Teaching Developmental Psychology in Higher Education
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Teaching Philosophy Statement

Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.
-B.F. Skinner

Experience
I enjoy working with emerging adults. Their volitional exploration of identity makes this stage an exciting time for learning. As a therapist, the majority of my clients were adolescents and young adults. However, I have experience teaching both children and adults:

- Conducting weekly classes to doctoral and master's level interns on diagnosis and crisis intervention
- Teaching experiential education team-building, as a ropes course instructor
- Leading a quarterly 40-hour mental health crisis intervention workshop for police officers
- Mentoring a graduate intern in research and statistical analysis
- Supervising undergraduate research assistants in a lab
- Providing ongoing supervision to new counselors in weekly group sessions
- Teaching about stress, bullying, and other topics to middle and high school students, as a school counselor
- Giving academic and professional presentations
- Providing psycho-education workshops to victims of violence and incarcerated youth
- Working as a graduate student teaching assistant for undergraduate psychology and education courses at Bucknell University
- Working as an undergraduate teaching assistant for mechanical engineering courses at Bucknell University

In the next 18 months, I will create my own course on the Sequelae of Trauma to teach to fourth year undergraduate students at Cornell University.

Pedagogy
Edward Thorndike (1910) wrote about how the application of psychology to the educational process enables us to clarify goals and methods. This remains true today. I believe in applying my knowledge of educational psychology, developmental psychology, and clinical psychology to develop and evaluate my teaching, and my students' learning.

The primary tenets I hold with regard to teaching are:

- Build a relationship with the class
- Be considerate of student motivations and hold all students in unconditional positive regard
- Meet students where they are
- Teaching methods must match the content and learning goals

Through discussion of ideas, interspersed with sharing personal experiences, a relationship is built between the class and teacher. I believe in transferring the Rogerian counseling tenant of *unconditional positive regard* to the classroom, and use this method to create a milieu of mutual respect. It is imperative to assess what the students' current understanding of the content, as well as the cognitive, developmental, cultural, and social needs and expectations of the class. Given the current state of

higher education, we need to consider the differences in motivation among different students. These can vary from passion about a topic, to a desire for a grade, to a need for completion of a required course. Course content must be taught so that those wanting to continue in the field are at a competitive advantage after course completion, but also with the understanding that most students in a course will not be pursuing an advanced degree in the subject. I enjoy lecture and discussion, but incorporate many other methods (like activities from my experimental education background) when inclusion will enhance learning. Students learn best when expectations are clearly defined, and so I make it a practice to transparently present the purpose of a course and the learning goals, the specific learning objectives, the process of the course, and the grading rubric for all course requirements.

Application

I maintain a strong commitment to teaching. I changed career fields from clinical practice to academia in order to have a greater impact on policy and practice through research and teaching. My goals as a professor of undergraduate students are for the students to learn:

- Basic constructs of developmental psychology as a foundation for further study in psychology, and/or as applicable to everyday life
- Critical analysis of social science through exposure to and critique of scholarly publications
- Fundamentals of literature review, including library skills and evaluation of sources
- Fundamental statistical skills, including research methodology and interpretation of statistics in lay and academic publications
- Beginning research methodology, including participation in my lab for interested students
- Concise writing

I provide my graduate students a close mentor relationship that provides the support needed to develop an independent line of research.

Developmental psychology is fun to teach. Because we are all people, every student has existing knowledge and experience they bring to the classroom. Application of psychological topics to personal experience can increase interest and retention. In the classroom, I confront student misconceptions about psychology and statistics in order to help students to view the world from a social scientist perspective.

I incorporate a decade of experiences as a psychotherapist and crisis clinician into my teaching, and students have reported that they enjoy these stories. I am also able to adapt many clinical skills for use in the classroom, such as group facilitation, attending to process, and active listening. I apply skills learned during my graduate study in educational counseling to my teaching. For instance, I have a background in psychological and educational measures (e.g. construct validity, reliability, best practices in item construction, etc.), that guides my test construction. Student assessment is a central part of higher education, and I provide students learning goals and test preparation materials, and construct fair tests. I value the student-teacher relationship and strive to always be a compassionate and available resource to my students.

References

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*(5), 469.

Thorndike, E. L. (1910). The contribution of psychology to education. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 1*(1), 5.