

Evidence of Consistently Excellent Teaching

As a prelude to the descriptions and summary of the evidence I have presented on excellent teaching, I would like to give a brief statement concerning my teaching philosophy. In each course I have taught, I have had a general goal: **to create an atmosphere of student engagement to promote critical thinking skills for learning developmental content**. Although experts may disagree on exact definitions for critical thinking (Kaplan, 2004), critical thinking skills involve assessing the truthfulness of information, making assumptions, and using reliable information to support one's opinions and decisions. These skills require an individual to reflect on and analyze their previous background knowledge, personal experiences and beliefs. As such, the use of critical thinking skills requires that students be actively engaged with content in a particular subject. Although my student's immediate requirement each semester is to master developmental concepts, my aim is that students develop and/or enhance important critical thinking skills to aid life-long learning. These skills are essential for beginning teachers and other professionals for such tasks as reflecting on instructional practice and intervention, analyzing the impact of individual traits and contexts on performance, and the use of assessment data to inform educational practice. In short, these skills will advance my student's professional careers long after they have forgotten slight details associated with developmental research and theory.

The use of teaching practices that have focused on critical thinking skills and student engagement in my undergraduate and graduate courses has received positive ratings and feedback. **A summative report of student evaluations across all courses and sections that were given student evaluations indicated an overall rating of 4.44** (Exhibit 1). Student evaluation ratings for separate courses (EDPSY 250, 260 and 627) also have indicated overall ratings of greater than 4.0 for each course (Exhibit 2). Student comments have also consistently been positive across semesters, with student often making comments similar to **“great teacher,” “best professor I ever had,” and “made class fun and interesting”** (Exhibit 3). Because I have consistently taught EDPSY 260 (Human Growth and Development for Elementary Education Majors) each semester since fall of 2001, various colleagues in my department have observed my EDPSY 260 class once a year for four years. **Peer ratings for a general impression of the instructor for each year were 5.0, with 5.0 being the highest possible rating** (Exhibit 4). Narratives from such evaluations also demonstrate that my classroom has an engaging atmosphere, with active participation expected for all students. Although student evaluations were not collected for students enrolled in EDPSY 251 in the spring of 2005, a chair evaluation indicated positive feedback for my instruction in this course (Exhibit 5). These comments also illustrate the level of active engagement from my students during class.

Overall, I have taught four courses at Ball State University: EDPSY 250 (3 sections), EDPSY 260 (17 sections), EDPSY 251 (2 sections), EDPSY 627 (2 sections) and EDPSY 720 (1 section). Because of this, most of this summary and presented evidence will focus on EDPSY 260. However, I maintain my emphasis on student engagement and critical thinking skills across each course and often use similar

assignments and activities to promote learning (discussion, debates, interviews, surveys, in-class activities, etc). As I reflect on previous courses that I taught before my current position at Ball State University (i.e., University of Miami, Miami University), I am particularly proud of the quality of my instruction in my current undergraduate courses. I know that the quality of my instruction as well as my demeanor with students has improved dramatically since coming to Ball State University. Moreover, I believe that my instruction has continued to improve over the past four years. Comparisons of student evaluations for EDPSY 260 demonstrate that student's ratings of my EDPSY 260 class increased from fall 2001 to fall 2004 (Exhibit 6). Although one might expect ratings for any instructor to increase over time, this comparison reflects my own efforts to modify my course instruction and assignments and confirms my own feelings that my instruction has improved over the past four years.

Critical Thinking Skills

Papers to Digital Mini Projects in EPPSY 260

My focus on critical thinking skills has led to different types of instructional practices and assignments over the past four years (Exhibit 7). Each semester I have required EDPSY 260 and 250 students to complete at least three assignments outside of exams and quizzes. These papers have focused on student's use of research and theory to support their opinions. One semester, students read two articles taking opposite sides of a current issue in child development and then focused their papers on their opinion and the information that shaped their opinion. On the day that these papers were due, we had a debate about the issue. Another semester, students read one article on a controversial topic (e.g., spanking) and then stated their opinions with supporting evidence from the article. On the day these papers were due, we had a discussion period. These assignments focused on students *learning how to assess information and use that information to support their opinions*. Because I teach mainly freshman and sophomores, students appear more comfortable and engaged in debates and discussions in class when they have a prior writing assignment about the issue.

To increase the use of technology in my course, I have modified the three papers assignment described above to three mini projects (Exhibit 8). The purpose of this assignment is to *analyze information to make assumptions about applications in different settings*. This modification is also a deliberate attempt to provide student's choices about the topic of their assignment as well as the format. Student completed three mini projects and for each project, they are given three choices about topic and format (Exhibit 9). Thus, students could chose assignments based on strengthens (e.g., design, observe, interview, experiment, and/or analyze) and/or interests. All mini project choices involved the application of class content to a particular setting and/or activity and required the use of technology. I was extremely pleased with the quality of projects as well as impressed with my student's incorporation of technology (Exhibit 10). I plan to continue this assignment in future semesters.

Group presentations to Digital poster presentations in EPPSY 260

Each semester I have required a final presentation on a particular topic of child development. This final project has taken two forms over the past four years (Exhibit 7).

