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A Standard Deviation Above the Mean

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Editor: Mary W. Godwin, M.A.

Thoughts on Teaching, Learning and Motivation

Bruce T. "Woody" Caine, Ph.D., Social and Developmental Psychologist

Each time I walk into a college classroom I experience a sense of wonder. What is it about teaching and learning that persistently engages my spirit? Why do I choose to spend a major portion of my life in this way – pursuing and applying knowledge, seeking and sharing understanding, encouraging curiosity and awareness, guiding discovery and comparative evaluation, appraising and reflecting on results of ideas applied, and yes, risking overt and covert criticism and rejection of my efforts?

Playwrights, poets, novelists, philosophers, marketing executives, politicians, civic leaders, educators, even psychologists and parents have questioned, theorized, hypothesized, investigated, agonized, and pontificated about human motivation, occasionally even as it applies to learning.

There are those who view curiosity as one of humanity's most fundamental motives. As a species, are we "programmed" to discover, to "view the other side of the mountain", to create explanations for what we experience? Are we driven to know "how and why" beyond the immediate sensations that reveal the "what, where, when and who" of experience? Is learning a form of achievement, rewarding in its own right?

Some argue that we are a species identified by our ability and compulsion to communicate. Do we need to share our discoveries with others to fully satisfy our curiosity? Is our need to be linked to others, called the affiliation motive, in part satisfied by

"story telling" – the invention and sharing of explanations and of knowledge?

Myths, legends, songs, tales, traditions of all sorts are anchors of human culture. Norms, role expectations, performance standards, regulations and laws are derivatives of shared cultural knowledge that allow us to function as collectives. Is it our compulsion to communicate, to affiliate, and to influence the actions of others that energizes and maintains our "habit of learning"?

Still others suggest that practical instrumentality is behind our efforts to understand, and through understanding, to control aspects of our world. Is learning then simply a means to a desired end? "When I figure this out, I'll be able to use it to get what I want and need." Learning becomes a tool when we put our discoveries and inventions to work to produce useful products, to devise ways to improve natural processes, or to design systems and procedures to synchronize our efforts and those of others.

Each of these motives is present in the interdependent processes of teaching and learning, especially in higher education. The mission of any university includes the discovery, sharing, application and evaluation of knowledge. Curiosity engages the academic researcher; story telling inspires the teacher; solving problems confirms the practitioner. Each is an essential component of scholarship.

Do our classroom and laboratory experiences in the study of psychology capture these motives

for learning? That certainly is our intent, but do we?

Educational philosopher John Dewey asserted that we learn best through a process he called "reflective thinking" which occurs in cycles of "Discovery", "Invention", "Production", and "Reflection". It is a process that taps learning motivation.

Psychology as the "Scientific study of behavior and mental processes" (David Myers, Psychology, 8th Ed., 2007, p.2) provides ample opportunities for "Discovery", the activation of curiosity about observable behavior and the unseeable mechanism of the mind – "Oh! I wonder why..." and "That's interesting. I wish I knew..." As this scientific study is about ourselves in large measure, we should be engaged by its subject matter in and out of class, through personal observation and reading.

Psychology as a science emphasizes the creation and utilization of theories, models and constructs – all products of "Invention" offered to explain discoveries. These inventions allow us to more easily share understanding and to create meaning, satisfying our need to communicate. They also provide opportunities for constructive conflict and useful competition, and over time some inventions may come to mimic legends, traditions, norms and other cultural artifacts as "schools of thought". Class discussions and case analyses encourage appraisal.

Again as a science, psychology demands that its inventions be repeatedly tested for validity and reliability – that is, for their actual usefulness in application. Dewey's stage of "Production" could also be called "Hypothesis Testing", "Trial Application" or "Experimentation". If deemed valid and reliable, an invention can then be used as a "practical instrumentality" to guide actions in the "real world". Studying psychology should provide "tools for life", satisfying our need to be effective, influential, liked, respected, trusted, and even independent and secure, in our future lives.

