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You Never Know For Whom You Toil...

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I love to teach psychology. I did my first teaching at Carl Sandburg High School (CSHS), where I stayed for 34 years! I received my BS in psychology from Illinois State University, in Bloomington, IL, and an MA in family therapy from California State University at Los Angeles. In those 34 years, I developed the first psychology course ever taught at CSHS, followed by psychology II (a project-oriented course), which led to the development of an Advanced Placement (AP) psychology course. I have also taught at Lewis University and for the Illinois Virtual High School. Currently I am teaching at Moraine Valley Community College where I have taught intermittingly for 22 years. I am **also teaching at** North Central College in Naperville, IL.

In 2001, I was nominated for the prestigious Golden Apple Award, which is given annually to 10 teachers in the Chicagoland area for their teaching excellence. In 2003, the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) named me the recipient of the Moffett Memorial Award. I was humbled by the letters of recommendation from students, parents, and fellow outstanding teachers such as David Myers, Martin Bolt, Bill Addison, Bob Stahl, Karen Huffman, and Phil Zimbardo.

In his APA presidential address, George Miller (1969) urged that we should give psychology away. The outstanding teachers who recommended me for the Moffett Award really understood what he meant. They taught me so much about psychology and life. They probably don't know just how much they have influenced me, which reminds me of a quote by Dr. David Viscott "You never know for whom you toil; who will reap the benefit of your work, who will grow in the nurturing of your giving or, who will respond to your being or having been. All you can do is commit yourself to a dream, work hard, and, act like someone who is the way you want to be." People such as Myers, Bolt, Addison, Stahl, Huffman, and Zimbardo have always given psychology away, to teachers such as me and in turn, to my students. That is why I appreciate them so much and try to emulate their efforts.

I've tried to share what I learned about the teaching of psychology in many ways. I have written or co-authored over 20 articles about psychology. I have been a consultant for three of the four major high school psychology textbooks, and I have also written,

edited, or consulted on 20 different high school and college textbooks. I am the author of five books: *Creating a Psychology Fair* (1998), *Advanced Placement Psychology Correlation Guide for the 16th* (2002) and *17th* (2005) editions of Gerrig and Zimbardo's *Psychology and Life*, *Psychology* (2004), and *Advanced Psychology* (2004) for TeachingPoint.com. These books have archived many of my lesson plans, projects, PowerPoint™ presentations, and other supportive materials from teaching psychology and Advanced Psychology as well as from conferences and workshops I have conducted.

Of course, none of these accomplishments mean a thing without the enduring love, devotion, patience and understanding from my wife, Sue, and our children, Mike and Alissa. They understand my passion for the teaching of psychology. They tolerate my foolishness and giggling when I received hundreds of sponge brains from a friend, or when I requested and received Chiquita banana labels that say "Brain Fuel." They worry about our garage space when it becomes the workshop where I paint, glue, and assemble special distorting vision goggles for other teachers. Once, Sue did not see the goggles on the garage floor and drove over them! Friends of our children and neighbors would come over to our house just to try on the "weird" goggles I made in our garage.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Student teaching in Peoria was the only real preparation I had for my career as a teacher. My major criticism from my advisor was that I sat on a desktop while teaching. That was the worst thing I did?

I was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. So, in January 1972, in order to fulfill my military obligation for 24 months, I was assigned to teach psychology at Carl Sandburg High School and work as a custodian (janitor) during the summer. However, Sandburg High School did not have a psychology course, but it did offer a Family Living course in the Home Economics Department. I was given a room key, chalk, access to a ditto machine, and told to teach the course. Next door was a child care room and before long, my students were observing and taking notes about the little children in the program. Thirty years later, one of my students recalled "It was great! We were doing psychology and didn't even know it!" Later, I was transferred to the Social Studies Department to start a psychology course. Eventually I got a room-set of *Psychology: Its Principles and Application* (1974) textbooks authored by Roy Engle and Lou Snellgrove. This was nirvana!

My development as a teacher was strongly influenced by several teachers. I have never been completely satisfied with just reading the text and preparing for class, so, I turned to Roy Engle and Lou Snellgrove asking their advice about different strategies to use in the classroom and about information in the text. That was the beginning of a 20-

year friendship with these two men. In the mid 1970s they began a nation-wide survey about high school psychology, and they asked if I would help.

At that time, Bob Stahl was at the University of Florida and was writing some articles about high school psychology. I asked Bob to help us because he was a meticulous writer with a research background. In 1976, Bob, Lou, Roy and I gave a presentation at the American Psychological Association convention on the status of high school psychology based on the surveys we conducted. Several years later, Bob became President of the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) and was responsible for starting the Psychology Special Interest Group (SIG). After that, and for 20 years, Dale Kinney (Ralston High School, Omaha, Nebraska) and I were the co-chairs of the Psychology SIG group and published a newsletter with activities and suggestions for teachers. In 1993, we invited Lou Snellgrove to the NCSS preconference workshop in Nashville. To our surprise and delight, he gave everyone a 175-page document on building and using inexpensive psychological equipment! Lou was always willing to share his ideas with others.

