

Linking Teaching Methods and Assessment to the Developmental Needs of Family Science Students

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ABSTRACT. The typical college campus is filled with students who have personal and social challenges that impact their efforts to earn a college degree. Yet, in the college classroom, the focus is predominantly on teaching course content, with minimal attention to the developmental needs of students. We argue that, just as family life educators teach students to be sensitive to the ‘felt’ needs of families and individuals in the community, educators should be equally sensitive to the felt needs of the college students they teach. Family science educators have the opportunity to model the integration of developmental needs through the use of intentional teaching and assessment. We describe strategies related to pedagogy and assessment that support the acquisition of knowledge and contribute to the achievement of late adolescent developmental tasks, with special attention to personal identity, autonomy, and the formation of lasting bonds with significant others. Specific examples of developmentally appropriate assignments and assessments are provided.

Keywords: late adolescence, developmental tasks, assessment, family science

An important tenet of Family Life Education (FLE) is that learning is more effective when the lived experiences and “felt” needs of the target population are valued and incorporated into the educational program (Arcus, Schvaneveldt, & Moss, 1993; Myers-Walls, 2000). Although this is a strong principle of community-based FLE programs, it is not generally regarded as a high priority for a classroom community of learners. In the college classroom, the focus is predominantly on the teaching of course content rather than the use of strategies that could meet the developmental needs of the students themselves (Greenberg, Lester, Evans, Williams, Hacker, & Halic, 2009; Duncan & Bushkirk-Choen, 2011).

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One advantage of addressing the developmental needs of late-adolescent college students is that they become more engaged in learning. The concept of student engagement was introduced by Alexander Astin (1984) and is conceptualized as the time and effort students invest in educational activities (Junco, 2012). Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles for good practice in undergraduate education promote student engagement and include: student/faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, and respecting diversity. These factors and principles can be integrated into assignments and assessment using developmental needs as a guide.

Developmental Needs of Late Adolescent College Students

Late adolescence, the developmental stage of most first-year college students and the focus of this article, is a time for students to develop as independent persons, exercising cognitive and behavioral autonomy (Beckert, 2007). It is generally presumed that individuals contribute significantly to their development (Little, Hawley, Henrich, & Marsland, 2002). However, there is variation among individuals, and late adolescents in particular, in their awareness and commitment to personal growth. Providing students with opportunities to practice and reflect on the process of "becoming" is appropriate and consistent with FLE principles. Ideally, pedagogy and assessments should be designed to support the mastery of developmental tasks and to enhance student engagement.

The concept of developmental tasks was first introduced by Havighurst (1972). A developmental task arises at or about a certain period in life and, if not achieved, will hinder performance of tasks at a subsequent stage. By contrast, mastery of developmental tasks contributes to a sense of agency over one's life contributing to a sense of purpose and well-being. Although this process is largely sequential, individuals can revisit tasks throughout their lives. Previous achievements or failures contribute to current and future completion of developmental tasks.

Late adolescent college students must establish autonomy, develop intellectual skills, develop a sense of morality and learn to love and work with others. Although developmental tasks overlap, this article focuses primarily on late adolescent college students' development as independent and interdependent persons. Independence is reflected in the desire for autonomy and the freedom to make decisions. Interdependence, the need to connect meaningfully with others, is reflected in a yearning for close relationships. Linking pedagogy with developmental needs creates a sense of relevance for students and enhances their engagement in the learning process. Teaching and assessment strategies that strengthen student engagement by providing opportunities for growth in these two developmental tasks are reviewed.

Task One: Achieving Identity and Independence

The achievement of identity represents a synthesis of a person's roles into a unified self-hood (Erikson, 1968). The family science curriculum affords students the opportunity to reflect: "How did I come to be who I am" and "How do I want to be in the future?" Topics in life span development identify relevant life transitions and events that impact a person's sense of self. Erikson (1968) believed that autobiographies of very perceptive individuals could provide insight about the developmental process. This insight can be encouraged in late adolescents when reflection about the significance of past experience is encouraged. For example, the study of early and middle childhood in family science courses can be used to intentionally trigger memories of early experiences that introduced students to their current interests and skills (athletics, music, art, science) and personal characteristics (self-control, patience, generosity, awareness of the needs of others). During identity formation, individuals must make decisions about whether the characteristics and interests by which they currently define themselves are still salient to the achievement of their life goals.