Does learning principally occur when we produce a workable solution? Or does it also result from our willingness to reflect on the process of creation and the intended and unintended outcomes of our productions? Clearly both, but we must acknowledge Campbell's First Law of Research which is a clear call for honest "Reflection".

Whatever the science, the forces of nature will exploit any loophole in experimental or theoretical design and construction, any ambiguity in measurement and any unchecked or unrecognized assumption to lead a researcher to enticing but false conclusions.

Psychology is not the realm of "The Right Answer", and those deeply needing such absolutism might best find another discipline. What makes studying psychology fun is that new inventions keep emerging from "old" discoveries, which are then subjected to the rigors of production and reflection. Reflection often yields new discoveries that begin the learning cycle anew.

Sadly, time restrictions, academic traditions and student norms too often limit the levels and scope of "Discovery, Invention, Production, Reflection" occurring in university classrooms. In pursuit of worthwhile learning, we, as students and teachers, must encourage intellectual exchanges, debates, comparative analyses, and the active synthesis of information, constructs, interpretations, and theories, while also testing potential applications. As reflections of emotional and social intelligence, these are exactly the intellectual skills we need in our increasingly complex and interdependent world.

In the 21st Century diverse workplace, distinct frames of reference, unique value sets, differing priorities and expectations, even contrasting views on ethical or moral standards are active. Decisions of significance will rarely satisfy every stakeholder, but the process of arriving at that decision must include consideration of multiple viewing points, and an honest appraisal of the potential consequences (short and long term) of each of the options

under consideration. Simply put, our actions must reflect continuous learning.

Why are you studying Psychology?
"Actions bring knowledge and values

simultaneously into play or into question." J. Monod

"We are both the victim and the beneficiary of our own experience" W. Caine.

Spring 2008 Psi Chi Induction

The Spring 2008 Induction for Psi Chi was held on February 19 at the home of Dr. Giordano.

New inductees are:

Rosemary Harris, Jessica Heacock, Michelle Howell, Whitney Marvel, Catherine Oman, Sarah Plotkin, and Jamie Vickstrom. Moose, Dr. G.'s dog, was not inducted but likes to attend the ceremony.



Dean's List – Fall 2008

The following Psychology and Neuroscience Majors and Minors made the Dean's List for Fall, 2008

Heather Cairl	William Howard	Kurt Niesner*
Taylor Cawley*	Michelle Howell*	Catherine Oman*
Jessica Chapman	Sarah Jaworski	Kaitlin Overton
Whitney Davis	Martha Johnson	Stephanie Parker
Rebekah DeGraff	Jill Johnson*	Lesley Paul
John DePriest	Matthew Kubicek	Sarah Plotkin
Julie Dorian	Sarah Lashley*	Erin Samuels
Jared Ezell*	Caitlin Lecksell	Taylor Shade
Adam Gilliland	Austin Loeppke	Sarah Smith
Danielle Goodboo	Eileen Marks*	Kevin Stone
James "Gunner" Goodlad	Whitney Marvel*	Irena Tepavcevic*
Meredith Graves	Jennifer Mashburn*	Lindsey Thompson
Rachael Haney	Laura Muck*	Shandus Valentine*
Rosemary Harris	Layne Murphy	Jamie Vickstrom
Laura Hart	Jessica Niesner	Drue Williamson

*President's List – 4.0 GPA

December 2007 Graduates: Jessica Niesner, Carolyn Currey, Renease Perkins, Beth Wiener, Kurt Niesner, Sarah Lashley, Eileen Marks, Layne Murphy,

Psychology Club/Psi Chi Events in Spring 2008 –

By Jamie Vickstrom, Secretary

- January 12- Officer meeting 10 am
- January 18- Spring Social 10 am
- January 25- Careers available with a bachelor's degree in psychology convo.
- February 1- members' meeting and Y.E.S. community service
- February 8- Officer meeting
- February 13- Psychology of Love convo. (AL)
- February 22- members' meeting

