

## **An Educational Psychology Curriculum Designed to Foster Effective Teaching**

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Nearly every preservice teacher studies educational psychology and most experience a survey course taught much in the style of "introduction to psychology" courses. This paper details a different approach to the curriculum, methodology and evaluation of "ed. psych." The curriculum has a limited number of focal points and a clinical dimension; the methods of instruction are varied and interactive in tone; and the evaluation scheme is diversified and de-emphasizes instructor subjectivity. The course has been tested in the field and is one part of a reconceptualized curriculum for teacher education. "An Educational Psychology Curriculum Designed to Foster Effective Teaching."

Preservice teachers expect a great deal from their educational psychology course and they do not always get it. They expect ed. psych. to convey theory which is readily adapted to classroom practice. It is in this course that the future teacher expects to find ideas on "how to maintain classroom discipline"; on "how to treat the 'special' student"; on "how to adapt teaching to human development"; on "how to teach for transfer and retention"; on "how to grade fairly"; and so on. Perhaps such high and varied expectations doom the curricularist, perhaps not. It is clear, however, that the typical educational psychology curriculum does not come to grips with the valid needs and expectations of the students it is to serve.

Ed. psych. is virtually a universal requirement in teacher education curricula. It is the one course which nearly all colleges of education and teaching majors have in common. The aggressive competition in textbooks for this course by publishers

bears witness to this fact. Unfortunately, the universal course is taught in a universally disappointing and ineffective manner: ed. psych. has typically become a pure theory course, removed from experience, and linked to a massive survey textbook. The instructional technique employed is typically "lecture" and the main objective of the course emerges as "the student should be able to identify several dozen theorists, the theories with which they are associated, and an equal number of terms drawn from the field of educational psychology." One error is to remove the course from the realm of practical experience; and a second error is to teach this large and diversified body of theory in a survey mode. The students learn neither to bring psychology into their classrooms, nor to comprehend some theoretical knowledge in depth.

Only one theoretical viewpoint receives enough recurring attention in the "typical" ed. psych. course to conceivably become well-understood and a practical resource available to the emerging teacher. This is, of course, the point of view known as behaviorism. The curriculum proposed in this paper is designed to avoid the pitfalls of excessive abstraction and encyclopedic survey; and not to be wed to the behaviorist stance.

In the way of an introduction, then, we have an introduction, then, we have set about slaughtering three "sacred cows": abstraction, survey and behaviorism as biases in curriculum design for this course.

Therefore, it is necessary to propose another conceptualization of ed. psych. and what follows is intended to be this improved alternative as it has been taught at one American college over a period of two years. The course is based on the proposition that teachers must acquire specific professional skills – metaphorically we call them "tools" – and an understanding of how and when to employ these skills, and that educational psychology is the course most central to this aspect of teacher education. In ed. psych. the students should develop the professional attitude necessary to support the acquisition later of specialized abilities in instructional methodology and curriculum development when the development of these abilities requires the teacher to be versed in psychology.

### **Curriculum Theory Assumptions**

The curriculum described herein is designed with certain principles in mind. They should be identified so the curricularist's point of view is clear.

*Content* should be historically grounded. There should be a sense of the historical development of an idea as it is presented to the learner. Too often students are given the impression that every idea of value has been conceived

recently whereas a more accurate appraisal might be that mankind continues to re-invent the (theoretical) wheel without being able to put it into use (practice). Students are led to the inaccurate conclusion that progress has been slow in education because our ideas were benighted, while actually the real challenge is how to implement the insights which have been in the literature since Socrates' time.

The use of primary source material for curricular content has other benefits. There is an innate motivation which is stirred in students who are presented with books they have heard of by authors whose names they recognize. Students see an opportunity to resolve the mystery of a reference they have encountered many times but never understood.

Content should be concise and pointed with ready access to supplemental material. Students should not be swamped in massive reading assignments, but should read and study a limited amount well. Publishers may know that a large book carries a large price tag, but curricularists realize that good editing is what turns raw information into a curriculum for learning.

Content should be attractive, well-designed graphically, and illustrated. It must arouse interest in the student and appeal to his or her aesthetic sense. The economics of publishing are not identical with ideals of curriculum design. In the latest edition of Brubacher's *History of the Problems of Education* all the illustrations have been deleted. Would anyone suggest that this was done to facilitate teaching and learning?

*Instructional methodology* should be based on several ideas. Instruction should be mediated, both as a model of how to use educational media and for the enhancing effect media have on instruction when they are well-integrated with content. Films, transparencies, and video-tape are all integral to proper instruction in this course.