In this section, three teaching strategies are introduced that encourage students to acquire self-awareness and develop as independent persons. The first is an assignment based on construction of a life-event time line to encourage students to reflect on past and present patterns of behavior and relate these to future aspirations. The second assignment supports students in the refinement and articulation of their career objections. The final strategy is a description of how students can benefit from having control over exam format in upper-level courses. All strategies have been implemented by the authors.

Teaching Strategy 1: Life-Event Time Line

Several weeks into an introductory-level lifespan development course, students construct a time-line based on significant events that occurred at different stages in their lives. As long as students are thoughtful about their choices, there are no rigid rules about how the time lines are constructed. Students are given the following general guidelines:

1. Consider your personal development and review events that have occurred in your life.
2. Using these events, create a timeline of your life. You may upload personal pictures or use sample pictures from Internet sources, but this is optional.
3. Make decisions about what information is pertinent for a timeline and what information is unnecessary to explain your personal story. Include events that reflect your intellectual, emotional, social, and/or physical development.

For each developmental stage, students are asked to recall facts and perceptions of salient life experiences. As the course progresses, they are asked to think more deeply about a specific area of development. Over time, the concepts of generosity, sense-of-humor, work ethic, among others have been addressed. In the following example, we ask students to recall events that illustrate their experiences with self-regulation and delay of gratification.

- a. Describe your personal level of self-control, starting from when you were little through school age and then high school. Provide examples of your ability to delay gratification, or your difficulty delaying gratification, at different points in your past.
- b. Think about the strategies used by children to delay gratification. Adults use different strategies. Think about your own. Are they effective for you? More importantly, which ones do not seem to work so well?
- c. Describe two behavior-change goals that can help you meet one of your long-term objectives. Translate your goals into target behaviors – that is, the behaviors you need to change or acquire in order to reach your goal. What specific behaviors would you like to increase? What behaviors do you want to decrease?
- d. What strategies can help you stick with your target behaviors?
- e. In what ways might your current behavior relate to behavior exhibited in earlier stages of your development?
- f. In what ways might your behavior now relate to your ability to achieve your goals in the future?

Students' responses need not be shared or discussed in class. However, the self-reflection exercise does require them to reflect in writing about their struggles for self-regulation as a child and their current efforts to achieve self-regulation as an adult. Instructors help family science students recognize how the short-term delay of gratification in childhood presages young adult planfulness. Their ability to set and work toward long term goals requires the implementation of strategies and actions needed to achieve those goals. We encourage adolescents to recognize and support agency as one of many aspects of the self that contributes to their sense of identity (Leary, 2003). Self-regulation is the dynamic or active aspect of this self-understanding (Vohs, & Baumeister, 2004).

When students study their current stage of development, the information from their time line can inform their understanding of past experience influences on current behavior, values, and beliefs. For many students, this is the first time that they've connected past and present behavior in a thoughtful way. From this assignment, students can see that if they are exhibiting patterns of behavior (e.g., smoking, procrastination, or arguing frequently with others), then they are on a trajectory to continue that behavior.

The final task in this assignment requires identification and exploration of the changes in perceptions and behaviors that would be required to alter the current life-course trajectory to achieve more satisfying life outcomes. Students are encouraged to recognize that the development of skills and abilities is never "finished". They are still moving along a time line and can modify levels of self-control, patience, and responsibility, among others in their pursuit of long-term goals.

The event-focused timeline embodies principles for good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). It is an active-learning assignment that students initiate

in the classroom. It is an assignment that respects diversity, as each timeline is unique to the individual who constructs it. Faculty members become facilitators as students explore their past and consider the future.

