of William and Mary, anesthetize rats, lesion their brains, and inject them with amphetamines. What could be more impressive, I thought, than demonstrating an animal model of schizophrenia? Though my husband’s meaning of “special” is conspicuously ambiguous, that research experience was certainly special to me. It was responsible for the start of my academic career. I went on to earn a Master’s degree at Arizona State University and a PhD at the University of Virginia (UVa). I am now an assistant professor at Appalachian State University. I have been honored with the UVa Rebecca Boone Memorial Award for Excellence in Teaching and Service, the UVa Psychology Graduate Teaching Award, the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students Teaching Excellence in Psychological Science Award and the Society for the Teaching of Psychology’s Wilbert J. McKeachie Teaching Excellence Award.

There are two points I hope to emphasize in this teaching autobiography. The first is that graduate students have a range of opportunities in graduate school to help them become effective teachers. Some of these opportunities land in your lap, and others may take a bit more initiative. The second point is that graduate students should be encouraged to seek those opportunities. After all, at some point in their careers they will have to teach other people—whether that comes in the form of classroom teaching, conference presentations, mentorship, consulting, or therapy. Teaching well should be an important part of graduate training not only because one day graduate students’ will be responsible for providing learning experiences to other people, but also because it will make them better at every other aspect of their chosen profession.

I took advantage of many kinds of pedagogical experiences during my career as a graduate student, and each one not only made me a better teacher, but also a better scientist. For example, I received two fellowships to teach seminar courses, and I am certain that the value of being able to explain difficult concepts could not have been made clearer by any other experience. I taught courses for non-traditional students who were earning liberal arts degrees. They challenged me to convince them that they should care about “this stuff.” And really, if you cannot convince a crowd like that of an experiment’s value, you have no chance with review panels when it comes to your own work. I credit that experience with teaching me how to tell a compelling story in and out of the classroom.

My obvious enthusiasm for teaching led to one of the most important experiences of my teaching career. I (literally) bumped into Dr. Dennis Proffitt, just after he had received a phone call from the UVa sponsored program, Semester at Sea. They needed a replacement for the psychology professor who had to cancel. Who better than a graduate student to drop everything in order to teach three courses on a ship sailing around the world? Three months
later, I found myself boarding the *MS Explorer* along with 605 undergraduates and 40 faculty for the next 104 days. As you might imagine, there is nothing quite like this teaching environment. I taught students about conformity and obedience and then visited the killing fields of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. This experience conveyed a powerful message about the importance of connecting course content to the broader world and continues to influence how I teach today.

**My Early Development as a Teacher**

What made me most anxious as a first-year graduate student was not statistics class or the weekly meetings with my advisor; it was what happened on Thursday evenings. Each Thursday, I had to run a review session for a 200-student Child Psychology course. My training consisted of a pat on the back and instructions to “answer their questions.” I had a few questions of my own—a troubling one being, “What if I could not answer their questions?” After scraping by that semester, I joined our university’s professional development program. It was here that I began my development as a teacher. I initially joined for a selfish reason: My goal was not to become a better teacher but to learn how not to dread teaching. My initial attitude was completely altered by the program’s pedagogy discussion group. We discussed seminal articles about theories of teaching and learning, and I discovered that the scholarship of teaching and learning was closely related to what I was studying in my graduate program.

This revelation led me to think about teaching in a new way. How could I connect the techniques I saw my mentors using in their classes with the literature on learning, memory, motivation, and attention? One of my mentors, Judy DeLoache, gave several short quizzes throughout the semester, and it dawned on me that repeated retrieval improves long-term retention (e.g., Karpicke & Rodiger, 2008). This technique was more than just a way to hold students accountable for reading; the process of taking multiple quizzes was actually helping them to learn. Similarly, my primary mentor, Vikram Jaswal, strategically inserted demonstrations, humor, or asked questions during his lectures. These activities were not just for entertainment value—he capitalized on the fact that students’ attention is a limited, consumable resource (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). These observations were invaluable in my early development as a teacher. Today, one of my favorite teaching tasks is figuring out how I can apply what I know about human psychology to enhance student learning.

In my third year of graduate school I was involved in the departmental orientation for new graduate students. The newbies’ main concern was not about doing research or taking classes. Like it had been for me, it was the prospect of teaching that dominated their questions and worries. Why, I wondered, did we not have a mechanism for helping students learn to teach? Over the next 2 years, with the help of many faculty in my department (particularly Dan Willingham), UVa’s Teaching Resource Center, and a host of like-minded student colleagues (especially Carrie Palmquist, Eric Smith, and Blair Hopkins), we developed a training program that eventually became a requirement for incoming students.

Developing this training program was an important experience in my early development as a teacher because it forced me to think carefully about not only what good teaching is, but how to develop it. Through a Small Partnership Grant from the Society for the Teaching of
Psychology, I also had the great fortune of getting to know the many excellent faculty at James Madison University who helped us tackle this issue (particularly David Daniel, Jessica Irons, Tracy Zinn, Bryan Saville, and Ken Barron).

One theme of the training program was the synergistic relationship between strong teaching and strong research. One way we explored this perspective on teaching, with support from the APS Fund for the Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science, was to ask high-profile scientists who were also passionate about teaching to talk to us about their views. Dr. Wendy Suzuki told us that “[teaching] is a skill that helps you on so many different levels as a scientist. Being able to explain a complex concept clearly is such a valuable skill to have, and [teaching] is where you hone that skill.” Dr. Ed Diener said that the relationship between teaching and research was really quite simple. After all, “how do you really learn social psychology? You teach it, because [then] you have to organize it in your mind and use it and understand it.” Dr. Dan Simons reflected that his “best cited paper actually came from a student laboratory class: the study on inattentional blindness with the gorilla basketball game was a class project.”

Much different from the stereotype that productive researchers do not have time for teaching, these individuals helped us understand that teaching well does not have to be the zero-sum game that some claim it to be. It is not only rewarding (and our responsibility) to help students learn, it can also support one’s research career. These talks still resonate with me today and helped clarify for me the career path I wished to take.

**The Examined Life of a Teacher**

There are two core principles that motivate my philosophy of teaching: (a) develop an effective learning environment and (b) facilitate self-discovery and learning beyond course content.

