Teaching Philosophy

I have taught both children and university students and have grown to be an effective instructor through the application of learning theory and research to the development of my instructional practice. My experiences teaching have afforded me the opportunity to develop a personally meaningful and empirically grounded teaching philosophy. My teaching philosophy is largely based on three theories: 1) Social Cognitive (Bandura, 2001), 2) Constructivism (Dewey, 1938), and 3) Expectancy-Value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Each of these theories impacts the assignments, activities, and pedagogical techniques that I implement in my classroom. In the following, I will discuss how each theory impacts my instruction and will also provide an explicit example of an instructional technique I implement based on tenets of these theories. I will then discuss my objectives as an instructor. Finally, I conclude by stating my passion for learning and instruction.

The first theory that has a significant impact on my instruction is Social Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura (2001). Bandura stated that students learn through social interactions with others. Specifically, learning occurs when students observe the behavior of others. Important to the Social Cognitive perspective are the ideas of modeling and scaffolding. Modeling occurs when a more knowledgeable or skilled mentor demonstrates a behavior or cognitive skill for a less capable individual. Related, scaffolding occurs when the mentor provides successively less demonstration until students can perform a target task on their own.

I apply the Social Cognitive ideas of modeling and scaffolding in my own instruction. I frequently assign peer-to-peer teaching activities. For example, students work in small groups and teach each other about core course concepts. Research suggests that teaching is one of the best ways to learn (Frager & Stern, 1970). An important next step in this activity is to scaffold students' peer instruction. To avoid the development of misconceptions, I carefully mentor each small group. At first, I provide a lot of scaffolding, however, over the course of the semester I fade support as students take up the responsibility to learn effectively on their own. This activity provides students with a sense of autonomy and ownership over their own learning.

The second influential theory that impacts my instruction is Constructivism, with a particular focus on the philosophy of John Dewey. In Dewey's seminal book entitled *Experience and Education* (1938), he states that students should be active participants in their own learning. Related, Dewey suggested that students will learn most effectively if they can experience classroom content beyond school. I engage students in use, change, value or UCV discussions to facilitate out of school engagement (Heddy & Sinatra, 2013; Heddy, Sinatra, & Seli, 2013). UCV discussions are based on Pugh's (2002) work on transformative experience (TE). TE is a special kind of learning that occurs when students apply what they learn in class to their everyday experience, have their perception expanded by the concepts, and recognize their value. Transforming students' lives through instruction is an essential goal of my teaching strategy.

To begin, I assign students a task in which they choose ten class concepts and attempt to apply them to their everyday experience. For instance, while learning about academic emotions (emotions related to classroom learning) in my educational psychology course, a student may notice that they become anxious before taking math examinations. The students then bring their

examples to class to discuss how they used, changed perception, and valued the concepts. UCV discussions begin in whole group format so I can provide scaffolding and eventually transition to a less facilitated small group discussion format. In two separate studies (Heddy, Sinatra, & Seli, 2013; Heddy, Sinatra, Seli, & Mukhopadhyay, in review) I have used UCV discussion to facilitate out-of-school engagement with educational psychology concepts in college students who are considered at risk of dropping out. The results show that when students engaged with concepts outside of school positive emotions, interest, and achievement increase. Further, not only did students transfer concepts to their everyday experience but they applied them to other courses as well. The results of these studies have impacted my own teaching in that I implement UCV discussions as a method for generating student learning and motivation.

The third theory that influences my instruction is Expectancy-Value theory (EVT) as proposed by Wigfield and Eccles (2002). EVT hypothesizes that students learn when they expect success and value the material or task. For instruction to be effective, tasks must be challenging yet attainable. That is, students should believe that if they put in enough effort they will succeed. Further, students should perceive value in engaging in a task. Wigfield and Eccles proposed four types of value including intrinsic (interest), attainment (importance), utility (usefulness), and cost (resources expended). A major goal of my instruction is to assist students in recognizing the value of the concepts learned in my course.

To scaffold students' expectations for success and value for classroom concepts and tasks I engage in two activities. First, I provide constructive feedback on writing assignments with an opportunity to resubmit. This method reduces student anxiety, while allowing them to recognize and correct mistakes. They can feel more positive that they have a chance to pass the assignment while still learning a great deal in the process. Second, I explicitly teach about the everyday and long-term value of each concept during instruction through UCV discussions. Many instructors expect students to pick up the value of concepts on their own volition. Unfortunately this type of implicit instruction is ineffective. As students engage in UCV discussions they are able to share recognition of value with each other with regard to classroom concepts.

I have many objectives in the design and implementation of my instruction. First, I attempt to facilitate a student-centered classroom. As stated previously, students engage in many discussions; and activities that allows students to serve as instructors. Further, students in my class have opportunities to choose to research and discuss topics that are of personal interest. Second, I try to generate an open atmosphere, where students are comfortable to share their views. To achieve this goal I assign activities that allow students to get to know each other by sharing personal experiences. Also, I seek to engage all students and give them space to have a voice. My final goal is to continually improve my instruction through research on my own practice, reflection, and honoring student feedback. I go beyond required teacher evaluations and ask students to assess my instruction at multiple points throughout the semester.

With so much pressure to publish and seek extramural funding, quality instruction often takes a backseat to activities more likely to advance ones career. This is an unfortunate occurrence because student's career success and lifelong learning skills are directly impacted by the instruction they receive in college courses. Although I dedicate significant time to research and

funding activities, I truly have the "call to teach" and I would not consider taking a research position that did not afford me the opportunity to teach.

I work hard to ensure that my courses are beneficial and impactful for student's academic objectives, careers, and their everyday life. I am passionate about designing and implementing pedagogy that generates engagement, motivation, and develops interest. I chose to pursue an academic career in order to make an impact on students with the goal of helping them reach their aspirations.

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