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CALL FOR PAPERS

The Journal of Effective Teaching is accepting submissions for review for the Fall 2017 issue. Manuscripts will be due May 31, 2017. The expected publication date will be September 30th. Articles will be accepted in any of the Content Areas supported by the journal.

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INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

The Journal of Effective Teaching is an electronic journal devoted to the exchange of ideas and information about undergraduate and graduate teaching. Articles are solicited for publications which address excellence in teaching at colleges and universities. We invite contributors to share their insights in pedagogy, innovations in teaching and learning, and classroom experiences in the form of a scholarly communication which will be reviewed by experts in teaching scholarship. Articles should appeal to a broad campus readership. Articles which draw upon specific-discipline based research or teaching practices should elaborate on how the teaching practice, research or findings relates across the disciplines. We are particularly interested in topics addressed in the particular Content Areas described at this site, including empirical research on pedagogy, innovations in teaching and learning, and classroom experiences.

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Manuscripts for publication should:

- Follow APA guidelines (5th Edition).
- Include an abstract and 3-5 keywords.
- Typeset in English using MS Word format and 12 pt Times New Roman
- Articles/essays on effective teaching should be 2000-5000.
- Research articles should be 3000-8000 words.
- Tables and figures should be placed appropriately in the text.

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Letter from the Editor-in-Chief: Scholarship and Teaching

Russell L. Herman
The University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC

There has been a long history of how faculty balance teaching, scholarship, and service and how faculty are evaluated in these areas. As Schulman (2011) noted, some committees operated under “the premise that teaching was the central function of university faculty members” while in the review of “faculty for promotion and tenure, the teaching work of faculty members was always subordinated to their published record as scholars in their discipline or profession.” This discussion has been occurring at colleges and universities for decades (Feldman, 1987). Most likely this is because annual evaluations and the tenure and promotion process are personal issues for faculty.

The debate of teaching vs research seemed to have culminated in some circles with Boyer’s (1990) book, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate. Boyer (1990) argued that there are four categories of the work of the professoriate. He listed these separate, but overlapping, categories of scholarship. These are: the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of teaching” (p. 16). These areas are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Boyer’s (1990) four categories of the work of the professoriate.

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The scholarship of discovery entails what traditionally is original research which advances knowledge. In the scholarship of integration, one integrates knowledge across disciplinary areas. The scholarship of application has become the scholarship of engagement. The scholarship of teaching has since become the scholarship of teaching and learning. It is the latter category that we hope the articles in *The Journal of Effective Teaching* can address.

As one looks at Figure 2, one sees what is called a word cloud, or a tag cloud. The relative font size in some way gives importance to some words over others. This particular list was generated from the frequency of key words used in the article titles, abstracts, and keywords from this journal over the past decade. The list may indicate some of the key topics covered so far, or suggest areas that need more discussion. However, does it show what is behind the article content and the interconnections of these words?

*The Journal of Effective Teaching* is devoted to the discussion of teaching excellence in colleges and universities. Many of the topics are seen in Figure 1, but the process of “discussion” is not so clear. It may seem that the discussion is one way, the authors speaking...
to the readers. But, the readers can take this a step further and introduce it to their students and colleagues. Eventually, readers can bring back the discussion by disseminating their own experiences. These constitute two differing approaches to as to how to change teaching practices in higher education. These are sometimes referred to as Scholarly Teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

There are differing approaches to how one brings scholarship into one’s teaching as noted in select discussions at the Vanderbilt site. Let’s say that you are trying to implement group projects into your class, but you have no idea as to how to effectively do so. You could be informed by observation and experience, talking to your colleagues and looking at what is known. You might review the literature and find that there have been studies which indicate some best practices or suggestions as to how to reduce social loafing. You learn about what seems to work, or not, and try it out in your class. This is a form of Scholarly Teaching. You implement new teaching practices based on informed, evidence-based teaching. You may even find that for your particular groups of students, you need to tweak the best practices or make choices about how to separate out the individual and group contributions for student assessment. However, whatever you learn for your own class, you may not contribute to the knowledge base for others.

This is different from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. SoTL is “scholarly inquiry into student learning which advances the practice of teaching by making research findings public.” In this case, you pick up from where Scholarly Teaching leaves off. You not only ask, “What has been done previously?” you also look to see what can be added and how can it be used. You look across courses and disciplines. You observe what takes place in the classroom and aim to build on work of others. These can take the form of interviews, observation, survey, or experiment. The classroom is a lab for SoTL. Finally, you disseminate your findings, contributing to community through conferences, journals, etc.

Over the last quarter century SoTL has grown from discipline-specific studies of pedagogy and trying to find out how students learn, to more interdisciplinary approaches and has become international in scope. However, it still seems that as much as SoTL has grown, as indicated by the literature (Hutchings, Bjork, & Babb, 2002) and many sites like The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University and Vanderbilt’s Center for Teaching and journals like this one, the same discussions occur within academic departments. However, how does this translate to the local level? It depends on the goals. Are we really interested in how students learn and how do research on student learning? The typical professional would like this endeavor to count towards their professional duties. But with all the discussion over the last several decades, it is still difficult to get disciplinary colleagues to acknowledge that this type of research ranks with discipline-specific research.
References

Linking Developmental Themes to Theories in the Autobiographical Narratives of Life-Span Development Students

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Abstract

Prior research findings point to the efficacy of using autobiographical life-story narration as a learning tool in undergraduate classes. The current study seeks to add to the existing literature on this topic by performing a qualitative analysis across events recorded in students’ autobiographical narratives. The purpose of this analysis is to assess student learning of preselected developmental theories (Piaget, Schaie & Willis, and Erikson). Participants were undergraduates ($N = 108$) enrolled in introductory life-span development classes at a public state college in the southeastern United States. Participants composed three written assignments of a flowing narrative quality due at designated time intervals throughout the semester. The first assignment covered infancy through preschool (0-6 years); the second, the elementary school years through adolescence (7-19 years); and the third, early through late adulthood (20 years onward). In completing their assignments, participants conducted an introspective analysis of their own development (past, present, and realistic speculations about the future) in terms of applicable developmental principles. The data were analyzed for correct and incorrect links between dominant themes and corresponding developmental conceptions. Results are discussed in light of participants’ content learning in the context of each preselected developmental theory. Implications for undergraduate teaching, learning, and assessment are also presented.

Keywords: Autobiographical narratives, narrative psychology, constructivist pedagogy.

Everyday cognitive activities depend on generalized abstractions derived from life experiences encoded in memory (Binder & Desai, 2011). Consequently, narrative psychology holds a prominent place in the retrieval of autobiographical memories that are relevant in analyzing and explaining individual development. As McAdams and McLean (2013) explain: “Narrative identity is a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (p. 233).

Developmental researchers and theorists have long discussed the importance of introspective reflection in constructing and understanding the various stages of the life cycle. For example, Fivush and Haden (2003) examined the origins of story comprehension and storytelling in childhood, whereas Habermas and Bluck (2000) investigated the emergence

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of life-story schemas in adolescence. With regard to memories of educational episodes from the college years, Pillemer, Picariello, Law, and Reichman (1996) demonstrated that most college students and alumni recount impactful events (e.g., highly emotional encounters) that they deem to possess pervasive influence in their lives. Focusing attention on the latter portion of the life span, Bruner (1999) associated successful aging with the self-credibility that people derive from running after-the-fact narratives about events in their own lives.