For several years, I required student groups to research and report on a particular topic in child development. Using this format, students worked in a collaborative fashion to report in depth on a particular topic, with about five to six topics presented each semester.

To encourage students to create digital artifacts for their electronic portfolio, I modified this assignment. Currently, I require students to create a Digital Poster Presentation (Exhibit 11). Students chose a topic in child development that they are interested in and are required to prepare a PowerPoint presentation on that topic. Although students must present some information on general development related to their topic, *they also are required to present factors related to development, unique patterns of development, the impact on education, make connections to other areas of development, and propose potential solutions such as a suggested intervention, change in school practices, and/or teaching methods.* I have been impressed with the level of thinking and ideas generated for these presentations (Exhibit 12). In addition, approximately 10 to 12 presentations occur simultaneously on three days, allowing for students to obtain in depth information for around 30 child development topics compared to only five or six topics. Moreover, students are encouraged to ask questions; thus, there is still an element of students interacting together to analyze information about child development.

Students in EDPSY 251 are also required to complete both a paper and a digital poster presentation to link developmental research and theory to INTASC standards and instructional practice (Exhibit 13). For these assignments, students must reflect on how developmental content might inform their teaching practices. That is, students must *make assumptions about anticipated student behaviors and performance and make decisions about instructional practice based on developmental research and theory* (Exhibit 14).

In summary, the three projects as well as the digital poster presentations focus on the use of critical thinking skills to master concepts in child development. Student engagement is enhanced because of greater student choice for assignment topics and interactive presentations formats.

Student Engagement

In my EDPSY 251 course last semester, student's comments on the Blackboard discussion board and in-class conversations about the Conceptual Framework revealed that students felt that *engagement* was the most important of the three themes. I mentioned earlier that my general goal for each course is to create an atmosphere of student engagement to promote critical thinking skills for learning developmental content. Individual student comments (Exhibit 3) and peer and chair teaching evaluations (Exhibit 4 and 5) demonstrate that I have been successful in creating such a classroom environment. In general, I use multiple presentation methods, concrete examples, hands on activities, debates, discussions, and assignments that required reflection on previous experiences. I also believe that my teaching practices to promote engagement will serve as a role model for future teachers.

Debates and Discussions

One technique that I use to promote engagement is to ask student's opinions and beliefs about controversial issues related to topics in child development (e.g., cloning – prenatal development, spanking – social / emotional development, dress codes - identity).

On each day assignments were due, the class engaged in either a debate or open discussion (Exhibit 7). By focusing the discussion on their opinions, information about the topic is more meaningful and serves as a basis to differentiate myths and research findings. In addition, an important part of analyzing information for oneself is to hear the opinions and beliefs of other people. The process of analyzing perspectives on issues that are different from your own likely facilitates learning.

Activities

I often use activities during class to demonstrate developmental concepts. These activities may involve having students role play as young children with toys, acting like parents, conducting surveys, emailing other students (known to be out of class!) and asking their opinion or interviewing each other about questions related to child development (Exhibit 4). In Adolescent Development (EDPSY 251), I often introduce a topic with an activity that makes students reflect on their own experiences (e.g., identity questionnaire, graphs of peer groups, etc). In particular, I have one activity for EDPSY 260 that involves tasks that mirror what it would feel like to have a learning disability. After the activity, we discuss characteristics associated with learning disabilities. About once a year, a student will email me and ask about those tasks for use in another class. Obviously, this experience stuck out in their minds. It is also likely that students retained the information about characteristics associated with learning disabilities. The use of such activities promotes engagement as well as provides a basis for developmental content.

Experiential Learning

I really enjoy teaching the graduate course, Child Development (EDPSY 627). Most graduate students have had experiences outside of the classroom with children and adults in different fields to link to developmental research and theory. As such, I use a seminar style format in this course, with class participation as part of the course grade (Exhibit 15). Student ratings for this course have been positive (Exhibit 2). Because personal experiences with children and adults in different settings provides a basis for critical thinking about developmental research and theory, I have written and submitted a new course form this fall, *Service Learning with Child, Adults and Families*, for students obtaining a Minor in Human Development in our department (Exhibit 16). I am extremely excited about the possibility of offering a service-learning course that focuses on developmental psychology. Students will be placed with local agencies in the Muncie/ Delaware County community and work directly with children, adults, families, and/or older adults. Classroom and/or online instruction will focus on life-span developmental content and analysis of ongoing field-based experiences. For this course, I will coordinate student placements through Student Volunteer Services on campus. It is my hope that I will teach with course in the fall of 2006.

Professional Growth

In summary, I am proud of my teaching accomplishments. Student evaluation ratings and peer/chair evaluations demonstrate my consistently excellent teaching. Formal professional development opportunities have also contributed to my teaching. I

have presented at the Midwest Association of Teachers of Educational Psychology for three years and benefited immensely from presentations and discussions concerning teaching educational psychology courses (Exhibit 17). I also attended several seminars for the Office of Teaching and Learning Advancement in my first year at Ball State University (Exhibit 18). Most importantly, I attribute my continued excellent teaching to my interactions, observations and conversations with other faculty. Every time I observe a class, review a website or talk with other faculty about instruction, I am inspired to reflect on and improve my teaching.