Considering the learning environment you are creating for students is important because learning is hard. Optimal learning involves struggling with appropriate challenges and actively engaging with material. If I want my students to work hard on the task of learning, then I must work hard to create an environment that will motivate and support that process. One approach I take is to ask students to apply content in meaningful ways. For example, in a cognition class we explored how magic tricks work by manipulating the visual and attentional systems, which are otherwise abstract topics. I also try to be creative with assignments in order to maintain interest and motivation. For example, I collect electronic poster samples from research conferences that are relevant to my course and assign a unique poster to several small groups of students. Each student later presents that poster to several other peers each assigned to different posters. This activity also opens the door to a part of the scientific process that is less accessible to them.

I try to foster self-discovery and learning beyond course content by *showing* students how fascinating psychology is rather than *telling* them, and by giving them some control over what they are learning. My experience on the Semester at Sea program convinced me that what makes people want to learn is understanding how the material is relevant to their lives or to the world (e.g., Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009). I was amazed at how students devoured information that helped them understand the culture or history of the place we were visiting.
For example, students in my Abnormal Psychology course were somewhat interested in learning about schizophrenia—it is an inherently interesting disorder. But when we came back from visiting the Schizophrenia Research Foundation in Chennai, India, where students got to meet real patients and learn about the stigma surrounding their diagnosis and care in this part of the world, their motivation to learn more about global mental health exploded.

I try to find ways for students at home to have similar types of experiences. In one course, for example, students learned about differences between the function and structure of the adolescent and adult brain. Later they composed a letter to their congressional representative detailing their opinion on the state’s policy about adolescents being tried as adults in court. As part of the project, I asked students to interview someone in the community. I expected most students to do the easiest thing—asking a friend or their parents. Instead, most ended up interviewing multiple people including police officers, officials from the juvenile justice department, social workers, radio show hosts, and professors from various departments and universities.

I began my teaching career with the attitude that it was something scary, to be dreaded, and gotten through. Clearly, my attitude has changed. However, as I reflect on what else about my approach to teaching has changed, I find that it is my attitude about the students I am teaching that has also evolved. I have learned to view students as well-intentioned, motivated, and capable and to view my role in our relationship as providing an environment in which those qualities can be harnessed and encouraged to grow. My first reaction to a student who seems disinterested is no longer, “I did my part; I can’t help if they don’t want to learn,” but rather, “I wonder what else that student has going on in his or her life, and if I can offer support and encouragement.” Time after time, I have experienced situations in which students are doing poorly not because they are lazy or incapable, but because they have real problems posing serious challenges to their learning. So far, I have had students who were experiencing difficulties transitioning to college life, dealing with mental and physical illnesses, and suffering from the loss of loved ones.

I have found that giving students the benefit of the doubt has improved the relationships I build with them and the quality of their learning. In that same light, I sometimes struggle to accept that sometimes no matter what I do, some students simply are not going to care or learn as much as I might want them to. In these instances, I remind myself that I am teaching students how to learn and how to think, and they will (I hope) use those skills for the rest of their lives even if they seem apathetic about my course. It is helpful for me to remember my first time ever teaching. I had a student who turned work in late, skipped class, and showed no interest. This particular student e-mailed me out-of-the-blue a year after he had taken my class to tell me he had earned an A in a political science class, and he wanted me to know that it was because of the critical analysis technique he learned from me.

I think about that experience and others when faced with frustrations that feed into a pessimistic view of students. For instance, I used to have strict rules about turning in homework assignments—on time, stapled, printed, with proper formatting. Anything else, and I would not accept it. I rationalized that I was teaching students important life skills: following instructions, punctuality, and the like. I have since realized that some flexibility accomplishes the same goal.
while preserving (and perhaps enhancing) my relationship with students. Today, I still have these expectations, but I listen to explanations if students do not meet the criteria. Printer ran out of ink? I will accept it late once, but in the future students print their papers at least a day in advance so that if there are difficulties, there will be time to resolve them. I find that it is rare for students to make the same mistake again, and they do not argue for a second mulligan if they do.

Reflecting on how I can improve my teaching or enhance learning is my favorite part about my profession. I enjoy the challenge of finding creative ways to make material come alive for students. I and three of my colleagues from graduate school have a weekly support group via video chat, and these meetings are a wonderful resource for thinking about our teaching. We discuss our activities, borrow ideas, exchange lecture materials, and brainstorm solutions for dealing with problems. I also take advantage of the resources my department and university offer. For instance, I participated in a week-long course design workshop where I had the pleasure of meeting Dee Fink and using his process to design a learner-centered course (Fink, 2003).

As a new faculty member, I look around at my colleagues’ teaching (and read my student evaluations) and realize I have much more to learn about being an effective teacher. If I did not think so, surely I should be doing something else.

**Advice for New Teachers**

Dr. Dan Willingham once scolded a group of graduate students who were complaining that a boring colloquium had been a waste of their time. Even bad talks have value, he said. What made it boring? How could we fix it? If we paid attention, perhaps we would save ourselves from making the same mistakes. That was very good advice, and I think it applies to developing as a teacher as well. Take every opportunity to collect materials (e.g., lecture slides, exam questions, and activities) and make observations about what worked well or flopped in the courses you take or events you attend. Be metacognitive, with an eye to borrowing and you will get better at teaching. For graduate students: You have a minimum of 5 years to develop your teaching style and philosophy during graduate school; get going already. Thinking that you can ignore teaching until you have to do it is a mistake on so many levels.

The second piece of advice is to care about the students, not just about the students’ learning. In my experience, sincerely caring about them—their lives, their extracurricular activities, and their other courses—substantially contributes to how much and how well they will learn from you. Give students the benefit of the doubt. Most of the time, they really are not trying to pull the wool over your eyes.

Finally, think about what you want your students to remember from your course 5 or even 25 years later, and be sure that everything you do supports that goal. More than content, I want my students to be able to transfer the skills I helped them build to other areas of their lives. I think this goal speaks to the broader calling of higher education: We are responsible for the next generation(s) of global citizens. If we want people to be able to think critically about issues that shape our social policy, such as whether vaccines cause autism or whether global warming...
is real, then we ought to focus our energy on the requisite skills to do so. In that sense, the content we teach exists mainly as a mechanism for practicing these skills.

**Final Thoughts**
Some mentors give bad advice to their graduate students. They tell them that teaching is not important, that it is something that should be a low priority, and that they should not waste valuable time doing those sorts of things. To those advisers, I urge you to change your perspective. I was fortunate to attend a program and to have mentors who encouraged me in both my research and pedagogical activities. It is wrong to think that these are mutually exclusive activities. As a result, I was the PI on several grants, I learned how to present information clearly and confidently, and I actually helped students learn, which is rewarding in so many different ways.