Teaching Strategy 2: Career exploration and refinement

The identity-formation process involves the appraisal of one's life goals. A sense of identity achievement occurs when an individual makes a commitment to specific choices. Instructors can encourage exploration of the many career possibilities afforded by a broad family science education. Many students today want to merge their desire to help others with realistic occupational goals. Career choice can be considered an expression of one's values and identity. There are many factors that influence career choice. In the short term, a student's academic major is a primary influence.

A career-related assignment is embedded in two upper level courses to support students' exploration and refinement of their career interests and professional identity. Using the Framework for Life-Span Family Life Education (1997), students merge their interest in a specific life stage (e.g., early childhood, adolescence, later adulthood) with one of the 10 FLE content areas. Students are instructed to consider the impact of past experiences and interactions with others as they articulate in writing why they are drawn to work with individuals in a specific life stage or focus on a specific content area.

In introductory courses, students tend to articulate their interests in general terms, such as "I want to work with little kids." In upper level courses, we tell students that anyone can 'like' kids. However, as emerging professionals, students need to be more detailed and deliberate about their reasoning. Students must specify a life stage and use the developmental tasks of that life stage to explain why they want to work with those individuals. An example would be: *I want to work with middle childhood children (ages 6-12), as this age group is working on self-evaluation, team play, and specifically, developing a sense of industry that gives them a sense of confidence.* This statement justifies working with an age group supported by developmental tasks, and introduces concepts related to psychosocial crisis and central process (Newman & Newman, 2012).

A second part of the assignment focuses on the 10 FLE content areas. Students are instructed to go to the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) website (<http://www.ncfr.org>) and read the *FLE Content Areas and Practice Guidelines*. Using this information, students identify content areas of interest and identify one content area as a preference. Students justify their content area choice by reflecting on previous coursework (based on the CFLE program approval and curriculum checklist as posted on the NCFR website) and the research and theory pertaining to that content area. As an example, a student might write: *"My preferred content area is Families in Societal Contexts, specifically the connection between home and community as outlined in ecological theory. In the partnership course, I learned the*

importance of connections... These opening sentences reference a theoretical perspective and make a connection with course/research-based content.

This assignment is embedded in two different upper level courses: a family life programming course and a professional development course. In the family life programming course, students are given the assignment on the first day of class and must complete it by the second day. Based on the assignment, students are clustered into collaborative groups with other students who have similar life stage and content area interests. Within these groups, students further discuss their reasons for prioritizing a life stage and content area. Based on this discussion, each group identifies common themes that form the basis for the major course project: development of a family life education program focused on a specific life stage and content area. Students will use theory and research to justify content for their FLE program and, when doing so, can draw on the exercise they completed previously about individual career interests.

In the professional development course, students' thoughtful explanations of their career interests are utilized when they must articulate a specific a career objective for a professional-quality resume during the first half of the semester. As a career objective, life stage and content area are used as a marketing strategy. Vaguely expressed career interests, such as "I want to work with kids" can be highly detrimental when students are seeking employment. In contrast, a well crafted sound bite, such as: *My major is human development and family studies. I have chosen to focus on [life stage] based on my experience and interests. I am specifically interested in [FLE content area]* is much more effective. The assignment helps define the career objective and allows the student to start prioritizing potential internship placement sites and narrowing professional identity.

Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles of good practice are integrated into this career-specialization activity. For the programming course, the self-assessments provide prompt feedback that results in students being clustered into groups during the next class period. The groups are designed for active learning and reinforce cooperation among students. Respect for diversity is supported, as each student articulates his/her worldview based on individual experiences and interests. The quick turnaround time and group designation communicates high course expectations. Experience has also shown that students, when grouped based on life stage and content area, spend more time on task as a common interest has been articulated.