Instruction should be interactive. In the education of teachers, the students' ability to express themselves orally on professional matters is vital. Furthermore, interaction fosters motivation and retention. Interactive methods include group work, micro-teaching, and simulation, as well as discussion and question-and-answer. Practical experiences must be included in instruction, not merely talk. The bridge between theory and practice is otherwise not constructed. Such experiences are embodied in simulations, field work, and clinical activities (as in the application of tests and measures). "People learn only what they experience. On that learning which is related to active purposes and is rooted in experience translates itself into behavior changes."<sup>(1)</sup>

*Evaluation* must be diversified as well as equitable. Probably, given student diversity, the two are inseparable. To a large extent "we teach what we test" because of the centrality of grades in student life. Other reforms are futile if they are not reflected in evaluation. Diversified evaluation includes not only the familiar objective tests and quizzes but also student-to-student peer evaluation (as by rating scales), self-evaluation, mastery activities, open book examinations, and so on. The one technique which it is appropriate to eliminate is the highly subjective, instructor-evaluated essay or "classroom performance." There are more effective means by which evaluation can be made – and means which are more likely to be fair.

These ideas outline the theoretical framework in which the course described herein has been developed. The specific features of the course, which follow, demonstrate how these values were brought to the classroom.

### Course Goals

Predictably, the course is intended to *introduce basic concepts* to preservice teachers in the traditional educational psychology sub-fields of learning theory, development, evaluation and motivation. The language and points of view of selected theorists are introduced to students in a manner intended to emphasize the root assumptions of the theorists so that the learner is equipped to progress from mere comprehension of the theories to an analysis of their common and disparate elements and a desire to synthesize the learner's own professional opinion. As a theory is discussed certain questions are always raised, for example: "What is the nature of knowledge to this theorist?"; "What is his or her view of the nature of mankind?"

A second course goal, again cognitive in nature, is the illustration of the historical evolution of theory in each topic area. In working toward this, the gap between theory and implementation is made obvious, drawing forth a discussion of the value and uses of theory. The narrowmindedness of much current practice is also considered in light of the breadth of thought available from the unassimilated wisdom of many historical figures in the field. Students become curious about the mechanism of change and, perhaps, are made to realize the necessity of intellectual involvement on the part of the classroom teacher if progress is to supplant lethargic repetitiveness.

With a similar effect in mind a third course goal is the demonstration of *how to transfer theory into practice*. Achieving this aim may not be as difficult a task as is often claimed since, most often, it is not attempted and any failure here is the consequent of neglect. Truthfully, overall, education is pre-Socratic in its implementation of pedagogy. There is clearly some factor acting against change and

in favor of the rote-and lecture-based classroom experience which has for so long been the norm. Ignorance has played a part, and lethargy. Authoritarianism is a factor. In any case, without explicit effort in this area, classroom teaching is not likely to improve.

A fourth general goal, and one which involves skill acquisition, is the *presentation of tests and measures and interaction analysis systems* for use by teachers. Ed. psych. is not considered to be the course in which we introduce educational media skills, which are, however, parallel to tests' and measures' competencies in their level of abstraction and position in the teacher's pool of techniques. These objective resources are included in the ed. psych. curriculum to facilitate the transition from theory to practice and to give some concrete footing in the phenomenal and fleeting fields of aptitude appraisal and instructional interaction. Although the comprehensiveness and validity of such instruments and techniques must not be exaggerated, they have a unique and useful place in the course design.

A final goal, affective in nature, is a conscious part of the curriculum design. The course is intended to draw forth in preservice teachers the ability and inclination to act from *reflection on professional values* and not to react to their students in an instinctive or ego-centric way. The importance of such a fundamental psychological shift cannot be overestimated. It is precisely the kind of change which separates professionals from others in the classic sense of professionalism. One of the main sources of teachers' frustration is the inability to separate their own feelings from the practice of their profession when such an act is appropriate and necessary. The naive, "natural" attitude teachers often carry to their classrooms frequently undermines their effectiveness and their job satisfaction. Ironically, it is an attitude which is relatively easy to reshape in contrast to the difficulty it causes.

These five represent the general goals of the curriculum outlined here. In describing specific content and methods they will be referred to for continuity and emphasis.

### The Course Curriculum

Our initial unit is an abbreviated one which is used to acquaint the students with the procedures of the course while at the same time presenting a current topic of special interest. By presenting a short unit at the start of the course the instructor can be sure that the students understand the modes of instruction and evaluation before they have lost weeks of time by responding to the course in an inappropriate manner. Typically, this unit has been centered on "*special education*," a topic of rising interest to all teachers because of the "mainstreaming" trend of recent years. A journal issue dedicated to this theme makes up the written curricu-

lum. The topic is a good one to supplement with a film. Other special interest topics which would be appropriate in this place in the course include: "the teaching of reading," "classroom discipline," or "computer-assisted instruction," to name three.

