

Reflections of a Student-Mentored Teacher

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I graduated with a BA degree in psychology from the University of Denver in 1964 and received an MEd degree in higher education (student services) from Indiana University in 1966. I received my MA in 1972 and my PhD in 1973 (in personality and social psychology) from the University of Arizona.

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

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

I am the author of *Adolescence* (1985) and the co-author (with Wayne Weiten) of *Psychology Applied to Modern Life* (1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, in press). I have authored over 100 articles, book chapters, and conference presentations, and I maintain a Web site, *Marky Lloyd's Careers in Psychology*.

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

Other noteworthy professional activities include membership on the APA's Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies (2001-2003), chairing the Advising Committee at APA's National Forum on Psychology Partnerships (1999), and being invited to participate in APA's National Conference on Enhancing the Quality of Undergraduate Education in Psychology (1991). I also value my work as Founding Chair of the Council of Undergraduate Psychology Programs (the national organization of chairs of undergraduate psychology programs) and my service on its Steering Committee (1987-1992).

I am a Fellow of the APA (STP), a Charter Fellow of the American Psychological Society (APS), and a member of Psi Chi. I am a recipient of Georgia Southern University's Award for Excellence in Contributions to Instruction and the Ruffin Cup (outstanding teacher-scholar in College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences). I am listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in American Education*, and *Who's Who of American Women*.

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

My Early Development as a Teacher

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

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

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

I came to college teaching through a circuitous route. Since high school, I had always been fascinated by psychology, but I had no idea how a psychology major would translate

into a job—except for clinical psychology, which did not particularly interest me. I was very clear that I did not want to teach elementary or high school, and it simply never occurred to me to consider teaching at the college level. (At that time, very few college faculty were women; I can recall having only three women as college instructors.) My experiences in student government allowed me to interact with competent professional women in the Dean of Students' office. Because I was really drawn to working on a college campus, a career in student services at the college level seemed like a good match for me.

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

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

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

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

In retrospect, I believe that two things enabled me to recover my enthusiasm for teaching. First, I had the opportunity to establish closer connections with a few students when

some of them confided to me dramatic personal difficulties that were interfering with their academic performance. These experiences helped me realize that some students were definitely in need of a willing ear, advice, and support.

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

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

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

The Examined Life of a Teacher

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

1. *Regularly seek students' suggestions for improving the course.* Since I first started teaching, I have always asked for student feedback on my courses in addition to the end-of-term student ratings that are required by the institution. Among other things, I assess students' perceptions of textbooks, course activities, and written projects, especially when I am testing out new ones. Through their comments and suggestions over the years, students have served as "mentors" for me regarding effective teaching. In addition to end-of-term feedback, I also ask for feedback after the first two exams because this early feedback gives me the opportunity to make changes in a course while those who made the suggestions can still benefit from them.

2. *Actively involve students in the course material.* I try to involve students actively in the course material not only to motivate them but also to help them understand how to apply the course material to their own lives. To involve students, I develop and use a variety of class activities (exercises, videotapes, questionnaires, out-of-class observations, and small group discussions).

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

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

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

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

During the first 16 years of my academic life, I taught at a private institution of about 5,000 students; in the next 16 years, I moved to a public institution of 16,000 students, and I adapted my teaching to these different academic environments. At the private institution, the size of my classes was smaller, most students were reasonably well-motivated, and I had fewer professional involvements than I would later. Thus, I could devote more time to my teaching, and I experimented with different course formats. I taught my Behavior Modification course using behavioral principles (Keller Plan or the Personalized System of Instruction [PSI]), and I had students conduct both group and individual experiments in my Experimental Social Psychology course. In Psychology of Adolescence, I used small group discussions on topics of interest once a week (and trained students to lead the groups). In my Social Psychology, Psychology of Adjustment, and Psychology of Women courses, I employed many in-class activities to demonstrate course principles and I utilized projects to help students understand how to apply psychological principles.

In the public institution, class sizes increased dramatically and students wanted more structure in the classroom. In response, I developed lecture outlines that are projected overhead in every course, an activity that consumed considerable time and also led to my teaching all of my courses according to the lecture-discussion format. Of course, the course content varied and I developed course activities and projects that were unique to specific courses. I also had a number of other professional obligations at this time in my career, which meant that I had less time to devote to teaching than had been the case.

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

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

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

I believe that instructors should develop their own informal methods of obtaining student feedback on classroom issues of particular interest to them. In response to demands by the public and accrediting agencies for "accountability," most universities now require formal assessments of teaching. Because many institutions use this information in determining faculty promotions and tenure as well as salary increases, it is essential that the formal assessment instruments be valid and reliable.

To discover new ideas on how to improve my teaching, I regularly read books and articles on teaching, attend regional teaching conferences every year, attend sessions on teaching at annual national psychology conventions, and talk with my colleagues about teaching. I have also participated in classes at the university's Center for Excellence in Teaching.

Advice for New Teachers

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

Final Thoughts

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

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