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Teaching Dossier

Relevant Education and Qualifications

<u>Education:</u>	Simon Fraser University Department of Psychology Ph.D. Relations between moral reasoning, personality traits, and justice-decisions on hypothetical and real-life moral dilemmas.	1989 - 1997 July, 1997
	University of Guelph Department of Psychology M.A. Self-schema versus gender-schema: Are the androgynous schematic?	1987 - 1989 May, 1989
	University of Victoria Departments of Psychology and Sociology B.A. (Honours Psychology, Sociology with distinction)	1983 - 1987 June, 1987

Instructor Training:

<i>UBC Faculty Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education</i>	<i>May, 2004</i>
Instructional Skills Workshop Facilitator Trainer Certificate	June, 1995
Instructional Skills Facilitator Certificate	May, 1994
Instructional Skills Workshop Certificate	Oct., 1993

Introduction

The secret of education is respecting the pupil.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

One question that people ask is, “How long have you been teaching?” One answer I give is: “We are all teachers, all of the time.” For me, teaching is an integral part of my life. I cannot imagine a time when I have not taught, nor do I wish to contemplate a time when I will not teach. My motivation for learning comes from both my curiosity and my desire to share new information with others.

What follows are a few stories. Some stories are about my teaching activities, some are about my attempts to help students as they learn how to learn and teach, and others are about my efforts to help those engaged in formal teaching situations to break free from the self-imposed limitations on their teaching creativity. Along the way, I will outline the basic assumptions that form the foundation of my teaching practice. In some cases, it will be clear that I recognize that teaching/facilitating is always a ‘work in progress.’ In other cases, I will point to things that ‘work’ for me—ideas that I hope are pedagogically valuable and that I can share. To some extent, the creation and continual recreation of this dossier on a regular basis starts, for me, the sort of internal dialogue about teaching and learning that I find so richly rewarding.

First, a story about what started me thinking about my teaching values. Like many people, I did not really think about my role as ‘teacher’ until I was a novice Teaching Assistant (TA). I attended an orientation for new TAs and one of the sessions offered was on grading. During the session, the workshop leader suggested that TAs should never tell students exactly what criteria they would be using when grading the assignments—making it easier to justify any grade given. I was annoyed and questioned the fairness such practices. Getting no satisfaction from the workshop leader, I complained to the event organizer, who, in turn, challenged me to conduct a workshop on fair grading practices. Accepting the challenge had at least three significant consequences. The first was the realization that I valued fairness and respect, and that both were essential for good teaching. To finish my story—I did the necessary research and then conducted several workshops on fair grading practices for TAs and have had the opportunity to ensure that my many TAs grade fairly and treat students respectfully.

A second consequence of accepting the challenge was that I was now ‘connected’ with other people in academe concerned about the quality of teaching and learning. These teachers were part of informal ‘learning communities,’ and being part of a community gave me the chance to talk with others about ‘good practice.’ The community provided me with support and guidance as I developed my own practice. From those discussions came many good ideas that I was able to incorporate into my teaching, first as a TA, then as a course instructor. The one group that has given me the greatest opportunity for growth is the Instructional Skills Workshop Facilitator learning community. Within that community, I have had the opportunity to reflect on what I mean when I say ‘I am a teacher.’

Contributing to that community, in my turn, has become one of my primary motivators—and one of the reasons why I hope continue to teach and develop as a teacher.

A third consequence was the opportunity to develop, literally from the ground up, a new way of teaching undergraduate Psychology. At many post-secondary institutions, 30% or more of the incoming students take 'Intro Psyc' courses. With a healthy tutorial system in place at Simon Fraser University, the large Intro Psyc classes seemed to be a logical place for students to develop generic learning skills (research skills [library and web], presentation skills, teamwork skills, critical thinking skills and writing skills). When I was asked if I would be interested in redesigning the Intro Psyc courses to incorporate some of these transferable skills, I jumped at the opportunity. Over the past eight years, starting with the design and construction of the Intro Psyc Labs, I have focused my energies on creating an Intro Psyc Program that benefits our own Psyc majors (500+ annually) as well as the 1500+ students who take Intro Psyc courses to fulfill breadth requirements.

From these experiences, I have been able to extract certain principles that guide my efforts. Those principles are summarized briefly in my Statement of Learning Philosophy and then given reality in the examples included the section titled Learning Philosophy in Practice.

Statement of Learning Philosophy

"Students learn what they care about..." Stanford Ericksen has said, but Goethe knew something else: "In all things we learn only from those we love." Add to that Emerson's declaration: "the secret of education lies in respecting the pupil." and we have a formula something like this: "Students learn what they care about, from people they care about and who, they know, care about them..."
Barbara Harrell Carson, 1996, Thirty Years of Stories

People learn when they have a reason to learn—no matter what the reason. Different individuals might have different motivations, or they might have the same motivation at different levels. The only motivation I can change is my own. If I am not enthusiastic about what I am teaching, how can I expect anyone to be excited about the content? Out of respect for the learners, I need to wear my passion for my teaching and my discipline on my sleeve. In the same way that individuals differ in motivation, every individual will have idiosyncratic learning preferences, a factor that I must recognise and respect. Respect for differing learning needs means using a variety of learning activities and multiple forms of assessment. Learners asked to do more work will accept that challenge if they understand why and if they feel that I am concerned about their success in my course and elsewhere. Respecting learners includes respecting their right to determine for themselves what constitutes acceptable performance.