The quick turn-around time of the career self-assessment in the programming course requires a commitment to timely assessment by the educator and timely completion by the student. Students who do not attend the first day or who neglect to read the course syllabus or the electronic course shell are out of sync with their peers and are placed into a group that lacks commonality, which is a consequence that reinforces high expectations. To date, there have been two class sections in which more than one student did not complete the assignment by the designated due date. These students were grouped together. In other classes, all students have completed the assignment on time.

In the professional development course, the principles of good practice reinforce student engagement as well. The relevance of utilizing the life stage and content area as a marketing strategy and a career objective embodies high expectations and projects a student's professional identity. The external audience and direct correlation to career creates a developmentally-appropriate relevance. Based on feedback from professionals about family studies students participating in campus interviews, these students earned the reputation of being prepared and professional. Finally, students' clear expression of their interests in a particular life stage and content area provides a framework for them to articulate a professional identity and show their knowledge of theory and research in their chosen area. The career objective projects one's values based on career choice respecting each student's worldview and career aims.

Teaching Strategy 3: Student-Determined Examinations

Cognitive autonomy does not come quickly or easily to the late adolescent. One signal that students are still struggling with independent thinking is the frequent request they make of instructors to "tell us what to study for the exam." Students have learned that instructors are the ones who create and implement exams, the most common assessment tool. Prior to entering college, students took many exams that were instructor driven and that may have not contributed to the development of cognitive autonomy. Instructor assessment of learning and students' self-assessment activities should "provide students with opportunities to exercise self-regulation and to gain additional control over the outcome of an exam" (Greenberg, et al., 2009, p. 383).

Assessment is considered a required task in the learning process. Often this task is viewed as a rote behavior occurring at specific times during a semester (Leite & Landry-Meyer, 2003) rather than a process occurring over a semester or several semesters in which students and instructors work together to achieve learning outcomes. Ideally, assessment in higher education should be a process that urges instructors to seek out and value quality in order to fulfill long-term mission and purpose (Cistone & Bashford, 2002). Assessment methods that allow students to influence and control the process through 'product development' or the creation of the evaluation method increase students' overall engagement (Duncan & Bushkirk-Choen, 2011).

In our program, student-determined exams have been implemented in two upper level courses for the past two academic years. Students are given the power to determine the exam format at least two weeks prior to the scheduled exam date. The only non-negotiable features are the purpose of the exam (midterm, final), exam date, point allocation (e.g., 50-100 point range), and the rule that each student must submit an individual exam. Instructors facilitate brainstorming about exam options during class time and encourage students to nominate a number of possible exam formats. These nominations are followed by class discussion. Initially, students are silent as the concept of asserting their beliefs about exam structure has not previously been within the realm of possibility. Ultimately, students spend a considerable amount of time (e.g., 15-20 minutes) considering and discussing exam options. Students debate advantages and disadvantages of exam formats. The exam discussion is an exercise in expressing opinions that supports the development of personal agency, an aspect of autonomy.

The exam format is decided prior to each exam by majority vote. Over time, exams have ranged from take-home exams to group exams where students have the opportunity discuss the questions and possible answers together before completing their exams individually. This latter format has been the most popular. The first step of the take-home, open note/book, multiple-choice, in class, group discussion exam is that students take home the exam and complete it individually. If students did not complete the take-home step, they are sent to another room to complete the exam individually with open note/book with no option of group collaboration. Students who have completed the take home step have the option of discussing each question in small groups. We find that students fiercely debate answers, justify responses, and ask thought provoking questions of each other. At the end of the exam time, each student turns in an individual exam and receives an individual score. The individual submission keeps the focus of discussion on course content, not persuasion. Students are empowered to make individual decisions regarding an answer rather than following other (and perhaps more vocal) students. Individual submission also develops personal responsibility for responses.

Based on student feedback and instructor reflection, we believe the involvement of students in the exam process is advantageous for engagement and learning. In marketing, education, student-generated exams have been implemented for well over a decade (Green, 1997). Recently, this strategy has been advocated in other areas of higher education with the objective of empowering students as active agents of their learning (Ahn & Class, 2011). This strategy meets students' developmental needs and supports Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles for good practice.