**References**
15. As It Turns Out, It’s All about Our Students: Reflections of a Life-long Psychology Educator

R. Eric Landrum
Boise State University

I am currently a professor in the Department of Psychology at Boise State University (BSU) in Boise, Idaho. I received bachelor’s degrees from Monmouth College (in Illinois) in 1985, majoring in psychology and speech communication and theater arts. I received my PhD in experimental psychology from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale in 1989. My first academic position was at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville from 1989-1992, and I have been at Boise State ever since. At Boise State, I have received college-level and university-wide teaching awards. Nationally, I served as President of the Council of Teaching of Undergraduate Psychology from 1999-2001, and I served as the Vice President of the Rocky Mountain region for Psi Chi (the International Honor Society in Psychology) from 2009-2011. I served as the Division Two Secretary of the American Psychological Association (APA; Society for the Teaching of Psychology or STP) from 2009-2011. I am presently serving as the STP President (2014).

During the APA National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology held at the University of Puget Sound in 2008, I served as participant and lead chapter author about the outcomes of an undergraduate psychology education.

My research interests center on the educational conditions that best facilitate student success as well as the use of scholarship of teaching and learning strategies to advance our efforts at scientist-educators. I given over 300 professional presentations and written more than 20 books and book chapters, with over 70 articles published in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals.

As of this writing (22 years at Boise State), I have worked with over 300 undergraduate research assistants and taught more than 13,000 students.


My Early Development as a Teacher

I started graduate school nearly 30 years ago, which seems like a lifetime ago. As I remember it, students who were going to serve as a teaching assistant for GE-B 202 Introduction to
Psychology at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (SIU-C) came to campus a week early and underwent a week-long teacher training program prior to the beginning of the semester. Although I am thankful for that training, it was nowhere near as thorough as some of the current training programs around the country today. I believe during that week we became familiar with the syllabus, delivered a sample lecture during which we were videotaped and critiqued, looked at sample assignments with grading rubrics, and so on.

I attended a small, private undergraduate institution (Monmouth College in Monmouth, IL) from 1981-1985 where three psychology professors were my teaching role models: Charles Meliska, Bill Hastings, and Dean Wright. Monmouth College was extremely small at the time—only 640 students for the total undergraduate enrollment. Each of these gentlemen were amazing professors in their own style, and I remember that I wanted to be like them. That was my true inspiration for entering psychology as a profession—not that I wanted to help improve the world or to help relieve human suffering—but I thought that my undergraduate professors were just so impressive; I wanted to be like them. As I went to graduate school, my teaching mentor was Tom Mitchell, who was the faculty member who coordinated the large Introduction to Psychology course at SIU-C. Working closely with him as a teaching assistant and assistant lecturer (while a graduate student) gave me unprecedented insight into what it took to manage a course that enrolled over 2000 students every semester across multiple plenary and discussion sessions.

In my early days, I tried to copy those professors. The week-long teaching assistant training that I received when I started graduate school at SIU-C was helpful, but ultimately the best teaching training was “learning by doing.” So during my four years as a graduate student, I helped to teach Introduction to Psychology the entire time, sometimes as a teaching assistant, and other times as an assistant lecturer. In fact, during my last semester at SIU-C, Tom Mitchell went on sabbatical, and I was hired to coordinate the entire course during his semester away from those duties.

Drs. Meliska, Hastings, and Wright were the ultimate influencers in my pursuit of graduate education in psychology. Their influence, coupled with my absolute fascination in attempting to understand human behavior, was the one-two punch that inspired my interest in graduate education in psychology. Because I saw them do their jobs so well—not only as teachers—but also working with students on research, taking students to local and regional conferences, and being active participants in Psi Chi activities sealed my decision to become a college professor in psychology.

**Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher**

Although it takes time to gain a mastery of the psychology content, my “other” major as an undergraduate, Speech Communication and Theater Arts, was wonderful preparation for the navigation and management of large lecture halls and student-teacher interactions. Students often viewed me as a “tough but fair” teacher, but obstacles entered the picture when I became familiar with the literature on student learning and active engagement. Although I could perform as an award-winning lecturer, it became clear to me that lecturing is not an
optimal strategy for skill development nor long-term retention of information for students (see Bligh, 2000, for a review on the appropriate use of lectures).

Thus, if I wanted my students to retain information, and more importantly acquire and hone skills like critical thinking and communication skills, then I had to abandon a teaching approach where lecturing was the central focus of the course. In some ways I had to reinvent myself and my teaching, even though I would become fairly accomplished as a lecturer. This makeover required a new skill set, such as guiding meaningful discussions during class time (which I still struggle to do well), engaging students outside of class to come prepared to class for active, hands-on learning, and so on. By staying an active reader and contributor to the scholarly literature, I have attempted to overcome my limitations as a teacher.

I have been very fortunate at Boise State in that my topic of research could be anything that I wanted it to be, as long as I was a productive and contributing scholar. So rather than pit teaching vs. research (a zero sum game), I have been able to make teaching and learning my primary research interest. Whether looking at student career paths or the effectiveness of classroom pedagogies or student skills and workforce readiness, most of my scholarly work centers on teachers teaching and students learning.

Although service can take many forms, much of my service often overlaps with my teaching and learning interests. For example, I served as an advisor to a Psi Chi chapter and a Psychology Club, gave workshops for our Center for Teaching and Learning, wrote the “teaching” sections of annual review/progress toward tenure statements as part of a Departmental Personnel Committee task, and so on.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

If I had to identify one principle that lies at the heart of my personal teaching philosophy, I would have to say that it is using active learning and engagement practices to help students achieve the requisite skills for post baccalaureate success. By carefully examining the dynamic of how students learn, remember, and demonstrate skills through active learning approaches, I can study both student learning and professorial pedagogy, and address a critical question: What can I do to facilitate and assess how well I successfully achieve these desired outcomes?

My teaching approach has changed dramatically over the course of my career. I have shifted from being teacher-centered to student-centered. The best description I have found of these two terms is by Gabriel (2008). She loosely defined these terms as follows: When preparing for a class session, teacher-centered teachers think about what they will be doing during class, such as preparing lecture notes, thinking about great examples to use to connect to students, the timing of certain topics within the class period, and so on. Alternatively when preparing for class, student-centered teachers think about what their students will be doing during class—taking notes, engaging in active learning exercises, participating in peer editing activities, and so on. I think for some teachers (and certainly for me early in my career), teaching class was in part about ego fulfillment. It made me feel great to give a good lecture, see students nodding their heads as to convey understanding, and occasionally laughing.

