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II. STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

"In psychology…, we have wholes which, instead of being the sum of parts existing independently, give their parts specific functions or properties that can only be defined in relation to the whole in question."
Wolfgang Köhler

The above quote from a Gestalt theorist embodies what has become the core of my teaching philosophy: the importance of understanding the whole-part relationship over studying parts in isolation. As a lifespan developmental psychologist, I am trained to be mindful of the "big picture." I consider not only the current contexts in which individuals live, but also the past and the broader cultural and historical factors that shape people's lives. My commitment to understanding this "bigger picture" is reflected in my teaching in a variety of ways: first, in the learning goals I set for my students (specifically, at the course-specific level, the content-specific level, and the broader level of skills learning); second, in the way I view my relationship with my students and their relationships with each other; and third, in my own growth and future goals as a teacher.

At the most basic, course-specific level, I want my students to understand how the different components of a single course only make sense in light of the course as a whole. To meet this teaching goal, I make a concerted effort in my classes to connect chapters, lectures, and assignments. For instance, the ultimate objective of the advanced research methods course that I taught was for students to be able to write a complete research paper. In the class, the students had two major assignments, both of which required them to engage only in specific parts of the research process (one, data collection and results interpretation, and the other, hypothesis formation and methods development). In order to help them elucidate the goal of the course, throughout the semester I asked my students to consider the purpose of the two assignments and how they were intricately linked.

At the content-specific level, I want my students to understand the big picture of psychology. In order to help them achieve this goal, I encourage them to interpret real-life experiences through the lens of psychology. For instance, in my discussion sections of Introduction to Developmental Psychology, I challenged my students to consider how the developmentally-relevant phenomena we were addressing, such as identity-formation during adolescence, played out in their own lives and helped shape them as individuals. I also brought

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in relevant articles from the popular press to spark discussions of real-world events from a developmental psychology perspective. I believe that contextualizing the material in such ways leads to greater actual integration and recollection.

At the most abstract but what I view as the most important level, I want my students to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Several examples illustrate my commitment to strengthening students' ability to think critically. In my research methods class, students were required to critically evaluate several research articles. I encouraged them to move beyond superficial critiques, such as writing style problems or small sample sizes, and to focus instead on deeper issues, such as mismatch between hypotheses and methods or discrepancies between the data presented and the authors' interpretations. In keeping with one of the basic tenets of Gestalt psychology, that learning occurs through restructuring and insight, I also encouraged students to think critically about their own work and the work of their classmates, by allowing students to revise drafts of assignments and by requiring peer review. These kinds of critical thinking skills are essential beyond the boundaries of the classroom. To illustrate the applicability of these skills, I have utilized a number of in-class activities. For example, I designed a fun and engaging activity for the last day of the research methods class. Students were required to use the skills they had learned throughout the semester in a unique way that forced them to think critically and "outside the box" of psychology. They were asked to devise a research study (complete with research questions, hypotheses, an analysis plan, results, conclusions, and limitations) based on an amusing and randomly-assigned phenomenon (such as "Red States vs. Blue States") and population (such as "superheroes"). These activities help train students to think critically not only about psychology but also about the world around them.

In addition to learning goals, I also place great importance on my relationship with my students and their relationships with each other. Psychology, of all disciplines, should be taught with the whole person in mind. To this end, I strive to get to know my students as individuals with unique life stories, motivations, and goals. I start by providing an information sheet for students to fill out on the first day of class to learn about students' experiences in psychology, their learning styles, their career aspirations, and any special constraints or issues involved in their participation in the class. I try to be as flexible as possible: for instance, by carefully considering my materials and modifying them accordingly for students with disabilities, or by teaching in a variety of styles (lectures, group work, etc.) to suit different learning needs. I

encourage students to come to my office hours so I can meet them individually. By being enthusiastic, open-minded, friendly, and humorous, I create a warm, open, and safe environment both in my classroom and outside of it. Such an environment allows students to freely communicate, feel respected, take intellectual risks, and safely question their assumptions. To further foster a truly inclusive learning environment, I believe it is also necessary for students to see *each other and me* as "wholes," rather than as the sum of parts: "Asian," "male," "heterosexual," "African American," "student," "female," "teacher." Thus, I frequently use group and pair work to promote interactions among students, and strategically utilize discussions and activities to emphasize the universality and diversity of our collective life experiences. Finally, from the beginning of a course I make it clear to my students that in assessing their success in meeting the objectives of that specific course, I consider more than simply the sum of various mechanical "parts" (e.g., paper grades); rather, I also reflect on the individual as a whole, with particular attention paid to effort and improvement across the course.

Furthermore, I am mindful of my growth as a teacher as I consider the "big picture" of my own teaching. In addition to teaching Introduction to Developmental Psychology, I have had the benefit of teaching a research methods course for three semesters. Thus, I have been able to reflect on what works and what doesn't from semester to semester. For example, based on student feedback, I have increased the use of visual aids in my classroom, such as Power Point presentations, and have attempted to keep groups of students relatively small (2 – 4).

My future goals as a teacher also reflect the importance I place on the big picture. Specifically, I hope to one day develop a course with a community service component, in which my students are encouraged to interact with a variety of populations (such as young children or elderly individuals). This will make studying psychology and human development more personal and meaningful for the students, and will emphasize the role that psychologists can play in the larger world.

Although only a small percentage of my students will pursue a career in psychology, I hope that for all of my students, the skills developed, the relationships created, and the assumptions questioned in my classes become integral parts of the "whole" of their lives.