Since this ed. psych. course is integrated with a program of clinical and/or field experiences, the special education unit classroom work is supported by a visit by the students to a special education classroom and a talk with the teacher there. Back at the college the students complete an observer form of the "Jesness Behavior Checklist"<sup>(2)</sup> which isolates categories of asocial behavior for an individual student who has been observed by the preservice teacher in a previous field experience, or in private life. By use of reading, discussion, field interview and a standardized instrument the preservice teachers may create for themselves a broadly-conceived view of the field for special education. Particular emphasis is given to the emerging vocabulary of this field which has become vital to classroom teachers.

The second unit, a full one, is organized around one of the classic educational psychology themes: "*motivation*". The focus of the written curriculum for this unit is the structure and dynamics of the psyche as developed by C.G. Jung. Motivation is, at best, an elusive quality and one which we hope preservice teachers may engender. To help arouse motivation for the ed. psych. class itself, the topic is brought up early in the course.

Most approaches to the subject are notably without impact, probably because they treat motivation only on a superficial plane. Dealing with a deep-seated phenomenon such as this in a superficial manner satisfies no-one and misleads many. Motivation must be grasped through a comprehension of the archetypes of human experience. The concept of "self-realization" is central among these and the phenomenologist's notion of "intentionality." Ideas such as these can be made accessible to undergraduates through use of Jung's schematically illustrated description of the human psyche.

Aided by illustrations the instructor can translate the theory of analytical psychology into an appropriate curricular segment. It is helpful to support these theoretical discussions with the administration to the class of the "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator" which, based on Jung's *Psychological Types*, places the student's own psychological profile in the context of the theory. Furthermore, the "Type Indicator" is supported by a wealth of research data which discusses the background, aspirations and idiosyncrasies of each "type" person. In several ways, then, highly abstract, yet fundamental, notions are "concretized" and made suitable for the teacher education student.

Through this approach to teaching about motivation, concepts like "interest"

and "reward" are given foundational background. The need for concreteness and activity in learning experiences is also explained with an eye to the psychological sources of behavior. In this unit Maslow's psychology of self-actualization is also introduced as a theory supportive of Jung's main insights. Behaviorist views are deliberately not included here, however, from the belief that their reductionist approach to the issue is misleading. In our view, motivation should be attended to with depth of understanding, or left untouched. Students should actually be motivated in the best sense of the word, not manipulated as if by advertisers.

The third unit is centered on the theme "*development*", and the work of Rousseau, Piaget and Erikson is emphasized. Students read excerpts from the *Emile* accompanied by study questions to help them identify key ideas. Rousseau's recapitulation view of development has proven to be a fitting way to initiate discussion on the topic of development both for its historical importance and because of the provocative stance Rousseau takes on subjects like reading, city life, discipline and women's education. Some of Rousseau's ideas are apparently outrageous while others have the air of genius. In all, students are drawn to a contemplation of their own views by Rousseau's brilliance and his radical positions. The *Emile* may be in error on many points in the view of modern educators. Perhaps these authorities are correct and Rousseau is wrong. To the curricularist there is a larger truth: Rousseau provokes interest and discussion and outlines the general concept of development. Here we have a clear example of the variance between "knowledge" and "curriculum": curriculum is content which induces the acquisition of knowledge, it is not necessarily knowledge in its purest form. One may question certain of Rousseau's claims, but it is difficult to fault him as a gadfly who focuses attention on issues of central importance. On the other hand, many of his claims about development have only gained credibility with the passage of time.

The remaining literature of the unit centers on the writings of Piaget and Erikson. Piaget's work lends itself well to the use of concrete illustration in the form of his famous experiments. His special vocabulary when combined with the problems which illustrate his concepts makes for fine curriculum and, again, provides students with a vehicle for discussing what could otherwise remain elusive and abstract.

The power of Erikson is in his adaptability to the life-issues of preservice teachers themselves. Development is not pictured as a childhood process, but as a lifelong one. Some themes previously discussed in the study of Jung's analytic psychology recur here. "The Eight Ages of Man" adds to the unit the dimension of continuity throughout life. As curriculum the shift is stimulating for the class as the focus becomes "us" instead of "them". Piaget and Erikson in their theorizing provide a clarity of discrimination among stages which is helpful to the new student

of psycho-social development.