The exam-determination process starts with student/faculty contact, leading to prompt feedback regarding exam format. The time spent on participatory exams is more extensive than when students complete the exam themselves. This format requires cooperation among students and demonstrates active learning in which students hold themselves and others accountable for selecting the 'best' answers and coming to the exam prepared. A disadvantage is that introverted students do not participate in the discussion, which means that not all students have an active voice in the process.

Our experience is that this paradigm shift ---allowing students to have a voice regarding exam format ---has been beneficial. Research supports our decision, as evidence suggests that student-centered assessment contributes to greater understanding and retention (Papinezak, Peterson, Brabri, Ward, Kippers, & Wilkinson, 2012). Researchers have also noted the benefit of involving students in group-exam review activities prior to taking the exam (Drouin, 2010) and student input after an exam based on student performance contributors (Williams & Clark, 2004). As instructors, there is great satisfaction in observing students discussing and debating highly challenging questions for 2 hours. Past experience has been that students frequently rushed through midterms and final exams, sometimes spending less than 20 minutes on an exam designed to assess an entire semester's learning. In contrast, using a student determined format as described, students frequently spend up to two hours in class applying knowledge, engaging in discussion and debating answers in addition to outside of class time spent completing the exam

prior to attending class. With this approach, the exam itself becomes a tool for the reinforcement and integration of learning.

The “grades” earned by students who participate in exam discussions are frequently a source of curiosity. Do some students ‘get’ the correct answer by not thinking critically and marking the answer chosen by class consensus? Yes. Are the exam scores skewed high? Sometimes. Remarkably, however, students can fail these exams because they complete and submit their exams individually. The exam grade distribution for student-determined exams has been consistent with grade distribution for instructor-determined exams, with results falling along a normal bell curve. The outcome for some types of exam questions has remained constant (e.g., theory) across exam formats. The variance in student answers to these questions is similar, regardless of whether the exam format is instructor-determined or student-determined.

Task Two: Achieving Interdependence

In addition to a drive for independence (identity and autonomy), late adolescents crave close connections with others and a sense of interdependence. Prior to forming intimate connections with others, late adolescents must establish a sense of identity. Having a sense of personal agency allows one the freedom to consider someone else’s point of view and how it may differ from one’s own. This perspective taking contributes to sharing oneself intimately with another and feeling a sense of belonging. Late adolescent college students often try to fit in and belong in an environment that differs from high school. Even with the desire for connection, late adolescents frequently experience conflict with parents, partners, and classmates and indicate concerns about their ability to resolve disagreements comfortably. Family science courses are a venue for introducing the perspective-taking skills, insights, and strategies that contribute to effective communication.

In this section, we focus on three strategies involved in enhancing late adolescent college students’ interdependence via perspective taking skills: 1) accepting the validity of perspectives other than one’s own; 2) development of active listening skills; and 3) the acquisition of group/team collaborative skills. Each of these strategies has been successfully implemented in various family science courses by the authors.

Teaching Strategy 4: Perspective Taking Opportunities

Most late adolescent college students are unprepared for the diversity of ideas and opinions expressed in college classes and personal relationships. Many students will resist change and regard any attempt to expand their worldview as a violation of personal beliefs. The FLE perspective on diversity requires students to develop dispositions toward others that are inclusive and respectful (Arcus, et al., 1993). To support this objective, case studies and documentaries are used in our courses to illustrate how wide-ranging interpretations of events can occur, even within the same family (Lim, Diamond, Chang, Primm, & Lu, 2008). These methods permit a ‘real life look’ at family structure and interaction. Students observe interpersonal relationships and consider how communication and conflict are handled from each family

member's perspective. This approach allows students to offer a character's view rather than articulating and risk the expression of a personal viewpoint.