The rewards of teaching are to see the success of my students; my greatest frustration in teaching occurs when I see my students falling short of success. It is frustrating when I provide
the best clarity I can, provide students access to myself and teaching assistants, offer a bevy of resource materials available online, and students fail to make the effort to afford themselves of these resources. When so many pathways to success exist but students pursue few, if any of them, I become frustrated. I overcome these frustrations by talking to my students, by encouraging them to regularly self-reflect on their course (and career) progress, by striving to improve my own clarity, and by providing materials and resources in different modalities, and so on.

I admit that after 25 years of teaching in higher education, student ratings of instruction on a Likert-type scale as well as written blurbs are not all that valuable to me anymore. When I dig into the details of students’ comments, I find that students often complain about the workload and the expectations. However, after more than two decades of teaching as well as substantial research about how students learn, I am satisfied with most of my own practices in most of my courses. Nonetheless, a valuable source of “data” for me comes from students’ weekly reflections about course content as well as their thinking about their skill development. Reading about my students’ struggles helps me conceptualize what I might do better and/or differently. I am a proponent of the action research iterative model:

\[ \text{PLAN} \rightarrow \text{ACT} \rightarrow \text{OBSERVE} \rightarrow \text{REFLECT} \] (then REPEAT)

Using this model, I try to design course structures and practices that lead students into following this sequence and appreciating the value of the process. For example, I ask my Research Methods students to write a complete APA manuscript (PLAN). My students wrote their Introduction sections (ACT), which I graded (OBSERVE). After using a carefully-constructed rubric, I detected that they were struggling with one component of the assignment more than others. I thought about those struggles (REFLECT), and designed classroom exercises (PLAN) which I implemented (ACT) to help bolster that particular skill. For me, assessment data in the classroom is all about personal improvement of my teaching.

My perceptions of the role of assessment have changed dramatically over the course of my teaching career. In the “olden” days, we used to talk about assessment in the form of outcomes assessment. For example, about a year before a departmental external review was to take place, a group of faculty working on a self-study would cook up a quick-and-dirty type of assessment, the external reviewers or accreditation team would gently chastise us and tell us we need to do better, and we would wipe our brows in relief and wait 5 years to start all over again before the next self-study commenced. Today, I see assessment as an invaluable tool for the improvement of teaching practices. That is right, for the improvement of teaching practice. If other entities (department chair, dean, provost, accreditation team) can use assessment data to make the case to relevant constituencies about our institutional performance, that is icing on the cake.

By using finely tuned rubrics on assignments and leveraging the technological capabilities of a learning management system like Blackboard, I can gain assessment data during the semester that informs my practice later in the same semester as well as for future semesters. Assessment data are for the improvement of faculty practice, so outcomes, like final grades, will be of relatively little use in such situations. However, by studying the components of assignments
related to student performance, the action research sequence of PLAN-ACT-OBSERVE-REFLECT can be implemented and repeated throughout a semester. Meaningful continuous improvement is possible when an assessment process is well designed and faithfully executed.

**Advice for New Teachers**
When I was recently asked about advice for new teachers by the STP Early Career Psychology (ECP) Committee, I made the following suggestions.

Your time and your talents are a resource, just as your money and your checkbook balance. So when you spend, it is best to spend wisely. Early in your career, it is hard to know where to get the most bang for the buck. First, be sure to leverage your mentors and your connections—networking continues to be vital throughout our careers. Second, something I wish that I had done more of was the Advanced Placement (AP) reading in psychology. I did it a couple of times early in my career, but I did not do it consistently. The AP reading is a great place to make local, regional, and national connections. Try to find organizations that overlap with your own professional interests; that way, you have a natural avenue for your expertise. Remember, too, that developing competency and expertise takes time—you will likely work hard for years or decades before you feel fully confident as a teacher, and even then, there will still be so much to learn.

There are at least two ways to become an effective teacher. First, pursue the scientist-educator model in psychology (see Bernstein et al., 2010). I particularly like this description of the scientist-educator:

> A scientist-educator treats professional work as an inquiry into the effectiveness of practice. It is critical to be familiar with evidence-based practice in the teaching of psychology, identifying those methods that are appropriate to one’s own teaching. Central to this enterprise is the systematic collection of evidence regarding the effectiveness of teaching and use of these data to guide the development and refinement of both the conceptual understanding of teaching and its practice in an iterative, recursive fashion. The scientist-educator reflects on the results of instruction, makes that work visible to peers, and redesigns course conception, measures, and activities accordingly. (p. 30)

Second, be an active consumer of learning science outcomes, especially regarding the scholarship of teaching and learning. Strive to become the “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage.” The longer I teach, the better I understand that I should not be the star of the show in my classroom.

**Final Thoughts**
Although teaching is a high calling and critically important to our nation, perhaps its status is only eclipsed by the importance of family. My children (Allison and Scott) will be the greatest legacies I will ever have. It is highly likely that in the future no one will remember how many students I taught, how many books that I wrote, or how many talks I gave. As we already know, one has to make choices about how to spend the greatest resource of all—one’s time. Relationship satisfaction and being a good parent are highly rewarding in their own way. You
have heard the phrase “you can have it all,” but here is my modification: You can have it all, but not all at the same time. Sacrifices have to be made in order to do well at what is important. Balanced choices with strong social support (both personal and professional) can made a lifelong career as an educator worth having.

References
Reflections on the Long and Winding Road of Professional Growth

Hillary H. Steiner
Kennesaw State University

I am not one to take the slow, scenic route. I typically drive as fast as the limit allows, with purpose and a focus on my destination. So when I look back on my career so far, I am surprised at what I see. I have made careful choices in my career based on what I thought was best at the time, but to say that I have arrived at this place in my life “on purpose,” quickly, and in a straightforward manner, would be wrong. Instead, the long and winding road that led me here was full of surprise hairpin turns, a few skidding brakes, and detours down back roads that I had never planned. However, these unexpected meanderings have been most influential in the shaping of my identity as a teacher and scholar.