Over the past two decades, research has emerged that explores autobiographical memories within the overall structure of prominent theories of development. This investigative track is consistent with Reichenbach’s (1938) pioneering description of the context of discovery (see Schickore & Steinle, 2006, for a more contemporary analysis of this topic). From this perspective, researchers examine open-ended narrative accounts for the presence of recurring broad themes and qualitative characterizations. In early discovery research with developmental implications, Thorne (1995) used personally salient, event-specific, retrospective reports to investigate age-related changes in young adults’ memories of childhood and adolescence. In doing so, the researcher uncovered patterns that reflect well-known developmental theories. By taking into account the developmental stage of the event, Thorne identified the type of memory recalled from a given age. For instance, consistent with the respective psychosocial stages in Erikson’s (1950, 1959, 1968) life-span developmental theory, memories about encounters with parents and wanting help dominated in childhood. On the other hand, memories about encounters with close friends and desiring intimacy appeared with increasing frequency by mid-to-late adolescence. Subsequently, Conway and Holmes (2004) studied older adults’ memories from each decade of life. Based on a content analysis of resulting memories, they also found a systematic relationship to Erikson’s psychosocial stages.

In yet another early investigation with developmental repercussions reflective of the context of discovery, Rothenberg (1994) implemented an open-ended, qualitative analysis of descriptive essays on the best and worst school memories of college students. Within one thematic category, Rothenberg found that many of the memories of school successes and failures relate to Erikson’s description of initiative, competence, and identity as developmental tasks that people must accomplish at successive stages in the life cycle. More current research involving undergraduate students has also shown that autobiographical memories of school emphasize social situations as opposed to academics; once again, with obvious connections to Erikson’s psychosocial stage theory. For example, in studying undergraduate autobiographical memories of school grades 1-12, Walls, Sperling, and Weber (2001) discovered “evidence of developmental progression from the importance of authority to the importance of peers” (p. 126). Even more recently, related research (Haught, Nardi, & Walls, 2015) favors these earlier findings about the preeminence of social scenarios in autobiographical memories. So expected is this observed research outcome that to counter the likelihood of discovering social elements of memories superseding academic ones, Haught, Nardi, and Walls (2016) offered prompts to undergraduates to provide the necessary framework to draw on their academic memories.
Haught et al. (2015, 2016) have also examined the underlying learning implications tied to autobiographical memories. As captured in these authors’ words, “‘memories of school’ and the formal and informal learning experiences associated with them may influence behaviors and subsequent choices [e.g., career choices]” (Haught et al., 2016, p. 825). This research focus is compatible with that adopted in other studies aimed at investigating autobiographical life-story narration as a learning tool. In the framework of teaching developmental principles, narrative accounts of individual development have been used successfully to improve undergraduate learning. In an early anecdotal report, Clinchy (1995) elicited and explored learner-generated narratives of personal experiences as a means of encouraging developmental psychology students to construct knowledge about course content. Consistent with Clinchy’s classroom observations, the present author has found both quantitative and qualitative evidence in support of the pedagogical effectiveness of life-story narration in teaching introductory life-span development classes (Mayo, 2001). In writing a Life Analysis (Mayo, 2001), a semester-length autobiographical narrative project, each student analyzed his or her life in theoretical terms over both its historical and hypothetical span. This assignment required students to combine knowledge of life-span theory with realistic self-assessment from birth through death. For the developmental periods that had already transpired, students provided an introspective analysis of important life events. For developmental periods that had yet to arrive, students discussed anticipated life successes and disappointments. Two sample excerpts are offered from selected life analyses to clarify the basic parameters for completing this assignment. The first excerpt, composed by a middle-aged female student, invokes an early childhood memory. The second excerpt, written by a young-adult male student, describes an anticipated life event in late adulthood.

**Excerpt 1:** At three years of age, I thought that the moon was actually a living and breathing person who could come down from the sky and sing to me. As illogical as it now seems to me in adulthood, I had apparently come to this conclusion back then from watching children’s cartoons where the “man in the moon” would bounce off musical notes as playful tunes sung in the background. Piaget discussed early childhood experiences like this one as preoperational illustrations of animism, or assigning human-like attributes to inanimate objects.

**Excerpt 2:** Looking ahead to my late adulthood years, I will draw strength from reflecting on my earlier life experiences. In reminiscing about the past, I will view my failures as learning experiences and my successes as many. In this way, I will develop what Erikson called a sense of ego integrity that I have accomplished much throughout a happy and productive life.

**Purpose of the Present Study**

In the current investigation, the Life Analysis project is revisited with another group of undergraduate students from classes in life-span developmental psychology. The Life Analysis, as an autobiographical life-narrative assignment, was validated previously as an effective pedagogical tool in relation to more traditional didactics (Mayo, 2001). Consequently, the purpose of the present study is to perform a qualitative analysis across the
events recorded in students’ autobiographical narratives. This analysis, in turn, is intended for use in assessing student learning of preselected developmental principles. In this qualitative analysis, both the psychosocial and cognitive domains of development across the life cycle are examined. This represents the first time that such an analysis is undertaken within the cognitive realm of development. Congruent with the underlying purpose of earlier reports (e.g., Conway & Holmes, 2004; Walls et al., 2001), the primary research goal in these two domains is to converge dominant themes and patterns with conceptions from several theoretical perspectives of noteworthy significance in the field of human development. As is the case in past reports (e.g., Rothenberg, 1994; Thorne, 1995), Erikson’s life-span developmental view once again serves as the undergirding theoretical framework for exploring psychosocial development. Piaget’s (1926/1959, 1929, 1936/1952) cognitive developmental theory and Schaie and Willis’ stage theory of adult cognitive development (Schaie & Willis, 2000, 2002) operate as the theoretical backdrops for examining cognitive development.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 108 freshmen and sophomores enrolled in one of four sections of a course in introductory human growth across the life span for which the present author served as instructor of record. These course sections were offered over two consecutive semesters, two sections per semester, at a public state college in the southeastern United States. There were 63 females and 45 males who ranged in age from 18 to 51 years ($M = 23.61$). Approximately 91% of participants were spread among the following college majors: psychology, sociology, and allied health. The remaining participants were either teacher education or business majors.

**Instructions to Students for Completing the Life Analysis**

The instructions issued to students for completing the Life Analysis project, which were essentially the same as those employed in prior classroom-based research (Mayo, 2001), are described earlier in the present paper. Instead of requiring a completed Life Analysis journal (replete with a designated number of short diary-like entries spanning the life cycle, in chronological order, from infancy through late adulthood) due at the conclusion of the semester, the learning project in the present study was divided into three written assignments of a flowing narrative quality due at designated time intervals throughout the term. Each assignment counted equally as 10% of the final course grade. The deadline for submitting each assignment corresponded to the conclusion of coverage of the respective developmental period included in that segment of the course. Overall, seven developmental periods were canvassed: infancy (0-2 years); early childhood (2-7 years); middle and late childhood (7-12 years); adolescence (teen years); early adulthood (20-40 years); middle adulthood (40-60 years); and late adulthood (60 years onward). The first assignment pertained to infancy through the preschool years (0-6 years); the second, the elementary school years through adolescence (7-19 years); and the third, early through late adulthood (20 years onward).
Each assignment contained between four and six computer-typed pages (not including the title page) written in accordance with current APA style guidelines. Photographs, diagrams, drawings, or other illustrations appeared in a separate, attached appendix that did not count toward fulfilling the stipulated page requirement.