The case method of analyzing family life situations is integrated into an introductory lifespan course throughout the semester. In this method, information about a family dilemma is presented to small groups of students during class without offering clues about how the dilemma should be resolved. Students often find the descriptions of the case frustratingly ambiguous. Students want more detail so they can make the "right" decision. The role of the instructor is to guide students through the process of exploring alternative perspectives during class time. Eventually, students discover that the process of implementing an effective strengths-based approach is the primary purpose of the case method. Students learn to consider a variety of valid reasons for seemingly "unreasonable" behavior. This lessens a rush to judgment when families and individuals in the case (or in real life) behave in unexpected ways. The case method helps to develop critical thinking and the exploration of varying motives for behavior. As an added benefit, students develop public speaking skills discussing their opinions within a group and sharing their group's response with the entire class.

In addition to the case method for teaching purposes, actual case studies are used for assessment of student understanding of developmental concepts. In introductory courses, students respond to questions about the influence of developmental, contextual, and psychosocial factors on the behavior of others through a homework assignment. By applying knowledge through case analysis, students have the opportunity to explore family challenges. The cases are brief, but contain enough detail to introduce concepts for exploration and evaluation. Questions are designed to challenge students' perceptions about gender, race, and religion by asking students to consider each situation from different points of view. Case analyses are written and students' grades are based on the soundness and thoughtfulness of their reasoning about the issues.

Documentaries are another tool for encouraging perspective taking. Reflection papers based on documentaries are assigned throughout the semester in an upper-level family diversity course. As an example, the documentary, *Off and Running* (Opper, 2009) focuses on an adopted African-American adolescent's coming of age and her struggles with identity. Her interactions with her white Jewish lesbian mothers, an older brother who is black and Puerto Rican, and a younger brother, who is Korean, emphasize the need for multiple perspectives and the importance of family connection when struggling to achieve autonomy. Students are assigned to reflect on family dynamics from each family member's perspective, as opposed to their perspective through specific prompt questions. Documentaries allow students to make discoveries about their biases in a supportive learning environment. Students who identify with certain family members in the documentary are often surprised by the insight they gain when asked to describe the emotions and feelings of others. Discussions about perspectives coinciding with the day reflection papers are due are usually quite lively. Students frequently comment that documentaries are among the most meaningful learning tools:

I think the videos were helpful in showing me real life examples of concepts I will need to know in the future.

Video clips and documentaries were helpful. Writing assignments were good for learning about diversity and helpful in considering worldviews.

Documentaries provide a mechanism for greater student involvement because they provide the context that is often missing from textbook descriptions. Students are challenged to think more broadly about outcomes. They learn that the original attributions about “why things went wrong” were often simplistic and distracting. This prepares students for more effective work with clients whose lives and stressors will differ from their own.

The value of respecting diversity is emphasized through these teaching methods and assessments. Students become engaged with the case method, case studies, and documentaries and spend more time on the task. The concept that ‘real’ families will be impacted by a student’s response communicates high expectations and the connection that the information learned in the classroom is relevant to ‘outside’ the classroom.

In terms of time on task, a principle for good practice, a limitation of documentary use is the classroom time required for their presentation. Accordingly, we limit the use of documentaries to those that are especially effective at illustrating a particular point or require outside of class viewing based on Internet viewing options.

Teaching Strategy 5: Development of Active Listening Skills

Active listening is a conscious attempt to truly feel and understand what another person is saying. It involves hearing, perceiving body language, and silence. According to Rogers and Farson (1987), people who are active listeners have more clarity about them and are able to focus on what the speaker is feeling and thinking, which enables a person to nurture lasting bonds. With increased usage of social media and other socio-technologies by late adolescent college students, there has been considerable debate about impact on social interactions. There is concern that some students may neither “hear” others nor feel “heard” themselves on college campuses.