In college, fascinated with the way people learn, I planned a career as a teacher of gifted children. Horrified to realize during my student teaching that I did not, in fact, enjoy teaching children, I made a U-turn and applied on the day of the application deadline to the University of Georgia for graduate work in educational psychology. As an idealistic graduate student, I envisioned my destination as a research-intensive university. I enjoyed research, and was good at it, receiving the expected fellowships and awards. To me, my destination was clear.

As often happens on that path, though, I also fell in love with teaching—this time teaching adults. During my academic career, I have taught everything from study skills to sexuality at four universities (including some of my coveted research institutions), but my most unexpected diversion was spending 7 years as an adjunct faculty member, teaching online classes while raising two young children. My commitment to this surprising (and, I admit, often frustrating) turn of events led me to the honor of receiving the inaugural Adjunct Faculty Teaching Excellence Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology in 2012.

My long and winding road eventually led me back on the tenure track to Kennesaw State University where I am an assistant professor in the First-Year and Transition Studies department. This position enables me to focus my research, teaching, and administrative interests on helping students, including the bright students that fascinated me years earlier, make the transition from high school to college. Here, I teach a first-year seminar as well as an introductory psychology class within various themed learning communities (our latest theme being “The Pursuit of Happiness”), and serve as assistant director of learning communities, helping faculty to make the kind of interdisciplinary connections that benefit students.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Attending a large research university for graduate school meant that teacher training was not a primary focus for me. However, my disciplinary choice meant that I was surrounded by dialogue about how to improve teaching and learning all the time. Roughly half of my graduate professors had training in K-12 education, as I had, while the other half came from cognitive, developmental, or experimental psychology. From the beginning, I was surrounded by faculty
with intensive research programs on how teaching and learning works, which influenced my own research interests as well as my interests in teaching.

I began my graduate program as a research assistant; however, when an opportunity to teach arose, I jumped at the chance. The first class I taught was an elective “Learning to Learn” course for the Division of Academic Assistance that ultimately influenced my choice to focus my interests on metacognition and self-regulation. I was amazed at how students who had been successful in high school—those gifted students I had once wanted to teach as children—had virtually no skills when it came to college-level studying. I taught nine sections of this course over several semesters, and it helped me learn more about reaching a broad range of students than any other course has since.

Later in my graduate program, I taught an undergraduate educational psychology class focused more on content. There was a small seminar attached to this teaching assistant position, but it did not influence my teaching to the same degree that experience did. During those first semesters of teaching, every time I stepped into the classroom I was acutely aware of all the eyes staring at me, which both terrified and exhilarated me. My heightened awareness of students’ nonverbal reactions to my teaching enabled me to observe what was working and what was not. I am also very much a pragmatist, so with every lesson I planned I made sure I could answer the “So what?” question. I wanted students to feel each class was worth their time. I wanted to know that they could apply what I was teaching—in other classes, in their preparation as pre-service teachers, or in daily life.

Along with early exposure to research on teaching and learning, and self-teaching through experience, my teaching skills developed through association with a series of teacher mentors—Michele Simpson, a veteran teacher with decades of experience who taught me the importance of teaching transferable thinking skills along with content; Nancy Knapp, a radical constructivist who helped me move out of my didactic comfort zone; Marty Carr, who mentored me as I transitioned from naïve novice to confident expert; and Katherine Kipp, who showed me by example how to really connect with students. Each one was so different in their teaching style, and I can see that my own current teaching style reflects elements of them all.

**Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher**

Near the end of my graduate training and approaching the job search, I was happy and successful, with outstanding teaching evaluations and acclaim for my research program. My focus was clear again, and I set my sights on a position at a research university where I also had the opportunity to teach frequently. The final year of my graduate program was a big one for me—not only was I finishing my dissertation, but I was also planning a wedding. Both went off without a hitch. I successfully defended my dissertation, landed the position of my dreams, and prepared to move—without my new husband, who had not been able to find a job in the same location. Having to live apart from my husband was one of those unexpected curves in the road, but I rationalized that it was just part of academic life. In my new department two other new faculty members were also facing long-distance marriages.

When the prospects of local employment for my husband became much less hopeful and the stress on a new marriage greater, we knew that we had to make a tough decision. Ultimately, I
chose to leave my tenure-track job and accept a part-time teaching position back home at the University of Georgia (UGA). With this decision, the skidding of the brakes on my career was almost audible. I had been successful in graduate school and in my tenure-track job, yet I was choosing to enter the much-maligned adjunct world—not the road I had envisioned, nor was it the road that my mentors expected me to take. Although I never thought it would happen to someone as dedicated to academics as I, I was learning first-hand how “life can get in the way.”

Soon after I began the adjunct position at UGA, I took an additional temporary adjunct position at another local research university. In this position, I was asked to teach large lecture sections of Introductory Psychology and Human Sexuality—a format, and in the case of the latter, content, that was far outside my comfort zone and certainly not written anywhere on the map of my career! Then, in the following semester, I was asked to design and teach online courses for UGA graduate students, a pedagogy that was just beginning to grow in popularity and one I knew virtually nothing about.

This period was the time when I struggled the most with my identity as a teacher. I am a planner, most comfortable when I am in control and can see a long stretch of the road ahead. But I felt as if I were on a road full of blind turns during a snowstorm. Did I truly have the flexibility necessary for teaching outside my area of expertise? Had I been trained well enough for this sort of challenge? Later, of course, I realized that the times that caused the most discomfort also caused the most growth for me as a teacher, something I try to remember when I am pushed out of my comfort zone today.

After all the twists and turns, I had confirmed that my life’s work was meant to be in the college classroom. But teaching was not the only thing I wanted to do in the classroom. At first, I was fearful that spending so many years focusing on teaching would prevent me from securing a tenure-track position. Instead, it only served to steer my research interests in a much more pragmatic direction—the growing discipline of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Upon rejoining the tenure-track at Kennesaw State, I found myself intensely interested in “what works” in the college classroom—for students as well as their instructors.

I feel very fortunate that my teaching, research, service, and administrative duties now all have the same goal—to improve college teaching and learning. My current research is on curricular interventions in learning communities and first-year seminars, which directly impacts the way we teach in our department. I am happy to say that I am no longer able to divorce my teaching and research practices, as my research is now informing my teaching and my teaching is inspiring my research. Therefore, I have not felt, as many academics feel, that teaching must be sacrificed in order to earn tenure.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

In my years of teaching (including many years teaching other teachers how to teach), I feel I have learned a great deal about what makes a learning experience successful. Part of my job as a professor and mentor is to transmit information, but a greater part of my job involves shaping attitudes toward learning, developing in students an appreciation for higher-level thinking, and promoting the kind of reflective thought that will make them successful in all aspects of their lives. As members of a consumer-focused generation, today’s students often expect their
instructors to “sell” them on why particular pedagogical practices work. Higher-level thinking is hard work, and the instructor who promotes it must provide an adequate rationale for putting forth the extra effort.