In composing their projects, students conducted introspective analyses of their own development in terms of applicable developmental principles. For past developmental periods, students were encouraged to talk with significant others (e.g., parents, siblings, friends, former teachers) in collecting historical data about the events that have played an important role in their personal development. For future developmental periods, students speculated realistically about the successes and misfortunes that they might expect to encounter in their lives. Matching the previously reported approach for clarifying the guidelines for completing the Life Analysis journal (Mayo, 2001), the contents of a sample life narrative (cognitive and psychosocial development for a fictitious preschool child) were distributed and reviewed on the first day of class.

As in the past (Mayo, 2001), appropriate measures were adopted to protect students’ privacy. Students were also urged to exercise reasonable discretion in their self-disclosure. Moreover, although the option was extended to complete traditional term papers in lieu of the life-narrative assignments, none of the student participants elected to pursue this course of action. The same situation applies to the option to refuse inclusion in the research data pool.

Results and Discussion

An open-ended methodology was used in analyzing students’ autobiographical narratives. Staying within the context of discovery, data analysis stemmed from a grounded theory approach (e.g., Birks & Mills, 2011) in which themes originating from analyzing student narratives were grounded in the content of the narratives themselves. More specifically, the research goal was to begin by systematically examining the data and then move toward discovered developmental principles as themes offered within three preselected theories (Piaget, Schaie & Willis, and Erikson).

The data set was large, consisting of the three previously described life-narrative assignments for each of the 108 student participants. Reliability of data analysis was established through inter-rater agreement. Because of the voluminous nature of the data, 50% of the data set—randomly drawn in equal proportions across the three assignments—was analyzed independently for content by the present author and a faculty colleague who also possessed experience in teaching introductory life-span development. Inter-rater judgments produced 95% agreement. Student responses that fell outside of this range of inter-rater agreement were excluded from this paper.

For the developmental time frame prescribed by each life-narrative assignment (infancy through preschool, elementary school through adolescence, and early through late adulthood), raters kept an ongoing record of the number of times that students applied given developmental principles from Piaget’s, Schaie and Willis’, and Erikson’s theories to
support their recorded life events. A synopsis of the thematic content of each event (e.g., one-year-old child playing hide-and-go-seek) was accompanied by a brief description of the supporting theoretical application (object permanence as part of Piagetian sensorimotor intelligence).

As part of the aforementioned content analysis, raters categorized correct and incorrect applications separately in the process of inspecting the data. In doing so, a categorical (discrete) coding scheme was used (see Krippendorff, 2012, for a definitive overview of the methodological aspects of content analysis). A category code of 1 was assigned in each instance where developmental theory was applied correctly to life event. In contrast, a category code of 2 was assigned to each incorrect application of developmental theory to life event.

The data analysis for both correct and incorrect applications is summarized in Tables 1-3. In sequential order beginning with Table 1, the salient findings represented in each table are discussed as they pertain to the connection between dominant themes and patterns and corresponding developmental conceptions from the respective theoretical perspectives. Although not specifically addressed in any of these tables, it should be noted that no reliable pattern of gender differences was observed throughout the content analysis.

For the multiple substages within the sensorimotor stage (birth-2 years), object permanence, tertiary circular reactions, secondary circular reactions, and deferred imitation, in that order, were the developmental conceptions identified most often in students’ life narratives. Students demonstrated a thorough understanding of both object permanence and deferred imitation. To typify his coming to terms with object permanence (understanding that objects continue to exist when out of the line of vision; 8-12 months), a student wrote about a story, shared with him by his parents, when he was 11 months old and had actively searched for a toy race car that had slid underneath his family’s living-room couch. For deferred imitation (delaying imitation of others’ behaviors as an indicator of rudimentary latent learning; 18-24 months), another student presented an instance when he had witnessed an older brother engage in a temper tantrum to get his way with his parents, and then “mentally cataloged” what he had observed for his own use months later. However, the more elevated number of incorrect applications for both tertiary and secondary circular reactions indicated that some students were unclear about these conceptions. In several instances, students appeared to have confused these notions with one another. In secondary circular reactions (4-8 months), infants begin to respond to the outside world by intentionally repeating enjoyable actions. In contrast, tertiary circular reactions (12-18 months) involve exploring new possibilities for objects through active trial-and-error experimentation. One student mistakenly cited secondary circular reactions in the instance where, as a 15 month old, she experimented with various squeeze toys to see which ones made different noises. In another case, a student wrongly tied tertiary circular reactions to the situation in which, as a 6 month old, he repeatedly shook his rattle as a means of entertaining himself.

Table 1 shows the data associated with the four most frequently cited concepts in each stage of Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory. Each stage will be reviewed separately.
Table 1. Number of Correct and Incorrect Applications of Piaget’s Cognitive Stage Theory.

<table>
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<th>Stage and its four most frequently cited developmental concepts</th>
<th>Correct application (category code = 1)</th>
<th>Incorrect application (category code = 2)</th>
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<td>Stage 1: Sensorimotor (birth-2 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Object permanence</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tertiary circular reactions</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Secondary circular reactions</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>4. Deferred imitation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Preoperations (2-7 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Egocentrism</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Centration</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Animism</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Symbolic play</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Concrete Operations (7-12 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Conservation</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reversibility</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Seriation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inductive logic</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Formal Operations (12 years onward)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Hypothetical reasoning</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>2. Imaginary audience</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Deductive logic</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Metacognition</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
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In preoperations (2-7 years), the content of students’ autobiographical narratives implied an overall mastery of the most frequently cited conceptions: egocentrism (inability to adopt another’s viewpoint that dominates thought during the preoperational stage), centration, animism, and symbolic play, in that order. In terms of the symbolic-function substage (2-4 years), a student provided an illustration of animism (the belief that inanimate objects are alive and have purpose) in the situation where he thought, as a 3 year old, that his toy cars were friends with whom he could converse. As an example of symbolic (pretend) play also within the symbolic-function substage, a different student offered the case when, at age 3, she had run around her family’s home waving a kitchen spatula as her “magic wand.” In relation to the intuitive-thought substage (4-7 years), yet another student correctly used centration (tendency to focus on only one aspect of a situation or problem) to justify her inability at age 5 to comprehend the conservation of liquids (i.e., four ounces of juice remains four ounces of juice, regardless of the size of the glass in which the juice has been poured).
Regarding concrete operations (7-12 years), conservation, reversibility, seriation, and inductive logic were, in that order, the four most frequently identified developmental concepts. Analysis of life narratives revealed that students had a consistently firm grasp of the first three of these conceptions. To illustrate conservation (understanding that an object’s underlying properties remain unchanged despite alterations in outward appearance), a student used the example of realizing early into his elementary school years that slicing a hot dog into two large pieces is equivalent to cutting the same-size hot dog into four smaller slices. For reversibility (ability to reason through the steps of a problem, and then to go backward to the starting point), another student cited an instance when she first understood as a second grader that a reversible winter ski jacket was not two separate jackets, but instead the same jacket that could be turned over to one of two different sides. To convey his understanding of seriation (mentally arranging items in a series based on a quantifiable dimension), another student described a situation in which, as a third grader, his parents asked him to clean up his toy building blocks. In this situation, he wrote that he had carefully placed these objects back into a large metal container based on their relative size—moving progressively from smallest to largest. In contrast to students’ overall facility in exemplifying conservation, reversibility and seriation, appreciably more errors were observed for inductive logic (mentally progressing from a specific experience to a general principle). In fact, several students mistook deductive logic (mentally applying a general principle to a specific conclusion) for inductive logic in their autobiographical narratives. For example, one student wrote that she had idolized her fifth-grade teacher and thus wanted to emulate her. She had reasoned that her teacher had earned a college degree to become an educator, as is also the case with all teachers; therefore, she would have to complete college if she wanted to become a teacher like her idol. Although correctly reasoned by this student, this example nonetheless reveals deductive as opposed to inductive logic.