The strategies to support the development of perspective taking and belongingness are embedded within the concept of active listening and the pedagogy associated with its teaching in a family science course open to all majors on campus. Active listening requires the talker to have a clear and open mind. A listener must clear his/her mind in order to give full attention and should not be thinking about how to respond or about a similar personal experience (Powell & Cassidy, 2001). In fact, students are deliberately taught not to talk or disclose about themselves as this behavior diminishes the talker’s perspective when the listener takes ownership of the conversation by projecting his/her beliefs and values rather than respecting the talker’s beliefs. A challenge for many listeners is when a talker discloses ideological beliefs that are in contrast to

the listener. The listener by active listening learns the value of being nonjudgmental which contributes to perspective taking.

An active listening pedagogy utilized is a talking circle. Talking circles create a sense of belonging and perspective taking by allowing students to individually be heard and to listen to others with full attention. A prompt associated with a course reading or listening experience is used to initiate the activity. A student volunteers to go first and is given a token (e.g., feather) and verbally responds to the prompt. The rule: no one else is allowed to talk, ask questions or respond in any way. Only the person with the token is permitted to talk. Once the student is finished talking, the token is passed clockwise to the next student. This student then has an opportunity to be heard. This pedagogy is potentially time intensive and should not be implemented close to the time a class ends, as students may feel rushed rather than feel that they have the gift of attention. Depending upon the prompt and class size, talking circles can take from 15 to 50 minutes.

Talking circles create community and connections. Students frequently describe the formation of lasting bonds with others as a result of acquired active-listening skills:

I didn't know anyone in the class, but as time went on I got to know these people. I learned their personalities, likes, dislikes, and I even learned about their personal lives. I know I have gained a whole new set of friends from this class.

In a sense, we all became a family through this course, because of everything we went through, and all of the experiences we shared and grew from. We all got to know each other on a completely different level and I think that was the most important thing.

I noticed a daily change in my conversations...I noticed a difference in my relationships, especially with my family and other people that I used to take for granted...My relationships have improved and I truthfully believe that it has everything to do with the change in communication I have learned in class.

Another teaching method to promote the development of active listening is service learning. Once students learn active listening strategies, they complete service learning hours at the Listening Post, a location on campus during specific time periods for anyone to come and be heard. The Listening Post is a place just for listening – not counseling or advice giving. Student listeners wait for someone to stop by. Members of the campus community can stop unannounced and talk about whatever topic they want for however long they want.

Service learning hours are started during the fifth week of the semester after students have learned basic active listening skills and learned the process for referral for those talkers who may have specific counseling needs. There is considerable time needed to set up and coordinate the Listening Post especially with balancing student schedules with the required number of hours students must listen (for each credit hour enrolled, students must listen 2 hours/week). This

service learning is team-taught by two faculty members, in which one person focuses on the service learning hours and the other on class content and implementation.

The service learning listening hours and talking circles embody Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles of effective undergraduate education. The nature of teaching active listening allows the instructors to engage more with students during talking circles and in the nature of teaching about active listening. The service learning aspect of the course emphasizes high expectations: students must make time to listen and apply active listening skills to an external audience. There is immediate feedback when one is listening at the Listening Post. There is also cooperation among students and instructors as they both provide non-judgmental listening and feedback toward one another. And being nonjudgmental is demonstrated with the talking circle as students are given full attention of others no matter what they disclose.

Teaching Strategy 6: Developing Group Discussion Skills

Learning to work meaningfully with others is challenging for adolescents, because they frequently eschew the process of teamwork and focus on a speedy outcome without the "bother" of collaboration. This avoidance of consensus building and impatience with group process leads many students to request, "Can I just do this myself instead of working in a group?" Conversely, some students who expect discussion and negotiation feel frustrated and devalued.

Students are less likely to resist group work when collaboration issues have been addressed before a formal assignment has been introduced. Collaboration with others involves a set of skills that must be learned and practiced. Students benefit when they are intentionally introduced to a variety of group interaction roles that foster success, such as the role of the encourager, the compromiser, the summarizer, and the clarifier, in addition to the role of the leader. By educating students on the many facets and skills of teamwork, instructors emphasized the development of personal characteristics that students need to be good friends, partners, and emerging professionals.