- March 7- Officer meeting
- March 11- CSI week: forensic psychology/ profiling convo. (AL)
- March 17- Brain week convo. (AL) on epilepsy pathophysiology and treatment
- April 4- members' meeting
- April 12- Car wash fundraiser
- April 26- plant sale community service for the Center of Living and Learning 9-2 pm

Psychology Students Present at EPA in Boston

Jessica Niesner, a recent Psychology major graduate (Dec 2007), was awarded a Psi Chi Regional Research Award at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association held in Boston on March 13-16, 2008.

Out of 180 research posters with Psi Chi members as first authors, Jessica's research was one of the few recognized with this award. Psi Chi is the National Honor Society in Psychology, founded for the purpose of encouraging, stimulating, and maintaining excellence in scholarship, and advancing the science of psychology. The Eastern Region of the organization includes chapters at such schools as Trinity College, Mount St. Mary's, Colby College, NYU, and Yale.

Supervised by Dr. Michael Sullivan, the research was entitled "**The Effect of Relevant Information on Mindlessness.**" In recognition for her work, Jessica received a certificate and check for \$300.

In addition, 8 other Belmont students and recent graduates attended and presented their work at the Eastern Psychological Association meeting. Students presenting research were: Afton Cole, Luke Lancaster, Sarah Lashley, Layne Murphy, Kurt Niesner, Renease Perkins, Shandus Valentine, and Ashley Wilkins. Their presentations follow:

"Uninformed 'Informed Consent': Examining Procedures to Protect Participants"

Michael P. Sullivan, Ph.D. and Sarah L. Lashley

"Behavioral Study of Zebrafish (*Danio Rerio*)"

Sarah L. Lashley & Luke Lancaster

Faculty Advisor: Lonnie R. Yandell, Ph.D.

"Racial Stereotyping and Crime Perception"

Layne Murphy & Afton Cole

Faculty Advisor: Linda D. Jones. Ph.D.

The Effects of Attention and Conformity on Adherence to Instructions"

Kurt J. Niesner

Faculty Advisor: Michael P. Sullivan, Ph.D.

"The Attractiveness of Revealing Clothes in Different Body Types"

C. Renease Perkins

Faculty Advisor: Lonnie R. Yandell, Ph.D.

"The Effect of Pleasant and Unpleasant Odor on Short-Term Memory"

Shandus B. Valentine, Barbara A. Hutchinson, and Rejana Wells

Faculty Advisor: Lonnie R. Yandell, Ph.D.

"A Study of Distractions in the Classroom"

Ashley S. Wilkins

Faculty Advisor: Michael P. Sullivan, Ph.D.

Our Alumni:

Katy A. Blasingame (2001) – Online Advocacy Manager, Mental Health America shared the following on March 6 of this year: My colleagues and I helped organize a rally at the Capitol yesterday before the US House FINALLY brought the mental health parity bill to the floor for a vote. Speakers included Patrick Kennedy, Nancy Pelosi, Jim Ramstad, former first lady Rosslyn Carter, and Paul Wellstone's son. The mental health community has been trying to pass parity for 12 years now, and it's been one of the movement's top priorities. The event was really emotional for me. When Dennis Hastert refused once again in 2004 to bring parity legislation to the floor for a vote, even though over half of the House supported it, I decided DC was where I needed to be. Many call yesterday's vote historical. I had to share the good news and attach some pictures. The next challenge is getting the Senate and House to reconcile their

respective bills. The Senate unanimously passed a less comprehensive bill last fall. The legislation prohibits private insurance companies from providing less (really discriminatory) coverage (higher co-pays, limited number of days per year for treatment, etc.) for mental health treatment compared to that for general health conditions. "It's a civil rights bill for people with mental illnesses and chemical addiction. It forces insurance companies to treat them as they treat others." You cannot separate the mind from the body.