For formal operations (12 years onward), a similar finding emerged as was observed with concrete operations insofar as distinguishing correctly between the types of reasoning common in this stage. In reviewing students’ life narratives, a sizeable number of errors were found in their applied illustrations of deductive logic—the third-most-frequently cited developmental conception of this stage. Many of these errors involved mistaking this form of reasoning for inductive logic, which is first observed in the concrete operational stage. For instance, one student thought back to when she had entered a dingy-looking attic when she was 14 years old and soon began to sneeze, therein reasoning deductively (the correct developmental application should have been inductive reasoning) that she must be allergic to dust. Beyond the recurring difficulties found with correctly identifying examples of deductive logic, students showed sound understanding of the other three most-often mentioned developmental concepts: hypothetical reasoning (first), imaginary audience (second), and metacognition (fourth). One student illustrated hypothetical reasoning with her early-teenage tendency to ponder "what if" questions in searching for possible outcomes in her life. For imaginary audience, a different student used the example of roaming the halls of his middle and high school, obsessed with how he would look to his peers, and thus always having a comb handy in his back pocket to make sure that his hair was neatly in place. For metacognition, yet another student described her ongoing internal search for a preferred learning style as she attempted to be-
come increasingly aware of ways that worked best for her to learn and recall information as a high school student.

Table 2 depicts the data linked to the accompanying focus for each stage in Schaie and Willis’ theory of adult cognitive development. On the whole, the content of students’ life narratives revealed a sound understanding of the stages in this theoretical model (each stage shown here, as in Table 2, with its associated focus): Stage 1 (under 19): Acquisitive (Acquiring knowledge); Stage 2 (20-30): Achieving (Applying knowledge); Stage 3 (30-40): Responsible (Family); Stage 4 (40-50): Executive (Broader social outlook); Stage 5 (50-60): Reorganizational (Pre-retirement); Stage 6 (60-65): Reintegrative (Replacing paid work); and Stage 7 (65 onward): Legacy creating (Legacy for loved ones).

### Table 2. Number of Correct and Incorrect Applications of Schaie and Willis’ Stage Theory of Adult Cognitive Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage and its associated focus</th>
<th>Correct application (category code = 1)</th>
<th>Incorrect application (category code = 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 (under 19): Acquisitive (Acquiring knowledge)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 (20-30): Achieving (Applying knowledge)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 (30-40): Responsible (Family)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4 (40-50): Executive (Broader social outlook)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5 (50-60): Reorganizational (Pre-retirement)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6 (60-65): Reintegrative (Replacing paid work)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 7 (65+): Legacy creating (Legacy for loved ones)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As found in Table 2, exceptions to the overall pattern of students’ demonstrated comprehension of Schaie and Willis’ theory involve Stage 3: Responsible and Stage 4: Executive, both of which share an underlying other-directedness. Several students confused these stages in tagging a supporting developmental conception to their life-narrative descriptions. As one example, one student wrote that when she entered her mid-40s she would become increasingly interested in national and world politics and her place in a growing global community. This student tied this example to Stage 3: Responsible, when it would have been more accurately matched to Stage 4: Executive because her other-directed behavior is targeted toward a larger social perspective involving complex multi-level relationships rather than concerns for nurturing family relationships. To further present the findings relative to the stages in Schaie and Willis’ theory (2000), three excerpts are offered that portray some of the more memorable accounts among students’ life narratives and their corresponding correct developmental applications.
Excerpt 1: As a 25-year-old small business owner, I have relied a lot on the information that I have learned while I have been enrolled in college. In my business classes, I have been taught how to market a product, handle day-to-day business operations, and manage cost accounting. Applying this knowledge to operating my own business has given me the opportunity to develop the entrepreneurial skills that I will need to continue to grow my company. [Stage 2 (20-30): Achieving]

Excerpt 2: When I reach my mid-60s, I will actively restructure my life by shifting away from my job-related responsibilities. Although my career will have been gratifying in many ways, I will now be ready to move in the direction of activities that will add new and different layers of challenge and reward to my life. [Stage 6 (60-65): Reintegrative]

Excerpt 3: In approaching the final years of my life, I will be interested in establishing a legacy for the members of my family. I will ask my oldest son, a professional journalist, to help me write a short story of my life filled with anecdotes, lessons learned, and photos that will live on in my absence. This will be my own unique way to tell future generations of my family who I was and what my life had to offer. [Stage 7 (65 onward): Legacy creating]

Table 3 presents the data connected to the principal psychosocial task within each stage of Erikson’s life-span theory. With the exception of higher numbers of incorrect applications observed in the early-childhood through later-preschool years, students’ autobiographical narratives exhibited evidence that they understood the developmental focus inherent in the stages of this theory: Stage 1 (birth-18 months): Trust versus mistrust; Stage 2 (18 months-3 years): Autonomy versus shame and doubt; Stage 3 (3-6 years): Initiative

Table 3. Number of Correct and Incorrect Applications of Erikson’s Psychosocial Stage Theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage and its associated psychosocial task</th>
<th>Correct application (category code = 1)</th>
<th>Incorrect application (category code = 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 (birth-18 months): Trust</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 (18 months-3 years): Autonomy</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 (3-6 years): Initiative</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4 (6-12 years): Industry</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5 (teen years): Identity</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6 (20-40 years): Intimacy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 7 (40-65 years): Generativity</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 8 (65 years+): Ego Integrity</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
versus guilt; Stage 4 (6-12 years): Industry versus inferiority; Stage 5 (teen years): Identity versus role confusion; Stage 6 (20-40 years): Intimacy versus Isolation; Stage 7 (40-65 years): Generativity versus Stagnation; and Stage 8 (65 onward): Ego Integrity versus Despair.