Perhaps more than teachers of any other discipline, psychology instructors can take advantage of the intrinsic motivation students have to understand themselves and the motivations of others around them. However, psychology in itself is not always easy for students to understand. Therefore, learning in my courses is active and applied. As an educational psychologist I know that engaging student interest by giving material a personal meaning is one of the best ways to ensure that students learn. Also, I always consider the importance of prior knowledge on new learning. Each learner has different experiences, motivations, and interests, and I do my best to respect these and take each individual student further along on his or her path. Finally, the need for integrative thinking is also of great importance to me. A narrow focus in an isolated domain no longer applies in today’s world. Students must be encouraged to see the interrelatedness of the courses they take, how to stretch beyond these courses, and how to apply them to real life.

I am committed to learning from my students, and take my teaching evaluations very seriously; I even make a practice of checking my “ratemyprofessors.com” ratings, just so I have my finger on the pulse of student opinion. I frequently incorporate a mid-semester course evaluation, especially when teaching a course for the first time or using a new teaching method. In addition, I often conduct item analyses after major tests to see if there is a pattern in the questions missed. As a mixed-methods researcher, I like to see quantitative data (in the form of grades and assessments) as well as qualitative data (in the form of written assignments and student feedback) in order to get the whole picture of what is happening. Because of the work I do in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, my teaching is in a constantly evolving state. My interests in this area often lead me to conferences and colleagues who share my passion, so I am frequently inspired by them to try new methods of assessment and teaching.

One of the most rewarding parts of teaching is getting positive feedback from students, especially those who are fearful of the subject matter. Two of the courses I was assigned to teach as an online adjunct instructor, Cognition and Research Methods, were among the most feared by our students. It was with a sense of pride that I accepted the responsibility and added my own challenge of making them extremely relevant, active, and interesting to students. When students told me at the end of the semester that their most dreaded courses had ended up being their favorites, I knew I had been successful. I loved seeing those “lightbulb” moments when things really clicked.

Consequently, the most frustrating moments for me as a teacher have been when students refuse to even get near the light switch. I will bend over backwards to help a struggling student understand, but when a student refuses to meet me halfway in that struggle, I can become exasperated. I try to overcome this frustration by seeing it as a challenge. How can I change what I am doing to reach students without giving them an excuse for poor performance? Using a variety of learning activities often solves this problem. I believe we all learn best when a variety of teaching methods are used, therefore I am deliberately eclectic in my teaching methods. In my courses (both online and traditional) I use constructivist and didactic methods,
group work, lecture, and personal reflection. Students who zone out during a lecture may turn lively during a small group discussion in which real-world issues are debated.

Over the years, I have seen my teaching philosophy, which was abstract at the beginning of my career, turn into observable action as my teaching became less focused on content and more focused on how to increase students’ critical thinking and long-term academic growth, as well as their ability to apply the content to real life. These outcomes are a challenge in courses like introductory psychology, where content is broad and every chapter is packed with important information. For courses like these, I try to take a step back and reexamine my ultimate goal: Is this course the only course in psychology these students are likely to take? If so, how can I help students become psychologically literate citizens in the scope of one course? In the end I hope that I have been more than a teacher to my students. I truly care about each student’s learning, value their opinions, and hope to be a mentor in their journey to become professionals.

Advice for New Teachers
To me, teaching is both an art and a science. As psychology teachers, most of us are well-versed in the science of teaching. For colleagues with little experience in this area, though, it is important to understand why and how students come to understand what we teach, which is an important part of understanding why certain teaching methods work when others do not. A good place to start is How Learning Works: 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010). In addition, many educators succumb to the pressure to “cover content” and forget about the learning outcomes and goals listed in their syllabus. Understanding how these learning outcomes can be used to drive content delivery promotes good teaching.

The science of teaching, although it is constantly evolving like any field, is something that can be learned. The “art” of teaching, though, may be built in part over years of experience. It is part “nature,” but a greater part “nurture.” On the “nature” side, a passion for teaching (or for a content area) is hard to fake. Let your passion shine through in the classroom—it is part of what makes for a great teacher. On the “nurture” side, pay attention to the journey, not the destination, as it is the unexpected forks and diversions that cause us to continually reexamine our teaching methods. I feel that the more detours you take, however uncomfortable they might be, the more you learn about who you are as a teacher.

Final Thoughts
I once read that many of today’s students see each college class like a game they have to beat. Upon entering class the first day, they see their job as figuring out how to earn enough points to “win” against the professor, who controls the game. Some students become very skilled at this game and quickly “win” all their classes. Good teachers, however, demonstrate to their students that professors and students are co-players in the learning game, and it is the process that really counts. I hope that readers of this autobiography series are reminded that their own academic success, however it is defined—by a successful job search, by promotion to full professor—will not happen in a neat, predictable manner. Instead, despite all the planning, it is ultimately the process that counts. Every one of the unpredictable traffic jams, collisions, and
detours along your long and winding road will shape who you become as a teacher. Thus, for a reflective teacher, there is no “destination,” only continued growth.

Reference
Why Chasing Rainbows and Getting Wet Makes for Good Teaching

Virginia (Ginger) Wickline
Miami University – Middletown

Although I work hard, I am primarily where I am today in my career because of blessings bestowed upon me, many of which have been relationships. My parents, both teachers by training, were loving, supportive, guiding influences for me. As an undergraduate psychology major at Anderson University, I honed my passion for service by joining the Center for Public Service (CPS), where I committed to “giving back” to the community through my professional development. Through CPS, I received mentoring, funding, and research opportunities, which led to my first publication. It was a decade before I published again, for I kept getting “distracted” by service opportunities that came my way. At Emory University, where I completed my MA and PhD in clinical psychology, most of my professors wisely noted, “You need to publish. You will never get an academic job without publishing” (which is, to their credit, often true). Thankfully, however, my mentor, adviser, and now friend and father figure—Dr. Stephen Nowicki—saw me for who I was and who I wanted to become, which was, first and foremost, a teacher. Although he encouraged me to hone my therapy and research skills, he also shepherded and supported my fledgling attempts at community engagement, which admittedly included some seemingly random things at first—like the psychology book drive for Romania’s Transylvania University that I helped coordinate at the urging of my friend, Sorina Iliescu (our names are posted in some dusty corner of their library). However, I was eventually recognized with Emory’s Humanitarian Award for my work creating campus-community partnerships in low income, primarily African American neighborhoods for the Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP) and the clinical psychology program.