In a clinical exercise associated with this unit, "The Mooney Problem Check List" is administered and evaluated by the class, usually on themselves as individuals because of the confidential nature of the items. The Check List is especially valuable in reinforcing the "Eight Ages of Man" view of development because of their mutual focus on social and emotional development. The curricular strategy of this unit is to move from theories to the personal concretization of development theory in the learner. Our experience has been that this approach touches on a strong vein of interest and need in undergraduates and helps them as people while it trains them as teachers.

Unit four deals with theories of *learning* in the four general categories of classical reminiscence, faculty psychology, behaviorism/associationism, and gestalt. Our approach is to illustrate the principles of each position and to propose curricular content for which each is most ideally suited. Connecting the theories to content has the salutary effect of making the abstractions more comprehensible and facilitating retention. For example, behaviorism is described as being particularly effective in applications like teaching psychomotor skills and cognitive material at the rote level (e.g. arithmetic tables), and for establishing classroom discipline unless and until the teacher develops a personal bond with the students. Socratic reminiscence is presented as an excellent metaphor for the process of inculcating aesthetic sensibility in students. Gestalt and discovery learning are connected with social science education as in "Man: A Course of Study." This eclectic and problem-centered approach seems realistic in light of the lack of consensus in learning theory and the importance of versatility on the part of teachers.

The *Meno* is read in full. As with Rousseau, Socrates "makes good curriculum." The students appear to gain satisfaction from encountering an educator they have heard much about, but not experienced personally. The literary quality of the *Meno* provokes a level of discussion and debate rarely encountered in the study of modern social science writing. Significantly, the *Meno* emphasizes the uses of questioning strategies, a vital, if poorly taught, aspect of learning and teaching.

Skinner's work in operant conditioning is readily adapted to this unit, as are Kohler's classic experiments with apes. Insight learning is given emphasis since it is a relatively difficult concept for the student of learning theory and, yet, a most promising approach to teaching.

Two standardized tests are self-administered in connection with this unit. They are "Wrenn's Study Habits Inventory" which evaluates this facet of student behavior, and "The California Phonics Survey," a written test cued by taped sounds which analyzes aural comprehension and introduces the notion of learning dis-



abilities in a tangible way. Other teaching aids include the familiar films on operant conditioning and models to illustrate the concept of Gestalt.

The fifth and concluding unit treats *evaluation* in education. At the level of specifics, students are introduced to the terminology of tests and measures, reinforcing their term-long acquaintance with standardized instruments. The most clearly practical lessons review the range of techniques which are available to the classroom teacher for evaluating achievement. Many of these are included in the grading system of this educational psychology course and will be discussed later in this report. Finally, the class considers John Dewey's analysis of the nature of experience which affords an opportunity for the preservice teachers to reflect meaningfully on the evaluation process as a whole and its fundamental assumptions. The specter of grading bears heavily upon students and teachers because so frequently teachers unknowingly contravene their true aims through inept evaluation. The aphorism "You teach what you test" is discomfortingly apt.

The clinical experience conducted in connection with this unit is the training in and use of an observational system for instructional analysis by the students. Again, elusive principles are given some tangible form and a sense of wonder surfaces in students who previously have not pictured any way to systematically appraise human interaction. Instructional analysis is a vital ingredient of teacher education; it is one of the learning experiences which is retained vividly by the students – and with good reason.

### Instructional Methodology

Isn't it obvious that courses in teacher education serve as exemplars for preservice teachers? The methods of instruction and evaluation employed in the ed. psych. course described here have been developed with this responsibility very much in mind. Grading, particularly, is a "necessary evil" instructors must bear up to, and it is the initial, if not the only, source of motivation for most students. The methodologies employed in this course continue to be refined, but already have engendered enthusiasm on the part of students.

*Lecturing* is held to a minimum, both because it is felt to be used excessively in higher education generally and because in professional education active student participation beyond the level of taking notes, is judged to be desirable. *Discussion* and *question and answer* are the most common techniques used in class. All instructors know the impossibility of using these strategies with students who come to class unprepared. To counteract students' tendency toward procrastination, announced objective quizzes introduce each unit. These exercises are designed only to determine whether a student has read the assigned material and are not

intended to require in-depth comprehension. Our experience has been that they serve this purpose well with the added benefit of stimulating discussion while the quiz is graded in class. Realistically, the tendency of students to leave their out-of-class assignments unattended until the evening before an examination cannot be ignored if meaningful classroom interaction is to take place.