Returning to the occurrence of relatively more incorrect applications of Erikson’s theory from 18 months through age 6, the primary successful outcome in early childhood (Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt) revolves around developing feelings of independence, whereas in later preschool (Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt) attention turns toward fostering a sense of purpose through active play. Several students confused these focal points in their life-narrative descriptions and corresponding developmental applications. As an illustration, one student wrote that, as a 3-year-old child, she went to the beach on a family vacation and spent time building a sandcastle. Once it was built, she then took a shovel and flattened it to the ground in front of her parents. When asked why she did this, she responded: “It’s mine, so I can if I want to.” However, she incorrectly assigned this demonstrative display of independence to Stage 3: Initiative rather than Stage 2: Autonomy. If, on the other hand, the life narrative had portrayed the child as carefully guarding her finished work to proudly show her parents, Stage 3: Initiative would have been the better choice. As undertaken similarly in representing the findings for stages in Schaie and Willis’ theory (2000), three life-narrative excerpts are again submitted to show some of the more creative reports of correct developmental applications of stages in Erikson’s theory.

**Excerpt 1:** I am now 18 years old and spend considerable time searching for an answer to the question: “Who am I?” Although only a simple three-word question, it may be the most difficult for many people to answer in their entire lives. To arrive at a successful answer in my own mind, I must integrate into a comprehensive whole all of the social roles that I play in my life such as daughter, sister, best friend, significant other, college student, and part-time employee. Coming to terms with whom I am will lay the groundwork for me to enter the next stages of my life with confidence and maturity. (Stage 5: Identity versus role Confusion)

**Excerpt 2:** I am presently a 45 year old who has just returned to college after over a quarter of a century. I started college the first time when I was 18 years old, but I was not emotionally ready to handle the academic and social challenges of college at that point in my life. I did not re-enroll in college the next semester. Instead, I entered the workforce, and within a span of the next five years I met my husband and we began a family together. Now that the last of my three children has grown up and left home to start adult lives, I have recently found myself growing more and more discontented with my own life. So, I decided to come back to college in midlife to pursue a nursing degree. My first semester back has been both scary and exciting as I try to adjust to the demands of college after so many years out of the loop. But in the long run, I know that I have made the right decision for myself because I am eager to earn my nursing degree and begin a rewarding career as a helping professional. (Stage 7: Generativity versus despair)
Excerpt 3: If I am fortunate enough to live into my 90s, I hope to look back on my life with pride and satisfaction. In weighing side-by-side a lifetime of both accomplishments and disappointments, I will do my best to adopt a positive stance on my life in total. In working through this reflective process, I hope to conclude that my life was largely worthwhile. If so, I will approach the inevitable end of my life with an inner peace. (*Stage 8: Ego Integrity versus despair*)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Viewed overall, the data from the present study support the conclusion that qualitative analysis of undergraduates’ autobiographical narratives is a viable means for assessing content learning within the context of teaching principles of human development. These findings are consistent with earlier reports of the facilitating impact that student narratives of personal life experience have on the undergraduate learning experience (Haught et al., 2015, 2016; Mayo, 2001; Rothenberg, 1994; Thorne, 1995; Walls et al., 2001).

Although a life-span perspective was adopted in the current investigation, it is reasonable to assume that life-narrative assignments can also be applied successfully in undergraduate classes where individual periods of development constitute the curricular focus. These classes might include child psychology, adolescent psychology, and the psychology of adulthood. Moreover, life-story narration is not restricted to undergraduate psychology classes that adhere to a developmental framework. For instance, this technique has been shown to promote learning in the context of teaching introductory psychology (Mayo, 2003b), applied psychology (Mayo, 2004), and the psychology of adjustment (Mayo, 2003a).

It is also important to note that autobiographical narration is not the sole province of undergraduate coursework in psychology. To begin, this instructional approach is germane to teaching classes within humanities where students are asked to internalize the perspective of key characters or relate life experiences to significant events in both fictional and non-fictional works. For example, in teaching an undergraduate class in humanities and cultural studies, Ogunsanwo (2017) describes the use of first-person accounts to highlight the socio-historical and psychological significance of autobiographical narratives. Comparable applications of autobiographical narratives are conceivable in history, political science, business, nursing, education, and other college classes where students are asked to connect their background knowledge and personalized life experiences to the underlying principles and defining components of a case study involving a person, event, or problem to be solved (see Schneider, 2007, for the characteristic features and planning elements of case-based learning).

From a constructivist pedagogical stance, the core value of narrative-based instruction rests upon promoting “inner dialogue” between students and course content (Mayo, 2010). Students are encouraged to search within themselves for life stories and concomitant connections to course content that become both intellectually and personally meaningful. A beneficial offshoot of this internalized learning process is that students increasingly approach course material as a “creation of the human mind” that informs learning.
far more than “merely gathered up facts strewn about the universe” (Clinchy, 1995, p. 104).

Autobiographical narration also holds promise in interconnecting teaching and learning with assessment practice. In classroom environments, teaching and learning converge with assessing cognitive competencies when teaching applications sample contexts that are realistically connected to students’ life experiences (Mayo, 2010). In the present study, the qualitative analysis of students’ autobiographical narratives provides a springboard for assessing learners’ abilities to both comprehend and apply course content with varying levels of sophistication. Therefore, as a versatile assessment tool, such an analysis can be used not only to afford a static assessment of conceptual systems at a given moment in time, but also to assess changes in dynamically evolving conceptions across time (Mayo, 2010).

In summation, content analysis of the qualitative data in the current study supports a call for increased use of autobiographical narration in undergraduate curricula within the overlapping areas of teaching, learning, and assessment. Accordingly, college educators should consider integrating into classroom practice students’ narratives of their life experiences, despite the fact that some traditional-minded academics cling to the misguided assumption that “narratives are not real evidence and that one’s personal experience is limited and biased” (Clinchy, 1995, p. 102). Theoretical and practical support for this view lies in the theory of mediated learning experience (Feuerstein & Feuerstein, 1991). Applying this theory to the present scenario, teachers should afford students opportunities to improve their learning through internalizing their personally constructed knowledge systems that are, at the same time, both subject to change and open to systematic assessment.

References


Schaie, K.W., & Willis, S. L. (2000). A stage theory model of adult cognitive development revisited. In R. Rubinstein, M. Moss, and M. Kleban (Eds.), The many dimen-
How Well do Trait Measures of Achievement Predict Students’ Perceptions of the Link between Personal Effort and Academic Performance?

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Abstract

The concept of Grit has gained momentum in the last several years as a better predictor of achievement than traditional measures, such as IQ. Duckworth, et al. (2007) found grit to be positively correlated to the Big Five personality dimension of conscientiousness, but not to IQ, causing the authors to hypothesize that grit is a good noncognitive supplemental predictor of academic success. The current study is a continuing interdisciplinary investigation of the relationship between college students’ perceptions of the link between personal effort and academic performance, and the influence of trait measures such as grit and the Big Five personality dimensions on students’ perceptions of the link between personal effort and academic performance (Mannahan & Gray, 2015). Results indicated a significant positive correlation between grit and motivation and a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and motivation, but conscientiousness did not relate to any other items on the Effort and Performance Inventory. Similar to the findings of Duckworth, et al. (2007), grit was correlated with conscientiousness, but conversely, grit was not related to most of our measures of perceptions of personal effort and academic performance.