Later, Bob and I would co-author several articles including one in which students wrote letters to psychologists cited in their textbooks (Matiya & Stahl, 1991). High school students wrote to over 100 prominent psychologists and asked them to identify the most important ideas in the discipline. The students received a large number of thoughtful letters, photographs, and reprints in return, allowing them a personal view of people and research in psychology.

Another special person who has shaped and influenced me as a teacher throughout all these psychology lessons and activities was Jonni Kincher, the author of *Psychology for Kids I* (1990) and *II* (1995). Although she was not a mentor in any formal sense, she encouraged me to have my students do more hands-on activities. Her books emphasized the ideas that children understand that learning is fun, they need to learn and use the scientific method, and they need to think critically in order to evaluate any information they collect.

These four people, Roy Engle, Lou Snellgrove, Bob Stahl, and Jonni Kincher have played major roles in my development as a teacher of psychology. Their ideas have changed who I am and how I teach. They taught me to psychology give away.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

The path of a high school psychology teacher is filled with obstacles. One particular obstacle that I have faced has been my identity as psychology teacher. People have asked me “Isn’t psychology where you just play games?” and “Isn’t psychology just common sense?” You know all we psychology teachers really want is a pat on the back by the principal who doesn’t have the slightest idea what we do in class.

Another obstacle for me was the sheer shortage of psychology-related materials for use in the high school psychology classroom. When I started teaching high school psychology the only book that was available was Engle and Snellgrove text and its accompanying workbook. With the advent of the AP program, more publishers developed materials that could be used in high school, but until recently, they were never as sophisticated nor had as many ancillary supplements as college texts did.

One final obstacle I also faced was letting administrators, teachers, and students understand what we did in psychology. I decided to create a Psychology Fair to let other teachers and administrators know what psychology teachers teach in their classrooms. During it, students select a particular demonstration, experiment, or survey to serve as the central topic in a “mini lesson” that they present to another student. Students conduct these mini-lessons with students from other classes in the school and collect data on their demonstration, experiment, or survey. The Psychology Fair was successful because it helped other teachers and administrators (including the principal) to understand what psychology is and how we teach it. We even had evening sessions during the Psychology Fair so that parents and families could attend! One colleague complimented me by noting that, more psychology teachers have ‘stolen’ and used your ideas and materials than they’ve stolen from anyone else in the country.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

I have always thought of the interaction between a teacher and students as a dance. In a typical classroom of the past, we found the teacher led and the students followed, sort of like Lorenz and his ducklings. Today, this description is not always true. Nowadays, there seems to more of a give and take between teachers and their students. The teacher gives guidance and support to the students. Then, at some point in the lesson, the students take over and the teacher follows the students’ initiatives.

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Who will reap the benefit of your work,
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And, act like someone who is the way you want to be.”

This quote by David Viscott, which I also noted at the outset of this essay, has guided and prepared me every time I walked in into a classroom. I can be prepared each day. I can create meaningful learning situations for my students. I can make sure the activity is appropriate to the material being learned. I can take risks and prepare different activities every time I teach. I can always look for newer and better ways of encouraging learning is what I do all the time in order to be fresh and excited about the material.

I have tried several different approaches to my teaching, but I keep on returning to active learning—involving students with activities that teach more than just what is in the book. It involves implementing meaningful activities that generate data and careful analysis and interpretation of those results. Such activities are very useful in encouraging students to think critically about their work in my classes.

In the end, teachers need to change, adapt, and move forward with their lessons, never forgetting that they are still dealing with adolescents who are still in the process of growing and developing physically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively. Teachers need to learn to communicate clearly with their students and to a large extent, trust them as young adults.

Advice for New Teachers

New teachers should seek out other enthusiastic teachers for help and advice on curriculum development, lesson plans, and classroom strategies. One way is to join two organizations that are most helpful: the Psychology Special Interest Group (Psych-SIG) within NCSS, and APA's Teachers of Psychology in the Secondary Schools (TOPSS). Another excellent organization for teachers is to join is STP (APA Division 2). New teachers, as well as more experienced teachers, should also attend teaching conferences where they can learn the latest classroom techniques, the latest curriculum developments, and classroom strategies. These organizations and conferences not only provide teachers with a bountiful array of useful teaching resources, they also provide opportunities to meet like-minded teachers who are interested in honing their craft. Indeed, becoming active in professional organizations and conventions is a sure step toward healthy professional growth.

In addition, there are online opportunities to help teachers, such as electronic “bulletin boards” where one can ask for advice about lesson plans, activities, and book suggestions from several hundred high school and college teachers who understand what you are trying to do in your classroom! Three excellent electronic discussion lists are PSYCH-NEWS (LISTSERV@LISTSERV.UH.EDU), PsychTeach (listserv@list.kennesaw.edu), and TIPS (Teaching in the Psychological Sciences; <<http://acsun.frostburg.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=tips>>) There is a tremendous wealth of information out there and many wonderful people who want to help young teachers get a solid start on their teaching.

Final Thoughts

Teaching psychology has always been very special to me. It is a field of study that integrates many different pieces of the puzzle that contribute to who and what we are as individuals. I am always looking for the best ways to communicate and express these

ideas in psychology. I owe everything to the people who influenced me the most. They probably don't understand how much they influenced me and my teaching because none of us understand for whom we toil....

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