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I Always Wanted to Be a College Professor

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

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

I began to use the information I acquired in this class about memory, attention, and learning to transform myself from the mediocre student I had been to the successful student I would become. I had discovered my passion, and this discovery was a genuinely transformative experience. I no longer viewed my teachers as educational adversaries; they had become my academic allies. Studying was no longer a dreaded task; it became a pleasure.

Tests were no longer fearsome obstacles; they had become exciting challenges. Papers were no longer dreaded chores to be put off until the night before they were due; they had become exciting journeys into undiscovered realms of knowledge, which I researched for weeks before I polished them to my new high standards of academic excellence. Armed with these new ways of thinking about my education—and a sincere desire to share them with future generations of undergraduate students—I decided to become a professor of psychology.

My Early Development as a Teacher

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

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

Growing up with a father who was a highly respected university professor had a profound effect upon me. He always made a special point of introducing me to his students, and these encounters led me to understand that the kind and gentle man whom I loved and knew as Dad at home was also loved—but known as Dr. Appleby—at school. His students told me how lucky I was to be his son and how grateful they were for all his help during their education. Another introduction I will never forget took place one night outside my father’s office when we encountered one of the custodians mopping the floor. My father said, “Drew, I’d like you to meet Mr. Green. Mr. Green is one of the most important people in the Dental School because without him, our school wouldn’t be clean, and dentistry can’t be taught in a building that isn’t 100% clean.” The look on Mr. Green’s face as I shook his hand is one I will never forget and, at that instant, I began to understand the remarkable effect that treating

everyone—no matter what their station or position in life—with kindness and dignity can have. There are countless professions that can produce encounters similar to these, but in my young mind becoming a college professor was the sure path that led to them. To be seen as a wise and caring teacher was a powerful incentive, and this incentive has had an amazingly compelling effect upon me during my entire career.

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

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

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

The Examined Life of a Teacher

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

use their acquired knowledge and skills. With this knowledge and these skills, the students can become active, articulate, and committed citizens who will provide solutions to the personal, social, and political challenges we face now and the unknown challenges we will face in the future.

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

My greatest rewards as a teacher have been the accomplishments of my students. I experienced a week several years ago that brought this clearly to my attention. On Monday I visited the newly opened practice of one of my graduates who had earned his PhD in clinical psychology from Purdue. Not only was his practice coming along nicely, but he was also teaching a course in my department. He was a fine young man with a bright professional future. On Tuesday I discovered a copy of an article on a rape prevention program placed on my mail shelf by one of our administrators. It was co-authored by one of my recent graduates who was in the counseling doctoral program at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The article was well written and well researched—I was very proud. On Wednesday, I was invited to another university by their Director of Student Development, who was one of my recent graduates (Masters in student personnel from the University of Wisconsin) to give their psychology club a talk on how a bachelor's degree in psychology can prepare students for the world of work. After the presentation, I had lunch with the chair of the department who said that the most successful change he had made in his department was to hire my graduate. On

Thursday, I received a note from a nursing student who had been in my general psychology class four years before. Her note thanked me for being the teacher who she felt had been the most influential in her entire undergraduate career. On Friday, one of my students who had graduated 20 years before brought her 18-year-old son to my office during their campus visit. She thanked me for teaching her sound parenting skills in Developmental Psychology, said that her son wanted to be a psychologist, and told me that she wanted me to teach him as well as I had taught her. Of course, not all my weeks are like this one, but these are the most important and most gratifying rewards that I gain from teaching.

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

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

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

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

Advice for New Teachers

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

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

Final Thoughts

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

My career has been—and continues to be—a grand and glorious ride. The most amazing part of my academic life has been my complete freedom to do what I believe is best for my students. If I could choose to do anything in the world, I would continue to do exactly

what I am doing now. The pleasure I derive from watching my students develop from shy, hesitant freshmen, to confident seniors, and finally to competent professional colleagues is the greatest reward I could ever hope to receive.

References

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