Keywords: Grit, traits, effort, performance, personality.

There is a fairly significant body of literature supporting the link between personality measures and academic achievement as measured by IQ, particularly concerning the Big Five traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009). Among the five personality dimensions, conscientiousness seems to be the strongest predictor of academic success as measured by GPA (Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 1998; Wagerman & Funder, 2007) and exam performance (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003).

Grit has gained momentum in the last several years with some debate that it may be a better predictor of achievement than traditional measures, such as talent or IQ. Grit is defined as passion and perseverance toward personal goals that is maintained in spite of setbacks and little success in the short-term (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). The concept has exploded as demonstrated by “Got Grit” becoming a popular...
buzz phrase in national education (Smith, 2014). Some college admissions officers have expressed interest in using grit as a college admissions selection criterion (Nelson, 2014), while others have questioned the validity of non-traditional measures of achievement such as grit and other personality tests. There appears to be some level of overlap among grit and personality as Duckworth, et al. (2007) found grit to be positively correlated with the Big Five personality dimension of conscientiousness. They also found that grit did not correlate with IQ as conscientiousness did, which indicated that grit may be a good non-cognitive supplemental predictor of academic success.

Personal effort, as defined by levels of motivation, class attendance, and paying attention and being engaged in class, has been associated with academic success (Mannahan & Gray, 2015). While it seems obvious that personal effort and academic performance are intrinsically connected, research indicates that the relationship is much deeper, more complex, and “often contradictory” (Khachikian & Guillaume, 2002; Khachikian, Guillaume, & Pham, 2011; Rich, 2006, p. 2). Many students “over-predict” grades because “they are too optimistic at the beginning” of their course, which results in self-deception about their abilities and dedication to their coursework (Khachikian et al., 2011).

Haynes, Ruthig, Perry, Stupnisky, and Hall (2006) suggest that self-deception among students may be dangerous because it has the potential to affect students’ adaptability and future academic achievement. They note that, “the adaptiveness of the student’s highly optimistic expectations may largely depend on his or her accompanying cognitions, in particular, underlying causal attributions and perceptions of control” (p. 756). In other words, students construct an individual narrative to explain the causes of their successes and failures, often base those explanations on the amount of control they perceive they have in the particular situation.

Currently the literature offers little empirical evidence of a clear connection between perceptions of personal effort and academic performance, so it is important to apply student opinion-based studies to better understand the students’ phenomenological experiences (Mannahan & Gray, 2015). In a large qualitative study, Rose (2012) sought to understand how students view academic success, especially those students who have historically not achieved. His findings indicated, “[w]hat you see depends on where you sit,” (p. 115) and he called for a more student-focused perspective on research that investigates what students experience from their point-of-view. The current study was an interdisciplinary investigation designed with Rose’s call for a more student-focused perspective in mind. We sought to better understand the relationship between college students’ perceptions of the link between personal effort and academic performance, and the influence of trait measures such as grit and the “Big Five” personality dimensions on students’ perceptions of the link between personal effort and academic performance.

The hypotheses for this study were:

H1: Based on the “overly optimistic” expectations students have at the start of a course (Haynes et al., 2006, p. 772), we expect participants will be more likely to
connect personal effort and academic performance at the start of the course, prior to the return of graded materials.

H2: Grittier participants, as defined by higher scores on the Grit Scale (Duckworth, et al., 2007), would be more likely to connect personal effort to academic performance as measured by the Effort and Performance Inventory.

H3: Participants higher in Conscientiousness2, as measured by the TIPI (Ten-Item Personality Inventory, Gosling, Renfrow, & Swann, 2003) will better connect personal effort and academic performance as measured by the Effort and Performance Inventory.

Method

Our study was conducted to explore students’ perceptions of the link between personal effort and academic performance. The study involved two administrations of the survey instrument. The first administration occurred during the first week of class (Time 1), and the second administration occurred after the first assignment was graded and returned (Time 2).

Participants. Eighty-five participants were recruited from introductory psychology and English courses at a small Southeastern college. These two courses were selected because most students at the institution take these two subjects (Psychology and English) at some point in their academic career, usually in their first year. The two specific sections were convenience samples because they were the principle investigators’ (PIs) courses and represented the researchers’ desire for an interdisciplinary approach. For Time 1, there were 85 total participants (36 males, 49 females); however, only 63 participants completed Time 2 of the survey (Part B). Because we used paired samples, we will report demographic information for only the 63 participants (31 males, 32 females) who completed part A and Part B. Ages ranged from 18 – 35 years (M = 20 years), and 20% of the sample were first-generation college students. Ethnicities included 73.4% Caucasian, 10.9% African American, 1.6% Hispanic, and 12.6% Other. These demographics were reflective of the general population of the college.

Instrument. Participants were asked to complete an Effort and Performance Inventory created by the authors containing demographic items such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Additionally, Likert-type items regarding the connection between effort and performance, such as “Your grade in this course will be a direct result of the effort you put into the course,” were used, with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 5 representing “Strongly Agree.” Three qualitative items were intermingled to broaden the research perspective incorporating mixed methods to diversify the type of data obtained. These items assessed students’ understandings of “effort” in an educational setting and identified their perceptions concerning confidence in their abilities in the classroom (Chronbach’s alpha = .83). Finally, participants completed the Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007; see Appendix)


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(Chronbach’s alpha = .79) and the TIPI (Ten-item Personality Inventory, Gosling et al., 2003). The Grit scale is a 12-item inventory designed to measure grit in which participants respond to Likert-type items such, “I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge” on a 1-5 scale with 1 representing “very much like me” and 5 representing “not like me at all.” The TIPI is a brief measure of the personality traits commonly referred to as “the Big Five:” openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. For Time 2, the Grit Scale and the TIPI were not repeated because they are trait measures and would not change over such a short period of time.

**Procedure.** After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, the two courses from which the sample would be taken were selected. The PIs entered each other’s classrooms on the day of the administration, invited class members to participate in the study, and distributed an informed consent form. After reading and signing the form, participants received the survey instrument. After completing the survey, the PIs collected the survey instrument and thanked the participants.

**Results**

Overall, students connected motivation, attending class, and attention and engagement with academic performance. However, paired-samples t-tests indicated that the strength of the connection was significantly lower in Time 2 than in Time 1:

![Paired t(63)=2.81, p=.007](image)

**Figure 1.** Mean scores for motivation Time 1 (first week of class) vs. Time 2 (after the first assignment was graded and returned).
The graphs above illustrate the significant decrease in the mean responses across time in terms of linking motivation, attending class, and attention and engagement (the survey instrument items designed to measure personal effort) with academic performance. Because the mean responses on the items measuring motivation, attending class, and atten-

Figure 2. Mean scores for attending class Time 1 (first week of class) vs. Time 2 (after the first assignment was graded and returned).

Figure 3. Mean scores for attention and engaged Time 1 (first week of class) vs. Time 2 (after the first assignment was graded and returned).
tion and engagement were significantly higher at Time 1 than Time 2, support was found for our first hypothesis that students are more likely to connect personal effort and academic performance at the start of the course rather than after receiving their first grade.