After graduation, I served as a visiting assistant professor at The College of Wooster, where I was honored with the International Student Association’s Mentorship Award. Most recently, I joined Miami University as an Assistant Professor of Psychology in 2009. Since then, I have been nominated for Miami’s Distinguished Teaching Award; have been a finalist for Miami’s E. Phillips Knox Teaching Award for excellence in innovation in undergraduate teaching; and have been recognized with Miami University Middletown’s Excellence in Teaching Award, Adviser of the Year Award, and the Maamawi Award for Faculty Service-Learning. I am a repeat Community Recognition Recipient for the Butler County Board of Developmental Disabilities for providing partnerships between Miami Middletown students and community members with developmental disabilities. In 2011, I was Miami Middletown’s nominee for the Ohio Association of Two-Year Colleges’ (OATYC) state teacher of the year award and the Greater Cincinnati Consortium of Colleges & Universities (GCCCU) Celebration of Teaching luncheon. In 2012-2013, I was honored to receive the Society for Teaching of Psychology’s Wayne Weiten Teaching Excellence Award for Two-Year Colleges, and my colleague (Nancy Kern-Manwaring, Nursing) and I received the Association of University Regional Colleges in Ohio (AURCO) journal’s Editor’s Choice Award for our work regarding the impact of interdisciplinary service-learning on student development.
My Early Development as a Teacher
My teaching lessons began as an undergraduate student at a small, faith-based, liberal arts college, where myriad teachers showed they cared deeply about me not just as a student, but as a person. Dr. Curtis Leech supported me during many personal and professional “growing pains.” Dr. Bill Farmen made our regression class of four students work collaboratively to all receive the same grade—which certainly made us commit to teaching each other and learning together! Gifted in Socratic questioning, Dr. Farmen also had us do interesting applied assignments, like demonstrating Freudian theory by psychoanalyzing characters from movies like “Pulp Fiction” (an assignment I still give my students today). Dr. Linda Swindell and Dr. G. Lee Griffith gave me my first opportunities as an undergraduate teaching assistant. Almost all of my classes in my major included experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), some of which were service-learning opportunities, where we applied what we were learning in class by helping to meet needs in the community. Like the research suggests (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; McKenna & Rizzo, 1999), these experiences not only impacted what I knew, they changed me: making me more empathetic, community-minded, self-aware, and eager to serve.

In 2008, my graduate institution, Emory University, was listed on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll—1 of 6 schools in the nation chosen that year for the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning, and civic engagement. I was fortunate to have attended Emory in the years and clime leading up to that nomination. I soaked up teaching as assistant experiences every semester I could, with as many different professors as possible, in order to see how “the greats” did it. I store-housed examples, behaviors, demonstrations, strategies, video clips, and assignments along the way. I sponged up advice from master teacher, William (Bill) Buskist, who gave a talk about effective teaching to graduate students in our department (ever since his presentation, I do name tags with all my students). I received two Emory teaching fellowships, including the NEH/Arthur Blank Teaching Fellowship and the Dean’s Teaching Fellowship. As part of my first teaching fellowship, I worked with my teaching mentor, Dr. Nancy Bliwise, to videotape and critique my own teaching methods with her input. At the same time, I completed our department’s teaching preparation course under Nancy’s tutelage, a seminar style class of fellow graduate students. Our primary text, McKeachie’s (1999) classic, McKeachie’s Teaching Tips, introduced us to many strategies and exercises that helped to relieve our new-teacher jitters and made us better educators.

During my Dean’s Teaching Fellowship at Emory, I proposed and taught perhaps the first ever set-apart course on Psychology and Culture for the department. As part of my subsequent fellowship with The Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP), I helped my supervisors and mentors, Dr. Michael Rich and Sam Marie Engle, to draft and receive a 3-year, $400,000 Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant called a Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) grant. We focused on parent involvement, housing, and community building in the Bankhead neighborhood of northwest Atlanta (Emory University, 2005), by many measures one of the most “challenging” neighborhoods in the city. My charge was to design and implement the education arm of the grant, including programming to help parents become more involved with their children’s education. Although Emory as an institution was then
skeptical about the idea of service-learning, I also proposed and co-taught with Dr. Rebekah Bradley the department’s first ever Theory-Practice Learning (or what others would call experiential learning) course. This undergraduate community psychology class focused on parent involvement efforts and an after-school mentoring program for at-risk, African American teenage girls. What was innovative about the class is that it was (at Dr. Bradley’s suggestion) not taught on Emory’s campus, but at our COPC center site, the Benjamin S. Carson Honors Preparatory School. It included six teachers who were taking the class and a related workshop I led called Teachers Involving Parents (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2001) for continuing education credits. These teachers and their principal, Mr. Nash Alexander, were instrumental in our ability to connect with, service, and learn from our community partners. My main mentor besides Dr. Bradley, a Spanish teacher named Phyllis Turner, was invaluable in helping me (a middle class, inexperienced White girl from a small town) to understand, join, and navigate the Black, low-income, urban community in which I was now an eager but naïve outsider in so many ways. Often being the only White person in the room, it was my first real experience being an ethnic minority and one I will never forget. Quite frankly, what I learned most importantly from the kindness and guidance of Dr. Bradley and Ms. Turner (although they never said it directly) is I had to take risks and get over myself if I was ever going to be of any help. Together, my partners, students, and I accomplished quite a bit that first year, including an undergraduate student who designed and led an after-school mentoring program for 12 at-risk girls (and one boy who just refused to be left out). We helped a frustrated, struggling girl who had never been identified as having a learning disorder to get assessment and services. We supported a series of monthly Parents and Children Coming Together (PACCT) nights with free food, activities, and speakers. Any help I provided primarily came from learning to say, “I don’t know enough, but I’m here to help, and I want to learn—teach me what I need to know so together we can move forward and make a difference for you and your community.”