Respect also means making my expectations as clear as possible so that students can make informed choices about the level of effort required, the amount of time to allocate, and the expected outcomes. Respect means publishing grading criteria and schemes as part of all assignments and trying to be as specific as possible when designing

assignments or essay exam questions. My concern is that learners have the opportunity to determine their own acceptable performance levels against the clearly set criteria. Communicating to novice TAs and new faculty members the importance of having clear criteria (and the goal posts must never move) is sometimes difficult, especially if they have already encountered the full range of student performance. Often, novice teachers will attribute to ability (or the lack thereof) what they could, more respectfully, attribute to motivation (or the lack thereof) or the learner's expectations.

Both learning and teaching require great courage—the courage to admit ignorance. As a teacher, I must model integrity and a willingness to risk—risk is the doorway to learning. A learning place created with integrity will encourage risk-taking and the creation of new knowledge. Sharing in the exploration of content and the creation of new knowledge makes the whole enterprise exciting for everyone. Learning should be fun—an ideal captured by my borrowed, oft quoted phrase 'where there is laughter, there is learning.' The exploration must be guided by the principles of openness, inclusion, fairness and respect. The exploration must have clear goals. Mutual respect grows when rooted in the integrity of individuals engaged in learning together. Learners very quickly learn how much passion we teachers have for our discipline, how motivated we are to help them learn, and what values, attitude, and integrity we bring to our teaching.

Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another,
it is the only means. *Albert Einstein*

As a teacher or facilitator, my first goal is to create a place for learning. This requires that I be open, genuine and human. I must model what I value. I must value both curiosity and confusion—both are doors to learning. I must challenge, frustrate, and irritate the complacent, so the doors to learning can open. If I do all of these things with respect for the individuals, then I might spark the motivation that will carry the learner well beyond my limited influence.

Learning Philosophy in Practice

I have said that I am responsible for my own motivation and enthusiasm. Students acknowledge my enthusiasm in the comments they make on my teaching evaluations. I have said that I think learning should be fun—again my students report enjoying my class (see Appendix section A for samples of comments from evaluations). Students generally respond well to my teaching, with over 95% of students rating my teaching ability ("I would rate the instructor's teaching ability as A, B, C, D, F") as A or B. They also rate the courses I teach very positively, with about 90% of students rating the course ("I would rate this course as A, B, C, D, F") as A or B (see Appendix section B for a table summarizing my teaching and course evaluations and samples of the specific course summaries).

As I have taught progressively larger classes, I have tried to move from 'the sage on the stage' to 'the guide by the side' model of teaching. But, being the instructor for large, first-year classes (up to 450 students) is a huge challenge, both philosophically

and logistically. Much of the course content is the ‘vocabulary’ of the discipline—the necessary language and core concepts needed before students can begin to comprehend the ideas and the research. These challenges have led me to adapt to the changing roles and responsibilities, develop different strategies and try new large-class activities—sometimes with mixed success.

From these attempts, I have learned many new things—two of which are key to my motivation to improve my practice. One is that risking new things in the classroom is always worth it—students want to be part of something successful, so they will pick me up when things do not go as planned. The shared excitement when something works and the shared laughter when something *just about* works makes the whole enterprise fun for all the learners (that includes me!).

The second thing I have learned is that the larger the group, the greater the need for structure. This challenge has focused my attention on integrating all parts of the course into a unit—the large class, lab-tutorials, and the one-on-one teaching I do during office hours. To guide students as much as possible, the course syllabus and the tutorial syllabus have become very specific and complete (see Appendix section C for examples from Psyc 100 and Psyc 102). All grading criteria are published on the course website (see Appendix section C for examples) and Teaching Assistants are guided to maintain consistency across lab-tutorial sections (see Appendix section D for TA Manual example and weekly Quick Notes).

Teaching Activities

The large numbers of students and TAs pose some real challenges (see Appendix for lists of the number of Teaching Assistants supervised and the number of students in each of the courses taught or supervised and the number of students using the Intro Psyc Labs on a semester basis). In spite of, or because of, the large numbers, I have developed very extensive course WebCT components (see Appendix section E for information on how to access the Psyc 102 course WebCT for 2003-3 and samples of the class outlines and shows).

As is indicated in many of the student comments (see Appendix [section A]), I use interactive activities in all my classes, often asking for volunteers to join me at the front of the room. I use multimedia, including PowerPoint, overhead transparencies, video clips, the WWW to engage the students in learning the material. I provide samples of the types of questions students can expect on exams, specific outlines of the expectations for all assignments, and respond respectfully to repeated questions about course logistics and content (to the point of annoying some students).