In terms of the trait measures of Grit and the TIPI, correlational analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between grit and motivation, $r=.336$, $p<.05$, but grit did not relate to any other measures on the Effort and Performance Inventory. We hypothesized that grittier students would be more likely to connect personal effort to academic performance as measured by the Effort and Performance Inventory. Although overall there was not a clear relationship between grit and all of the items on the Effort and Performance Inventory, higher mean scores on the Grit scale, which Duckworth, et al. (2007) call a “grittier” student, were more motivated toward academic success and personal goals than less grittier students.

Correlational analyses also indicated a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and motivation, $r=.260$, $p<.05$, but conscientiousness did not relate to any other items on the Effort and Performance Inventory. Our final hypothesis was that participants higher in Conscientiousness, as measured by the TIPI (Ten-Item Personality Inventory, Gosling et al., 2003), will better connect personal effort and academic performance as measured by the Effort and Performance Inventory. Similar to hypothesis 2, while the results overall did not demonstrate a direct relationship among all measures with the Effort and Performance Inventory, there was a positive correlation between Conscientiousness and motivation.

The qualitative portions of the study indicated that students listed effort as one contributing factor for course performance; however, other factors were frequently identified, including “love for the subject,” “natural ability,” and “liking the teacher.”

**Discussion**

Results revealed that while participants appeared to connect motivation, attending class, and attention/engagement with performance, the connection was significantly weaker after the first test/assignment was returned. Perhaps the reality of the first graded assignment was problematic for students to accept. It seems that the participants’ locus of control with regard to their own academic performance became increasingly external as the semester progressed. They no longer connected personal control over their actions, and they were quick to divorce themselves from responsibility. This removal of personal effort, in such a short time period, may demonstrate a lack of resilience or apathy on the students’ part. Haynes et al. (2006) indicated that “overly optimistic” students can be “problematic” (p. 772), especially in unfamiliar situations such as the transition from high

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3 Locus of Control is defined by Rotter (1966) as the extent to which one believes he or she is in control of the circumstances of their life. Someone with an internal locus of control believes he or she has more control over life, and someone with an external locus of control believes that external forces, such as a higher power or luck, controls life.
school to college. Because these courses are often selected by first-year students who are in transition, this research is particularly relevant to our study.

Results revealed that the grittier the participant, the more likely they were to connect their personal level of motivation to their academic performance. These grittier participants maintained their level of motivation from Time 1 to Time 2, demonstrating that grit may influence a student’s motivation levels in a persistent manner. However, the other areas measured (attending class, attention and engagement) were not significantly correlated to grit suggesting that grit may not be as strong of a global predictor of academic success as it has been touted. Further research is warranted to explore the predictive power of grit before measures of grit become a standard component for college admission criterion.

With regard to the trait measures of grit and conscientiousness, in line with Duckworth et al., (2007), we found grit was positively correlated with conscientiousness. Duckworth et al. (2007) note that “grit overlaps with achievement aspects of conscientiousness but differs in its emphasis on long-term stamina rather than short-term intensity” (p.1089). In our study, conscientiousness was positively correlated with motivation at both Time 1 and Time 2 as was grit. The similar pattern of results of the trait measures of grit and conscientiousness suggests that these concepts map onto each other and both may be useful in determining short-term and long-term academic success.

Qualitative elements of the study showed that students connected personal effort with their academic performance at Time 1 and Time 2. However, other factors associated with academic success were identified, such as “love for the subject,” “natural ability,” and “liking the teacher.” These results reflect that students are able to say what they need to do in order to have academic success, but the mean scores on the Effort and Performance Inventory show that it may be all talk and no action. For example, the qualitative results showed that participants could easily identify what they need to do in order to perform well (study, read the text, do homework, put forth effort, etc.); however, when asked what specific behaviors they engaged in while studying or doing coursework, the most common response was “listen to music.” This discovery may be useful in the design of study-skill programs because students may not be aware they need to learn the actual process of how to study. Therefore, some students may have difficulty realizing “a problem exists” and they may “not seek help in time to gain benefits” (Ofori & Charlton, 2002, p. 514). Within the classroom, teachers can use the GRIT scale as a classroom-based activity, which would promote reflective examination on the students’ part. This focus on grit places attention squarely on potential predictors of academic success, a conversation that may not be occurring in many classrooms and may be contributing to the lack of connection between personal effort and academic performance demonstrated in this study.

There are some limitations of this study and future directions that should be considered. The TIPI is a very short version of a personality measure with only two items measuring each of the “Big Five” personality dimensions. Perhaps a longer, more thorough measure of personality would illuminate more nuanced results. Also, the relatively short time frame of the current study could be problematic. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) and
Duckworth et al. (2007) asserted that grit is about persistence and sticking with a goal for extended periods of time, and in fact, the main differentiating factor between grit and conscientiousness is stamina. Since the current study only spanned one semester with first-year students, it would be interesting to perform longitudinal research with the same participants until graduation to investigate how their perceptions of their personal effort and academic performance shift throughout their undergraduate career, and whether the grittier students were more successful long-term than those high in conscientiousness.

In their investigation of personality traits and academic performance, Furnham, Nuygards, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2013) found that personality traits played a more essential role in course work, rather than exam results. This is particularly relevant to the current study as we used an interdisciplinary approach and our Time 2 administration was after the first graded assignment was received. The first graded assignment in the English class was a paper, which is considered course work, and the first graded assignment in the Psychology class was an exam. Our sample was not evenly distributed enough in the current study to compare the two classes to each other, but it would be valuable to follow up in this area to determine if our study would provide support for Furnham, Nuygards, and Chamorro-Premuzic’s (2013) findings.

A final direction for future research would be to examine other personality differences that may contribute to different perceptions of the link between personal effort and academic performance, such as dispositional optimism (Haynes et al., 2006; Thompson & Gaudreau, 2008), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), narcissism (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998), and locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Extracting the nuances of students’ phenomenological experiences in the classroom can guide practitioners to focus on what their students may need to succeed.

References


Appendix. Grit Scale

Directions for taking the Grit Scale: Please respond to the following 12 items. Be honest – there are no right or wrong answers!

1. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

2. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.*
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

3. My interests change from year to year.*
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

4. Setbacks don’t discourage me.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

5. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.*
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

6. I am a hard worker.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all
7. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.*
   - Not like me at all
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

8. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.*
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

9. I finish whatever I begin.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

10. I have achieved a goal that took years of work.
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all

11. I become interested in new pursuits every few months.*
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all

12. I am diligent.
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all
Scoring:

1. For questions 1, 4, 6, 9, 10 and 12 assign the following points:

   5 = Very much like me
   4 = Mostly like me
   3 = Somewhat like me
   2 = Not much like me
   1 = Not like me at all

2. For questions 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 11 assign the following points:

   1 = Very much like me
   2 = Mostly like me
   3 = Somewhat like me
   4 = Not much like me
   5 = Not like me at all

Add up all the points and divide by 12. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest scale on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty).