By the time I finished my graduate education, that phrase had become something of a mantra to me. I had been mentored and trained to think big and think outside the box. I had learned to take risks. I had learned that risks do not always work, but that trying and failing is almost as important—if not more important—than trying and succeeding every time. I had learned for myself and portrayed to those I taught that the deepest things we learn are not just in our heads, but they stay in our hearts and are shown by our deeds. By then, there was nothing I wanted to do more than continue to teach. I adored teaching...not just for what I felt I could give to students, but also for what I continued to learn from and with them. To this day, my community psychology class’ final picture with our “girls” at our concluding art display greets me each day I enter my office. Again, I have been forever changed by the teaching situations I had intended for others.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher
One of the primary challenges I faced as a young teacher was convincing employers that the time I had spent in teaching and community service instead of publishing (remember, my professors tried to warn me) was worth taking the risk on hiring me. Thankfully, I found the perfect fit for me at Miami Middletown, where my tenure decision will be made based on teaching and community (not campus) service as my primary criteria, with scholarship third.
Unlike many of my peers, I have not had to sacrifice research time for teaching because I have been clear in my career that research, while definitely important, is not my primary passion or greatest strength as an academician.

At the same time, the biggest challenge I currently face in teaching is time management, both personally and professionally. At Miami, I learned how better to integrate scholarship, teaching, and research, so I started publishing research in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) domain (McKinney, 2007) for myriad reasons. For example, I wanted to evaluate the teaching strategies in which I believed deeply. I had practiced service-learning and experiential education for many years, but I started doing qualitative and quantitative research to determine its impact and effectiveness. I recruited students from my classes to do the research with me, who also helped start a student organization, SERVE (Students Engaging in Real Volunteer Efforts), which started providing funding for our community events, some of which were required for students in my psychology classes. Integration has been for me not only a smart strategy, but a survival mechanism. Without this synchronicity, I am really not sure how I could have persisted these pre-tenure years as a committed academician who also values my time with my family, which includes a husband and two young children. Honestly, mentioning my commitment to my family and career in other job interviews may have cost me some positions. To this day, though, I have never regretted mentioning them. I did not want to work at a place where my job overshadowed my life. That said, the juggle among competing responsibilities is a complicated one, and many times I have to be creative to handle all of my work tasks. I wrote this manuscript, for example, between 11 PM and 1 AM every night, after my children were in bed. This period is also when paper and exam grading gets done (and when usually when I ask myself, “Why is it I don’t just give multiple-choice exams?!?”).

The other obstacle I have faced as a teacher is trying to balance what I think should work and think that students should be learning with what they actually take away. My first year at Miami, the Introduction to Psychology test that I thought would be a fair learning assessment achieved a surprising 60% average…yes…average. As part of Miami’s New Faculty Teaching Enhancement Program (NFTEP), I performed a self-assessment to determine where, in my own teaching and evaluation methods, I was not succeeding. As a result of this project, I learned to slow down and to focus on more critical thinking and less on jamming in every content element I possibly could. I did more engaging experiential exercises—I love anything by Thiagi (e.g., Thiagarajan, 2006), a guru of training and simulation games. I more regularly used daily, non-graded quizzing that helped students practice concepts and prepare for exams, which increased test scores (Wickline & Spektor, 2011). I held to my rigor in my ceiling items for exams but dropped the floor to help capture a wider array of students’ learning strengths and difficulties. Most importantly, I learned to ask for help and evaluation from peers, to admit when I needed to do something differently, and to do continual assessment of class climate and student learning outcomes.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My teaching philosophy really boils down to one key thing: In order to learn, students (and I) should “try stuff.” More precisely, people often fear what they have not tried. Therefore, I encourage students to take risks by providing classroom, service, and research opportunities
that challenge them to get of their comfort zones far enough to understand new things, yet not so far as to make them too anxious to learn. Early in my career, I worried most about what students were getting in terms of content—had I explained concepts well enough that they could explain (or recall) them back? To me now, that is just the tip of the iceberg. Intercultural competence, for example, is one of the primary things I try to ingrain for my students across my classes. Intercultural competence, however, includes the knowledge of, attitudes toward, and skill when interacting with culturally different others, which is demonstrated when students can act effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2006). If those are my learning goals for students, am I creating assignments and opportunities that allow them to demonstrate knowledge with cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes? Or am I simply testing them on a shallower level of knowledge?

At the end of the day, it is my experiences with students who have tried something new that used to frighten them that I find the most rewarding—whether that means talking to a Chinese international student, presenting at a research conference, or volunteering with a community agency. I get most frustrated with students who just want to show up for class and take tests and accept that as a standard for true learning. Sometimes I find myself explaining what I value and defending how I teach and what I assign in order to convince them, “This is not busy work—it is good for you and your future.” It is probably good to be transparent about my goals for applied learning and community mindedness, yet some could say I border on proselytizing. I have to remind myself sometimes that I teach this way, with all the time and effort it takes, because I believe it is best for students and our community: If the students want to find classes that just give multiple-choice tests, they are free to sign up for somebody else’s section. I have learned over time, though, that if students cannot see why I am testing this way or giving that assignment, they are less likely to be able to learn from it. Therefore, I believe it is extremely valuable to do both formative and summative assessment to determine if my approaches are working. I regularly give mid-semester evaluations, exam/studying student self-reflections, and exam/project feedback questions on public forums like class discussion boards and wikis. I do extra credit items on exams that ask students to show me what they have been learning through different assignments, as well as what they like and dislike about the class—if we only ask about what they like, really, how can we improve? In publishing and presenting my SoTL work both locally and nationally, I am opening myself up to another source of feedback from my peers about my methods. I also attend a teaching conference of some kind most years to keep learning what other people are doing, to see what I can do better. There is always room to improve.

Advice for New Teachers and Final Thoughts

To me, being an effective teacher is akin to hitting a moving target. Like happiness, good (or even superior) teaching is a journey, not a destination. You have to be willing to keep moving, learning, and changing. When you keep doing the same things the same way—even good things—you are likely to get stagnant, bored, dull, and ineffective. You should not be afraid to care about your students, and if you do care, make sure they know that. The payoff is that they will try harder and learn more. I created my personal mantra after observing London’s Tavistock terrorist bombing as a teaching assistant for a psychology study abroad trip in 2005, where I
learned, “If you believe in purpose, do not shy from opportunity. You only see the rainbow when you stand with your head up, facing the rain.” Be bold. Get wet. You might be surprised what you find in the midst.

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