Teaching Philosophy
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"Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness" – Sigmund Freud

When serving as an instructor, I always try to keep in mind this famous quote by Sigmund Freud. Preparing students for the love and work in their future adult roles (e.g., parent, employee) is central to my teaching philosophy. More specifically, I strive to help students develop skills that are needed for these roles: communication, application, critical thinking, and exploration skills. To obtain these goals, I work hard to build a classroom environment where students realize that I am approachable and genuinely interested in their development.

Communication. Communication skills are useful for students pursuing a variety of career paths, in addition to being an important part of everyday interactions. Becoming a more clear and effective communicator is a skill that can be developed with practice. Because of this, I prefer to have both writing and presentation requirements in a class (although feasibility is dependent on factors such as class size and content of the class). For example, as an instructor of Research Methods at the College of Charleston, I required students to work in groups of three to four people to develop a research project. Students were required to present their findings as a group, but turn in separate written papers. I chose this method in an effort to increase collaboration and support among students, while at the same time ensuring that all students were developing written communication skills.

As an instructor, I believe that communication skills are most effectively honed in a supportive learning environment that provides constructive feedback and opportunities for revision. For written assignments, I provide feedback on positive aspects of the paper, in addition to constructive feedback about format, grammar, content, and general writing style. I have seen dramatic improvements in students' written communication skills in my classes where students were required to revise writing assignments in response to my feedback. However, due to time constraints, I have not always required this of students. In the future, I plan to make this a requirement because of the benefits I have seen in the past. The revision of presentations is less feasible. However, I believe that it is still important for students to receive both positive and constructive feedback in order to become better presenters. Not only do I provide feedback on standard areas of assessment for presentations (e.g., content, organization of material, overall delivery), but I also provide feedback on students' attire. Students are required to dress neat and professionally because I want students to recognize that appearance is also a form of communication, which may be particularly important for future professional events (e.g., job interviews).

Application. To encourage a deeper understanding of material, it is important to help students learn how to apply course concepts to the "real world." I encourage students to go beyond memorization of material by requiring them to apply content and skills to their life and/or their careers. Writing assignments are one avenue that can be used to reach this goal. For example, my co-instructor and I asked students taking an Introduction to Human Development and Family Studies course to interview an individual going through a life transition (e.g., birth of a new child). In the assignment, we asked the students to summarize the interview while integrating at least three points from class material (both theory and course concepts). For example, students could have discussed how the developmental stage of the individual may have

influenced the transition process. My co-instructor and I used this technique because we wanted students to be able to pick a life transition of interest in order to increase student motivation to apply the material to the "real world."

Critical Thinking. In psychology, critical thinking refers to an individual's ability to skeptically examine and actively challenge "facts" reported in everyday life, the media, and research. Critical thinking is one of the most crucial skills for students to learn, yet one of the most difficult skills to teach. In the past, I have used techniques such as class or group discussions to help foster critical thinking. For example, when teaching students that correlations do not imply causation, I use example articles from the media that imply causation based on correlational research as a discussion starter. I seek out articles that may spark students' interest, such as articles implying that having a skinny wife leads to a happier marriage or that spanking a child leads to lower IQs. After students read through the article, I start the conversation by asking questions such as, "What do you think? What else may be going on? How do you think this research study was conducted? Was it an experiment?" The promotion of critical thinking is not an easy task, and I plan to incorporate more activities and writing assignments to foster the development of critical thinking skills in the future. For instance, I plan to develop an activity in which students must critique the conclusions of a research study based on the methods used in the research, such as representativeness of the sample or adequacy of the measures used to operationalize constructs. This activity could be used for a writing assignment, small group discussion, or class discussion.

Exploration. Many researchers argue that college students are actively exploring possible career paths. However, based on my experiences talking with students, I have found that many students are unsure of how to gain exposure to a wider number of career paths. As an instructor, I incorporate materials into my lecture to help aid career exploration. For example, during my lecture on career choice in my Introduction to Human Development and Family Studies class, I introduced students to the U.S. Occupational Handbook website, which describes occupations and gives the educational requirements, projected growth rates, and median pay for numerous occupations in the U.S. This lecture provides students with a useful tool for exploring possible future occupations. In addition, in the future I plan to incorporate "career days" into my classes. By using technology such as Skype, my friends and acquaintances from a wide-range of careers (e.g., Clinical Psychologist, I/O Psychologist, non-academic researcher) will be able to discuss their careers with students in the class, allowing time for students to ask their own questions. I am hoping that this may serve as a networking opportunity for students.

Summary. As an instructor, I always try to keep in mind the "big picture." College is designed to help students develop skills that will be used in a variety of future roles (e.g., parent, employee). By fostering a collaborative and supportive classroom environment, I aim to give students the opportunity to become more effective communicators, applicators of the course material, critical thinkers, and explorers of future careers.