Amanda E. Halliburton
Teaching Philosophy

I.   Objectives

My teaching style most often focuses on Bloom's taxonomy levels of application (using information in novel situations) and analysis (drawing connections among ideas). For example, when I teach abnormal psychology, one major project requires students to apply diagnostic principles in a clinical case study based on a character from popular media. This project involves applying knowledge of diagnostic criteria to a character and using this knowledge and that of similar disorders to determine which diagnostic category, if any, most accurately fits the symptoms portrayed on screen. This project also involves Bloom's levels of evaluation (defending the choice of disorder) and creation (writing up a treatment plan that would be appropriate for the character). I strive to go beyond the most basic levels of memory and understanding and challenge students to work with information they gain from the class and utilize it in ways that are interesting to them. Additionally, when possible, I discuss theories from other areas of psychology and highlight how they relate to the current topic of discussion.

Education has the ability to empower students and widen their worldview, opening up new possibilities for a brighter future. As an instructor, I feel that I am responsible for exposing students to opportunities for critical pedagogy by facilitating their understanding of the connections between what they are learning in the classroom and the real-world challenges that confront their communities. In fact, one of the reasons I was attracted to psychology was that the field is so clearly relevant for many domains of knowledge and important issues of our time. In addition, I strongly value diversity and inclusion, and I take care to point out when diverse perspectives have been neglected (e.g., in early psychological theories) and encourage students to imagine how principles and theories might apply to or look different for marginalized groups.

II.   Method

It is important to me to convey to students that psychology is a science by modeling scientific inquiry in my teaching style. In my lectures, I frequently reference studies that bolster key points by providing empirical data. One tactic I have used is to assign an article and ask the class to critique the methods used, reflect on how these limitations might impact interpretation and utility of the study results, and discuss how future research might improve upon these limitations.

However, I believe that students learn best when the class is not limited by a lecture-only format. I prioritize student engagement in several ways. I encourage students to participate using stepwise techniques such as "think pair share" activities; students have an opportunity to write a brief response and then discuss the topic in pairs or small groups before opening up for a larger class discussion. Students have told me that this tactic helps them "check" their answers with others and feel more comfortable opening up in class. I also use technology, which is part of the native language for many students, to facilitate my lectures and help students relate material to their own lives in an accessible and interesting way. Breaking up my class periods is more appropriate for students' attention spans and seems to limit distraction and off-topic conversation. I try to use an activity or video clip after every 15-20 minutes of traditional lecture,

and I sometimes start class off with an activity to help students warm up to the topic. Additionally, this variety allows me to engage students with many different learning styles, such that they do not feel limited by the exclusive use of lecture-based methods.

Given the importance of diversity and inclusion in my classroom, I try to model the use of a "brave space" for students by bringing important issues to the forefront and challenging students to think about how someone with a different background might experience the material. It is important to me that students find me approachable and feel that they have a voice in my classes, and I work hard to help students connect seemingly disparate opinions during class discussion and to encourage shy students to feel comfortable participating. I also strive to remain abreast of and responsive to the needs of differently abled students and to creatively support their learning.

III.   Assessment

My assessments are designed to target multiple levels of student learning, from memory and understanding (e.g., quizzes) to evaluation and creation (e.g., case study project). Although I do use quizzes to assess comprehension, given my focus on application and analysis, the major assignments for my courses typically require students to apply course material to novel concepts/examples and synthesize key ideas in order to form a more cohesive, holistic understanding of course concepts. Student feedback suggests that application helps students retain and utilize information more effectively, and students tend to enjoy these assignments more than exams and quizzes. I understand the importance of scaffolding student learning, and I try to incorporate numerous small assignments that are built with separate parts (e.g., sections of a research paper) and include opportunities for feedback rather than basing the grade on a few exams. Recently, students commented that having multiple smaller assignments rather than one or two big tests helped them focus more on learning in class as opposed to memorizing notes.

IV.   Conclusion

In the spirit of critical pedagogy, my ultimate goal for students is not that they can recall information from a textbook but that they can apply course material to situations that become relevant for them, including current affairs in our society, and see connections that extend outside the classroom, no matter their ultimate field of study. I aim for students to be excited about engaging with psychological topics and to see the utility of the material for problems in their own lives. Critical to this process is the inclusion of diverse opinions and perspectives in the curriculum, such that the classroom is a space for students to express themselves in the mediums of their choosing and to challenge themselves to become ardent, curious learners.