Teaching Philosophy

Throughout my time here at NC State I have had a number of excellent opportunities to develop, assess, and refine my teaching philosophy. I was fortunate enough to have taught three semesters of our upper level PSY 470: Abnormal Psychology and an additional three semesters of PSY 420: Cognitive Psychology. Outside of those appointments as a primary instructor, I was a guest lecturer and a teaching assistant under Dr. Gillan for our undergraduate course in human factors. Through these experiences, I was able to develop a teaching philosophy that heavily encouraged critical analysis and application. Students should look beyond the classroom to find ways to integrate the abstract course material with their own interests and into their daily lives. In doing so, students gain a deeper understanding of what is being taught and also a motivation to continue learning as they see the tangible impact it can make.

My first belief is in the importance of critical analysis. By encouraging students to analyze the material in order to make connections they will internalize the information to a greater extent increasing the potential long term retention. My course long project for Abnormal Psychology exemplifies this well. Students were required to choose a character (real or fictional) and make an argument for a potential diagnosis based on what the students learned about a disorder's presentation and casualty. The assignment required students to outline their character's case history and analyze it for potential factors that could contribute to the development of their disorder. Students also needed to articulate the symptoms their character showcased, comparing those symptoms to the DSM-V criteria for the disorder. This assignment helps take the abstract concept of a disorder from class and critically analyze its components to make a compelling argument for their character's diagnosis. The next phase of the assignment was for students to conduct a scientific literature review on their character's disorder and provide a practical recommendation for their character based on the findings. This allowed them to seek their own knowledge fostering a sense of discovery which I believe increases their learning. Students then needed to analyze that new information to relate it back to their character strengthening their retention as they make connections between the new material and a solid foundation of knowledge started at the beginning of the semester. Throughout this whole process I am providing feedback and insight the students may be overlooking that would help their argument for their character's disorder. This back and forth is a vital piece for the success of critical analysis as a tool for learning.

My second belief is in students applying course material to their own lives in order to see the real world impact. By doing so, students will gain a deeper connection to the material and an increased motivation to attend class. This was especially relevant when I taught Cognitive Psychology. I would have students participate in a replication of the studies being discussed in order for them to understand how the psychologist came to their conclusions. This inevitably lead to a discussion afterward on if the students could see where the phenomenon occurred

outside the laboratory. In addition to participating in experiments, the topic of memory is vital for students to apply in order to create better study strategies. I often had students get in groups and discuss what they could be doing better in prepping for exams based on the information we just learned. To solidify this, after each exam, I would be sure to lead a discussion asking students if they had used the study strategies and seen any benefits. I usually got agreement from students on the study strategies' success and it encouraged others to apply this knowledge as well. By doing this sort of check I can help students see how applying course information is beneficial not only for the current class but for all others as well. Part of this approach is not being afraid to let a lesson day take a natural discussion down a tangential road. Students will often bring up their own interests and explore scenarios where they can see the concepts in action. I've seen students get more excited about the content and click with the material on a deeper level by letting these "tangents" occur.

Finally, a portion of my teaching experience has also occurred beyond the classroom. One way is through the mentorship of undergraduate research assistants (RAs). I use these same principles from my courses to support the growth of bright students interested in pursuing research. All of my RAs have had little to no experience conducting research and most say I am their first opportunity to learn. I train them through the tasks of research idea generation, literature reviews, writing a research proposal, the importance of a standard operating procedure, data entry and cleaning, statistical analysis, result interpretation, and finally how to do a write up for publication. I can happily say that after my time with them often they are able to lead their own research studies. One in particular even presented their work at a national conference. Another way I've taught outside the classroom is by leading instructional sessions on Human Factors at my place of work. I have led multiple one hour long sessions outlining the principles, benefits, and strategies for implementing Human Factors within their own software development teams. For many professionals at my institution, I am the first person to inform them of what Human Factors is. The beliefs I developed from teaching in the classroom have helped create successful learning sessions for my coworkers leading to a better working process.