A good part of my teaching activity takes place in the Intro Psyc Labs and my office. My one-to-one contact with students is very rewarding. Comments from students about my availability and approachability are particularly rewarding, with many of the comments being phrased ‘in contrast’ to their experience with other instructors. With the Introductory Psychology Program being the ‘front door’ to the discipline, I attempt to encourage

students to be proactive in seeking help and guidance. Supervising the Intro Psyc Lab during all Open Lab times (see Appendix section E for Lab Schedule) for has allowed me to maintain contact with the students and get daily feedback from students and TAs about the progress of the courses.

Professional Development Contributions

Self-knowledge is best learned, not by contemplation, but action.

Goethe

As I have developed more teaching and learning skills, I have recognized that I have an obligation to 'pass-it-on.' Many colleagues have been very supportive, giving me the opportunity to focus on developing my teaching skills. As I learn best by doing, my scholarship of teaching and learning has followed a practical path—when challenged to teach something new, I will do the background research and refine my practice until I am satisfied that I can deliver the appropriate information so that participants can turn that information into knowledge. This approach has been very successful and has resulted in invitations to conduct workshops on teaching large classes, training and managing TAs, using WebCT, and Instructional Skills Workshops (ISW) at institutions locally and nationally (see Appendix section H for my current Curriculum Vitae and Appendix section F for samples of the workshops conducted).

As a member of provincial and national organizations devoted to enhancing post-secondary teaching, I have had the opportunity to help organize conferences that focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning (see my C.V.). With the growing emphasis on the need for certification of professional development activities, training new Instructional Skills Workshop Facilitators has become a greater challenge and responsibility. As a member of the ISW Advisory Committee and a Facilitator Trainer, I feel obliged to continue my own professional development (see Appendix section F for a description of the UBC Faculty Certificate Program in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education) and to maintain very high standards when conducting the workshops at SFU and elsewhere (see Appendix section F for examples of summative feedback from participants).

My Professional Development activities are not always conducted away from the department. Supervising large numbers of novice Teaching Assistants every year has been a wonderful learning experience for me, and has given me the opportunity to guide their development as teachers. To assist them with understanding their role and the pedagogical rationale for the components of the Intro Psyc Program, I conduct, with the assistance of Dr. George Alder, an Orientation Workshop for all novice TAs (see Appendix section F for the workshop agenda). I also support any Psyc faculty members wishing to enhance their own teaching, whether it is simply the hallway conversations about maintaining grading standards, dealing with plagiarism, incorporating more multimedia components, or supporting their on-campus teaching with additional web resources. The latter often includes supporting their efforts to use WebCT. To that end, I am often an additional 'designer' in the course, so I can be of direct support when needed (see Appendix section F for a list of some of the supported courses and faculty members).

Reflections and Future Directions

With increasing enrolments and declining resources, it becomes more challenging to find ways to maintain the human connection between teacher and learner. How will I maintain my enthusiasm and love of my discipline when I have less and less contact with students? New technologies are not pedagogically neutral—often they actually increase the distance between the teacher and the learner. Several challenges seem to be facing post-secondary education across Canada and they have a direct influence my personal challenges.

I have always reflected on my teaching practice—those reflections have motivated me to pursue various Professional Development activities and to become involved in conducting workshops for others. Reflective practice for me includes more than just examining my own performance as a teacher. It includes a broad floodlight on the whole of the Psychology Program at SFU and the Intro Psyc courses as keystone features of that program. It includes teaching at the university as a whole and any initiatives by the university to enhance teaching and learning. Many of the challenges faced by post-secondary educators will require that we have a clear idea how we can respond to the challenge to best serve the needs of our students. That clarity is improved when people take the time to really examine the strengths and weaknesses inherent in any initiative that impact on the teaching and learning environments.

Applying for the Senior Lecturer position forced me to examine what teaching skills I had, and what skills I still needed to develop (see Appendix section G for an example from that job application process). Since that time, I have been more willing to reflect publicly about the successes and near misses in my teaching—even to the extent of sharing my practice at national conferences (see Appendix section G for an example of a reflective presentation at an annual STLHE conference). I have also been willing to share my insights with SFU colleagues (see Appendix section G for an Innovative Teaching presentation).

More and more, I recognize the need to be involved in larger initiatives to enhance teaching and learning. Part of my motivation for completing the UBC Faculty Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education was to gain the type of credentials that would allow me to make a more meaningful contribution to the scholarship of teaching. Many local and national initiatives need to be carefully debated to ensure their value to students and to the academy. In some cases, I have already started to contribute to debates at SFU, most recently in response to the proposed curriculum changes (see Appendix section G for my comments about the Implementation Proposals).

A Final Comment

I am a teacher first. When I am interacting with a learner—be it a first-year student or a faculty member with 30 years of experience—and I see the light come on for the learner, I know why I keep doing what I do. I hope to continue to see the light come on for many more years—and I will learn what I need to learn to help others see their lights come on.

Appendix

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NOTE: In addition to this Teaching Dossier, my Teaching Portfolio Archive
and Teaching History binders are available for review.