We have found that student-centered small group activities embedded in our introductory courses are an effective way to initiate collaboration skills. As an example, we have students complete an online survey about group interaction and teamwork styles early in the semester and again at the end of the semester. For this, we refer students to a website on Team Working skills provided in the U.K. by the University of Kent (<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/teamwork.htm>). When students complete the online survey, they are frequently surprised to discover that being an "encourager" can have as much value as being the "leader" when working with others. Students learn that those who tend to take charge because they want things "done right" may be dismissing the contributions of others that can only become apparent when group process is valued. As an outcome of the survey, students identify their 3 strongest areas of competence and report these via discussion board. Groups of four are formed based on this information, with students of complementary styles paired together. For example, strong leaders are not paired with other leaders, but with encouragers or supporters. These groups remain constant throughout the semester.

As we progress through the course, students read brief vignettes about the content they are studying and respond to questions in their small groups. At the end of each group discussion, students complete a brief questionnaire to assess their behavior in the discussion. The objective of the questionnaire is to encourage students to reflect on their behavior during the discussion. Ideally, they would show a balance between listening, initiating, and focusing discussion. They would explore alternate ideas, collaborate to achieve genuine consensus and, over time, share leadership. The questions also require students to consider the extent to which they listen when others talk, stay on topic and have prepared in advance by locating relevant information or reading the textbook. They are encouraged to recognize patterns of their own disruptive behavior, if any, so that they may understand it and change it. We have students keep the questionnaires over time, as these become the basis for self-reflection at the end of the course. Because we want this exercise to be meaningful, we do not assign grades for the reflection based on how high they have scored on their assessment quizzes, but rather, the depth of their reflection about the process of group work.

When students retook the online survey at the end of the semester, many students were aware that they had developed new strengths in teamwork categories that were not noted at the beginning of the course. Results generally indicate considerable growth based on engagement opportunities offered during class. We conclude that students are surprisingly willing to work in groups if they are provided with tools of effective communication. Their natural desire to connect with others increases their motivation to take this activity seriously.

The online survey provides prompt and personal feedback to students. The active learning in cooperative groups based on teamwork styles provides the opportunity for students to respect the different styles of others within the group. Students are involved in learning because their discussions are relevant ---they reflect on their roles and the collaborative process as well as the course content.

Summary

Effective family life education focuses on meeting the needs of the intended audience. In support of Powell and Cassidy's (2001) statement: "it is important to understand how people of various ages and stages and abilities learn best" (p. 73), we advocate that this FLE principle be more overtly applied to teaching college students. As educators, we recognize the importance of creating relevance for FLE participants in order to increase engagement and gaining audience "buy-in". In a family science course, the target audience is college students most likely in the late adolescence stage. By supporting students' need for independence and belongingness with creative assignments and assessments, we increase their involvement in the learning process.

A focus on using student engagement principles to meet the developmental needs of college students may require a shift in pedagogy and philosophy for some educators. Initiating more student-faculty contact to identify felt needs, creating active learning strategies, and providing prompt feedback can be potential barriers. More work for the instructor, and time

away from content instruction are sometimes cited as drawbacks. We, however, believe that this time is well spent because our strategies increase student motivation and learning.

Our approach to meeting college students' "felt needs" is respectful of their personal experiences and the immediate issues that relate to their developmental tasks. Powell and Cassidy (2001) assert that "the needs and concerns of the learners should be acknowledged by the educator and addressed in some fashion during the program" or in this context, the course (p. 70). If needs are not met, then "the learners will feel frustrated and doubtful about the value of the program" which contradicts the value of student engagement (Powell & Cassidy, 2001, p. 70). Just as family life education programs must be relevant, we argue that family science courses (and all other college courses) must meet the felt needs of college students and be relevant to them as learners. Utilizing developmental tasks as a framework, we show how teaching strategies that reflect Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles can help to accomplish these objectives.

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