Educational media are employed especially in the form of 16 mm films and overhead transparencies. These and the mimeographed materials of the curriculum are selected and/or developed with an emphasis on good graphic design and aesthetic appeal. These intangible factors contribute to student, interest and, subsequently, motivation.

As was noted previously there is a *clinical component* to the course involving standardized instruments and interaction analysis. Each unit is linked to these kinds of practical applications which are discussed by students in charrettes (small groups) and entered in personal journals. These activities contribute to a student feeling of growing professional competence as they master skills useful in supporting their concepts about teaching. The clinical experiences also connect the course to the schools themselves, since some involve visits to classrooms.

During the course each student presents a *micro-teaching* lesson focusing on some research related to the clinical experiences. Students gain the opportunity to practice their teaching skills as well as conduct a limited piece of research into tests and measures. The micro-teaching is graded by peer evaluation on standardized rating scales. *Simulated* classroom disturbances are played out wherein the micro-teacher is compelled to apply the theories of classroom control we have previously studied in the course. In all, this activity is lively and provokes excellent discussion. It has a high measure of verisimilitude and is an unforgettable and valuable preparatory experience.

Grading is based on a thousand point scale with typical percentages equivalent to letter grades (e.g. 93%-100% "A"; 70%, "Passing"). Notably absent is subjective instructor evaluation. The *quizzes* already mentioned total 100 points, the lowest, or one absence, being dropped. Four of five correct is a "perfect" quiz score. Students respond very positively to tests which allow for human frailty and emphasize the opportunity to "show what you do know". The adversary ambience of the typical classroom quiz is thereby ameliorated.

A *mid-term* and a *final examination*, each valued at two hundred points and objective in form, are "open-book and notes" in format and of unlimited time duration when scheduling permits (in practice, the final has been unlimited in time; the midterm, one hour.) Our theory is to ask somewhat more challenging questions and a good number of them and to promote in-test researching. The tests

have become an arena for intensive study which we believe is excellent. The tests are not memory games or games of chance, as is so often the case. The thinking students do during these examinations represents perhaps the most serious study they ever do.

*Class participation* valued at one hundred points, is graded by student *self-evaluation* on the last day of class. The key to this exercise is that it is public, i.e. before the peer group, and the results have been similar to what the instructor would have assigned without introducing the opportunity for or charge of favoritism.

As mentioned above, *micro-teaching*, valued at one hundred points, is graded by *peer evaluation*. Standardized rating scales are averaged after the high and low cards are deleted. Again, the results have appeared to the instructor to be valid while eliminating the burden of subjective grading from the instructor. Separating subjective evaluation from the role of instructor frees the professor to be a more convincing supporter of student development. There appear to be alternate ways to assign meaningful marks.

Two hundred points are assigned in relation to the clinical experiences. The format here is basically "mastery". If the completed forms, answer sheets, matrices, and journalized remarks are submitted, the points are awarded. There is little room for interpretation since the instruments yield specific products.

The final one hundred points are also based on a "mastery" format of evaluation of the student's daily class notes and written responses to study questions associated with each unit. To facilitate marking the students complete a check list and declare the degree of completeness of their notes. The replication of these notes is not guarded against and they are entered in the discrimination of grades, therefore, in only a minimal way. Still, this requirement acts to encourage note-taking and attendance.

Finally, up to forty points may be earned for a variety of extra-credit activities. This component tilts the entire grading system toward a "mastery" basis. This is thought to be valid and more educationally sound than a purely "adversary" approach.

The implementation of this evaluation plan has earned general praise from students and yielded a distribution of grades not unlike the college-wide norms. The system was not inflationary with respect to grades, but, instead, transferred responsibility to the students and eliminated the perception of the instructor as an all-powerful and fickle judge.

### Conclusion

This paper has attempted to summarize the principal aspects of a reconceptualized educational psychology course for preservice teachers. The course as it is described has been in development for five years and in classroom implementation for two years with encouraging results. In its methods, curriculum, and evaluation features, the course is designed to account for the needs and abilities of college undergraduates and to address the subject matter with an effective instructional style. The support of theoretical content with historical data and clinical exercises is a major emphasis in the course as is a diversified evaluation plan. Student interest and involvement have given us reason to think the course may be succeeding in preparing young people for the vocation of teaching.

### Footnotes

1. Hilda Taba, *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962, p. 401.
2. "The Jesness Behavior Checklist," "The California Phonics Survey," "The Myers Briggs Type Indicator," and "The Wrenn Study Habits Inventory" are all distributed by Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, California, U.S.A. "The Mooney Problem Check List" is a publication of the Psychological Corporation, New York, New York.

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