

The main principle of my pedagogical philosophy is that student engagement with ideas, with peers, and with the community creates the conditions for students to acquire deep understanding. I conceptualize student engagement as students' cognitive and emotional investment in their learning that increases their motivation to be active participants in the classroom and the local community. My teaching philosophy grew out of my experiences as a college instructor, my work as an instructional and assessment consultant at The Schreyer Institute of Teaching Excellence, and my studies in educational psychology, which have helped me to become aware of the importance of student engagement for learning in college.

I embrace Vygotsky's idea that language is a cognitive tool that allows learners to communicate and engage in higher order thinking such as problem solving. My primary goal when I teach general education classes in educational psychology is for students to acquire the basic vocabulary of the discipline and be able to apply concepts and principles in their practice. In order to engage students with the basic concepts and issues of debate in developmental and educational psychology, I conduct interactive lectures, in which I implement techniques to reach students from varied backgrounds (e.g., kinesiology and education majors). For example, I show videos recorded in research labs to illustrate concepts such as the different types of attachment between a mother and a toddler. I also provide students the opportunity to review these concepts by filling in a digital crossword with important terms before taking a test, and by generating and sharing with peers examples and cases that illustrate important concepts. However, a basic understanding of concepts and principles is not sufficient for future practitioners who plan to work with infants, children and adolescents. The learning goal for my students is to apply this conceptual knowledge in contexts outside the class.

Teaching has to enable students to transfer their knowledge about child development and educational psychology to make informed decisions in their workplace and family setting. My students have commented on how they enjoyed learning about child development and the value that such knowledge has for teaching and parenting. Thus, to facilitate transfer I embed case studies and scenarios in the lectures. For example, I have presented students with various peer conflict cases and I asked them to project and explain how children with strong and weak social skills would respond differentially. In another instance, I asked students to create a toy collection for a specific day care center by selecting developmentally appropriate toys for infants and toddlers from a commercial website. Interactive lectures encourage my students to be reflective and use the terms of the discipline to communicate, to make connections, to compare and contrast, and to put their personal experiences of growing up and learning in context. Interactive lectures prepare students more effectively for multiple choice exams that include

both items in which students have to define or identify concepts and higher order thinking items in which students are asked to make a decision about a scenario or a case.

I believe that collaborative work with peers promotes deep learning. I apply a problem-based approach that engages students with their peers in small groups to solve authentic and meaningful problems. In groups, students negotiate meaning, co-construct understanding, argue about and explain their reasoning in order to reach consensus, evaluate alternative perspectives, and solve problems. A typical example of a group outcome includes developing informational sources for parents, teachers, social workers or other professionals involved with infants, children, and adolescents. For instance, my students created a pamphlet to distribute in elementary schools about the role of schools in preventing childhood obesity, along with specific suggestions for promoting a healthier lifestyle. In addition, I assign optional collaborative homework assignments that allow students to work together outside of the classroom. As an example, students designed a brochure for young parents to inform them about how children's play evolves and how they can create richer play time experiences for their children that support cognitive and social development. Such collaborative activities encourage students to clarify, elaborate and organize ideas and theoretical principles and communicate them to a less experienced audience, such as new parents.

Setting high expectations for students in my classes encourages them to be cognitively engaged in the classroom. I strive to communicate to my students that they have the potential to improve their critical thinking, and I provide them with opportunities to practice these skills both via collaborative activities and individual assignments. Students practice critical thinking in small groups when they discuss topics that require them to generate pros and cons such as thinking about the benefits and drawbacks of child-organized games vs. adult organized sports, or compare and contrast the consequences of tracking students vs. grouping students based on their school performance. Another individual project that aimed to develop critical thinking skills asked students to take the role of a school board member and review an intervention implemented in a school (e.g., bullying, social problem solving), examine the goals of the intervention, determine the degree to which the intervention involved children, parents, teachers and the community, and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. To further support critical thinking skills, I incorporate empirical research from the fields of child development and educational psychology. For example, I assign readings from journals and excerpts from APA press releases written at an appropriate difficulty level to ensure comprehension and allow students to engage the readings critically and analytically.

Student engagement with the community extends the learning community outside the classroom and creates opportunities for experiential learning and community service. Having students involved with the local community in contexts where infants, children, adolescents develop and learn helps them contextualize what they are learning in the classroom. Students have commented on the value of experiences such as visiting a campus child care center to interview children of different ages about who they consider to be their friend and why. In the future, I will plan additional opportunities for students to get involved with the local community and their population of interest, including attending children's programs in libraries and participating in parent support group meetings.

Through my teaching I aim to engage students with ideas, their peers, and the community. I believe this pedagogical approach has helped my students to learn and think deeply about their own life course, the sources of resilience in their lives, and the individuals and communities that helped them become who they are. The ultimate learning goal for my students is to acquire the knowledge that will inspire and commit them in advocating for young people, both as college students, and later as professionals in different fields.