Noelle McIntyre (2001) – Employed at MTSU as Graduate Teaching Assistant for Health & Human Performance Dept. After finishing a year working as Staff Hall Director for Interlochen Arts Academy in Interlochen MI; I moved back to start graduate school. Starting in August of 2007, I began pursuing a Masters in Health from MTSU. Currently, I am a full time student who teaches 7 sections of health and wellness labs. (I absolutely love it!) I'm an active member of our Health Fraternity "Kappa Sigma Pi", and continue my work with the National Eating Disorder Association as well as with Planned Parenthood of Middle and Eastern TN. Still an avid flute player, I can be heard monthly at Taize services throughout the community.

A View from the Chair:

Pete Giordano, Ph.D., Professor and Chair of Psychology

Each time this newsletter is published I am struck by the accomplishments of our alumni and current students. If you are an alum reader, please take a moment to e-mail us to let us know what is going on. It is fun to hear about all your personal and professional activities. Look at the news on this page. What a varied and impressive list of accomplishments. If you are an alum reader and currently send gifts to Belmont, please keep in mind that you can designate your gift to go to the Psychology Research Fund. This fund is growing and can help us purchase lab equipment or pay for students to attend psychology conferences, among other things as well.

Ron Samuels (1971) – Senior Benefits Specialist for Lifeway Christian Resources. Recently awarded Career of Excellence Award.

Temp Sparkman (1955) – Lulu online publisher, just released a memoir, "Saying No to Power: Footnote to 1980's Southern Baptist Tumult." Working on "The Source and Flow of Religious Experience."

Eric Stamper (1999) – Owner and Optometrist, Visionary Eyecare Center. In May 2007 I graduated as Doctor of Optometry from Southern College of Optometry in Memphis and received my Tennessee Optometry License. I am currently opening my own solo, private optometry practice in my hometown of Hendersonville, TN. My practice is called Visionary Eyecare Center and we expect to be open by the end of February, 2008. Since you last saw me in 1999: First I became a branch manager of Washington Mutual Finance for nearly 2 years. I quit that and returned to school for Optometry in 2002. I married Cristin on October 25, 2003 at "Shadowbrook" here in Nashville. I graduated optometry school in May 2007 in the top 10% of my class and am now opening my own practice. It is great to be back in town!

Liz (Roby) Stillwell (1999) – is living in Washington DC and works as a Legislative Assistant for Senator Sessions (Alabama). She handles primarily health, education, and labor issues. Her husband, Robert, is an attorney in the Office of General Counsel at the Office of Management and Budget in the White House.

Brad Walker (2005) – returned to school fall 2007 to begin a Master's in English at MTSU.

I am also inspired by the hard work of our current students. The psychology faculty recently joined nine students in attending the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association in Boston. See the related story in this newsletter. It was a fun trip in which we all learned more about the science and profession of psychology.

The future remains exciting for our department. We are busting at the seams in the Psychology Department Building and look forward to expanded laboratory space and more research and internship opportunities for our students. More on those developments in the future!

Let Us Hear From You!

If you are an alum reader, please take a moment to fill out the form below and drop us a line. Just mail to the address on the back of the newsletter, or contact us by e-mail at godwinm@mail.belmont.edu. We would love to hear from you and to include your update in the next edition of *enPSYCHlopedia*. If you are ever in the Nashville area, please stop by our office to meet the new faculty and see the exciting things going on here in the Psychology Department. Check out our web pages at <http://www.belmont.edu/psychology>.

<i>Alumni Update</i>		Date _____
Name _____	Graduation Year _____	
Address _____		
City _____	State _____	ZIP _____ Phone _____
Spouse's name _____	Belmont grad? _____	Year _____
Employment _____	Title _____	
Recent promotion, honor, award, etc.? _____		
What else is going on with you (that you'd like to share): _____		

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