

**Adapting My Teaching Approach:
Navigating Diversity and Contemporary Perspectives in Psychology Education**

Anna Maria Behler

North Carolina State University

When I first became an instructor, I followed a traditional approach to teaching, relying on well-established materials, and modeling my courses on classes I had taken in the past. The content I covered in my undergraduate Introduction to Research in Psychology course and my undergraduate and graduate-level Social Psychology courses was comprised of major theories, concepts, and researchers that are found in most college-level psychology syllabi. The format was what my own classes had been like—mostly lecture based with a mix of exams and papers. However, as I developed my pedagogy and grew more confident as an instructor, I felt that my course design and teaching materials were in need of being updated for a more contemporary student population. I wanted to provide students opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of course material in ways apart from traditional assignments. Most importantly, I wanted to give them the opportunity to showcase their ability to apply course content to their everyday experiences and our modern world.

My first aim was to update my courses to be mindful of the ways in which I might be perpetuating the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968) is a set of unspoken rules and expectations that can be intentionally or unintentionally promoted by individual instructors and even school systems as a whole. These implicit expectations can be a significant burden for students from underrepresented backgrounds and those who are first-generation college students. They may not have the same experience with or understanding of university norms.

As I became more aware of the hidden curriculum's impact on students, I realized the importance of addressing it and modifying my course design accordingly. I began by updating

nearly all of my courses to incorporate open-access textbooks or primary source materials, greatly reducing costs, which can be a barrier for many students. Additionally, to address the potential impact of any implicit expectations in my courses, I made a conscious effort to emphasize elements of the syllabus that I feel often get taken for granted. For example, I not only make it a point to encourage students to attend office hours, but I explain the benefits, such as making it easier for students in large classes to form a connection with a professor. I also began to offer virtual options for attending office hours to increase accessibility for students who commute to campus or have work conflicts that prevent them from otherwise attending in-person.

The next step was to modify the course content itself. Initially, I was hesitant to deviate from what I knew and was worried that I might not be able to convey the content as well if I didn't focus on more traditional materials. However, I soon realized it was not an either-or situation, but rather a matter of finding creative ways to blend the old and the new, to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. In my undergraduate Social Psychology course, I began utilizing a "Concept Demonstration" as a final project. For this assignment, students are required to select a topic we have covered throughout the semester and demonstrate it as though they are trying to teach someone else the content. Students are allowed to present the topic in any manner of their choosing, and their creativity shines through, with submissions including children's books, paintings, original songs, and even short films that all reflect a deep understanding of course material.

As my confidence grew, I became more creative in the ways I updated and incorporated new content, though my approach has varied a bit based on the different courses I teach. For example, in my graduate and undergraduate Social Psychology courses, I began highlighting the WEIRD problem in psychology (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan). This acronym pertains to the notion that an overwhelming majority of research in the field was conducted on participants from western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic populations, which has several implications for the conclusions we can draw from these works. I cover this topic not just once, but I make intentional connections to it during nearly every subject we cover. I ask my students

to focus on the knowledge gained from the classic studies we discussed, and then to critique them based on which populations were and were NOT represented, how they could be improved, and how they might need to be modified to incorporate a more diverse and representative sample of participants. Similarly, in my undergraduate research methods course, students are required to submit a brief project proposal. I encourage them to think about how to define research questions that are generalizable to a broad population, or alternatively, to be well-equipped to articulate why their research findings might be limited to specific groups.

I also try to anticipate student needs when considering my course design. For example, I noted that the overwhelming majority of students who take my graduate-level social psychology course are from programs in the department other than social psychology, and sometimes from outside the psychology department altogether. Therefore, I wanted to structure the course in such a way that it would be relevant and applicable to the students' areas of study without sacrificing any important content. To that end, I have incorporated research workshop sessions each semester, which have been successful and well-received. In these sessions, students provide a brief overview of a project proposal and then receive feedback and questions from their classmates. Many of the graduate students have shared that our research workshops have provided them with the foundation for projects they went on to propose, with several being successfully carried out as dissertations.

I also adjusted the format of my undergraduate and graduate-level courses to incorporate more in-class discussions where possible. This encourages my students to share their perspectives and experiences, allowing them to relate their personal and cultural contexts to concepts discussed in class. I believe that making course material personally applicable is one of the best ways to have students engaged in their learning process and promotes true ownership of content. This strategy has generated thought-provoking discussion and helped students recognize the relevance of psychology in the world around them, as well as develop an appreciation for the different experiences their classmates bring to the table. Notably, I realized that building rapport and trust required me to be more than just a passive listener during in-class discussions. I take the time to learn about my students' backgrounds, interests, and aspirations.

I share my own personal experiences as well. This has helped bridge the gap between us and fostered an environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and engaging in meaningful conversations.

In the years to come, I intend to continue evaluating my teaching methods and course design. By acknowledging the hidden curriculum and making deliberate efforts to address its impact, I have created a more supportive learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds. Incorporating new perspectives, adapting course materials, and promoting a sense of connection to the content, has allowed me to create a more inclusive learning environment. Moving forward, I am committed to designing accessible and inclusive courses, empowering students to explore their own valuable perspectives, and fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding. I view this as an important part of my personal development as an instructor in response to the ever-evolving needs of my students.

References

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