

***Teaching as a Partnership:
The Reciprocal Relationship between Teaching and Learning***

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

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

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

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

ethnic minority community college honor students who want to pursue research careers in psychology.

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

My Early Development as a Teacher

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

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

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

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

I carefully watched the instructional styles of my graduate professors. Each one brought something different to the teaching experience that I admired—humanity, scholarship, precision, opportunity, and engagement. I began to formulate a scheme for good

teaching based on these impressions. I also recognized how their individual differences made them effective in their own way. I knew then that if I wanted to be an effective teacher that I needed to be eclectic in my teaching style.

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

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

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

The Examined Life of a Teacher

When I began my teaching career, I spent considerable time working on lectures and worrying about how much content to cover in class. I really was the proverbial “sage on the stage.” During the next phase of my teaching career, I became more interested in facilitating the learning process, so I became the “guide on the side.” I attended every active learning teaching conference that I could, and I organized numerous workshops and conferences on

this topic. I still believe in active learning and I do embrace this philosophy of teaching, but I have made a radical shift in how I see my students.

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

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

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

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

My philosophy of teaching is based on a core set of values that I developed during the past decade. At the heart of these values is my mission as a classroom instructor. I firmly believe that part of my mission in the classroom is to transform lives so that students can

reach their full potential. This transformation occurs as we examine the course content, interact, seek new and exciting opportunities for growth, expect positive results, and conduct personal reflections. I also believe that students are successful when their teachers believe that they can succeed. Thus, I begin instructing every class from the perspective that my students can and will succeed. I set high standards for my students and I expect them to measure up to these standards. Invariably, I tell my students that everything in life is about choices that we make. They can choose to be successful or unsuccessful. As their instructor, my job is to make certain that they have the resources that they need to be successful. Their job is to use the resources provided in order to be successful students.

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

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

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

I constantly reflect on my role as a teacher and solicit feedback regarding my teaching every semester. I ask for input from my students, my colleagues, and my dean. I conduct informal evaluations in each course. As an adjunct faculty member at Howard University, I am evaluated every semester I teach a course. As a full-time faculty member at Prince

George's Community College, I am evaluated formally every 2 years. I use the results of these evaluations to inform my teaching.

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

Advice for New Teachers

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

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

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

[†] From T. A. Benson, C. Burke, A. Amstadter, R. Siney, V. Hevern, B. Beins, & W. Buskist, (Eds.), *Teaching psychology in autobiography: Perspectives from exemplary psychology teachers* (pp. 121-126). Society for the Teaching of Psychology. Retrieved [insert date] from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology Web site: <http://teachpsych.lemoyne.edu/teachpsych/tia/index.html>