The Fifty Minute Ethnography: Teaching Theory through Fieldwork

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Abstract

Ethnography is becoming an increasingly popular research methodology used across a number of disciplines. Typically, teaching students how to write an ethnography, much less how to undertake “fieldwork” (or the ethnographic research upon which ethnographies are based), is reserved for senior- or MA-level research methods courses. This article examines the pedagogical strategy of engaging first-year students in ethnographic field methods and the art of ethnographic writing and suggests how the use of a short ethnographic exercise (the fifty minute mini-ethnography) can enable students who are at the beginning of their undergraduate degrees to better understand the relationships between theory and empirical data.

Keywords: Ethnography, fieldwork, teaching theory.

Long considered the hallmark of social or cultural anthropology, ethnography is becoming an increasingly popular research methodology across a number of disciplines, including not only Arts and Humanities subjects such as sociology or gender studies but also education, the medical sciences and business studies. Undergraduate degrees in anthropology usually require students to read and critique a fair number of ethnographies, often starting in their introductory courses. Students do not, however, tend to go “out into the field” and produce their own ethnographies until they reach at least the senior year of their undergraduate studies, and in some cases, not until they begin their MAs. This article examines the outcomes of a different approach; namely, engaging first-year students in ethnographic field methods and the art of ethnographic writing.

In 2010, I began a three-year stint of teaching a broad-ranging introduction to social and cultural anthropology. (I work at a large, public university at which all of the tenured instructors in social-cultural anthropology rotate through the introductory course, teaching it for three or four years at a time). With an average class size of 330 students, it is by far our largest social-cultural anthropology class. In the past, this course’s assessments have focused on a close reading of a short ethnographic text, a research paper on a predetermined topic, and a final exam. In my first year of teaching this course, I found that while these assessment tools were useful and students walked away with a range of skills relating to how to structure an essay or use the library more effectively, they did not con-
vey the centerpiece of anthropological knowledge: ethnography. I surmised that if students are to emerge from their first year course with some sort of understanding – regardless of how elementary it might be – of how knowledge can be produced through ethnographic methods, they would have a much richer appreciation of why this method is increasingly popular across a range of disciplines. Even more importantly, they would have firsthand experience of the benefits and challenges of applying theory to our understandings of everyday life. But how can we teach students a practice known for in-depth community engagement and long-term commitment as part of an introductory, lecture-based course?

What is Ethnography?

Ethnography is a genre of writing characterized by the interweaving conceptual analysis with rich empirical description (sometimes called “thick description,” after the work of the interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973)). It is grounded in fieldwork, a research method in which the researcher joins the community under study, immersing themselves in their daily lives. Though there are a variety of ways of practicing ethnography today, the classic anthropological model requires sustained engagement in community life for the period of a year or more. During this time, researchers need to be attentive not just to “big events” or information gleaned from structured interviews and discussions, but to the flotsam and jetsam of how people construct the most mundane aspects of ordinary lives, from how they hold their toothbrushes to what they read online – what one of the founders of this method, Bronislaw Malinowski (1932), famously named “the imponderabilia of actual life.” How one gains access to such intimate aspects of people’s lives, and the myriad of different aspects of “the imponderabilia of actual life” that should be recorded, is the stuff of (often heated) debate. What is usually not debated is the fact that immersive, open-ended research often requires long term commitment as well as a researcher who is willing to suspend being directive and let the research process play out in front of her or him. Practitioners often stress the open-ended nature of fieldwork, and while their research might involve structured fieldwork engagements or directed questioning, it requires as much, if not more, nondirected engagement, or what one anthropologist called, “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1998). Serendipity plays a key role in shaping the structure of research as does allowing our research interlocutors steer, and sometimes set, the research agenda (Shore & Trnka, 2013, p. 10). As one business analyst wrote in the Harvard Business Review, in using ethnographic methods, “our goal is to see people’s behavior on their terms” (Anderson, 2009). Researchers must thus be ready, for example, to shift gear from studying views on natural resources to taking part in a community effort to lift an ensorceling, especially when the researcher is the one who has been bewitched (Trigger, 2013). It follows that not only the “data” that corresponds to one’s initial research questions but the wealth of (often exhaustive) experiences lived out in the field are recorded as part of one’s field notes (Sanjek, 1990; Sanjek & Tratner, 2015); as one of my graduate school teachers repeatedly exhorted: “just write everything down.”

Field notes are then recrafted into yet another written form: the ethnography. While traditionally ethnographies aimed to holistically represent a “culture,” over the last three or
four decades, it has been generally recognized that such an aim is impossible (Clifford & Marcus, 1984) and contemporary ethnographies consist of detailed, in-depth descriptions and analyses of *particular* cultural or social features, based on the material collected through the fieldwork process. A close marriage between field data and a conceptual framework is pivotal to good scholarship, with many ethnographers emphasizing the importance of the give and take or “dialectical tacking back and forth” between the general and the particular that are necessary to achieve it (Geertz, 1973; 1979).

What emerges out of this practice is the tight-knit relationship between field observations and theory. Concepts can be tried out in advance, but the nature of one’s interactions in the field determine whether it is gender, class, or embodiment (or all three) that become the most salient rubric for analyzing social dynamics and cultural phenomena. But in an educational and financial environment that emphasizes forward-planning, this open-ended method of analysis is also one of the most difficult to teach. As Peggy Golde has noted, “The student often reads an ethnography as a fait accompli with no clear idea of how the picture of another culture was achieved, and with an inadequate grasp of the process of interaction between researcher and community members and of the problems, pitfalls, and procedures” involved (1986, p. 1). Arguably, however, some glimmer of how this “picture” is achieved is the most important lesson for undergraduate (and graduate) students to grasp, as it both makes theory come alive and reveals concepts for what they are: a tool for understanding empirical events that can be powerful for reconfiguring how we see the world, but that nonetheless remains one of many tools that offer up a range of perspectives on the nature of human society, social relations, cultural values, and power (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1993). So, how to make the fluid and open-ended nature of fieldwork amenable to 12-week teaching term, where ethnographic research methods are just one of a range of learning objectives?

**Teaching Fieldwork, 50 Minutes at a Time**

In order to address this question, I have devised an assignment based on a 50 minute “mini ethnography,” reflecting not only the 50 minute lecture period students attend twice a week, but also the average amount of time I envisage they should spend “immersed” in the field in order to complete this task. Students are given the job of choosing a feature of social life that they can easily and unobtrusively observe in a public place. Specifically, they are instructed to imagine themselves as an anthropologist from another country, reporting on a significant phenomenon they have observed in their “field site.” As the assignment instructions relate:

You are a social-cultural anthropologist who lives in the (make believe) land of Qwerty. You have received funding from the Qwerty Association for Social Anthropology (QASA) to conduct one year of ethnographic fieldwork in Auckland, New Zealand.

You have just completed your first month of fieldwork and QASA requires that you send them back an initial report describing your ethnographic findings so far. You can choose any one of a variety of different aspects of social/cultural life in Auckland to cover in your report (for example, kinship, food, economics, sports, etc.) but you must focus on...
one (and only one) area. You will be marked on both your ethnographic description and your analysis – remember that a good ethnography contains both of these elements (Trnka, 2012).

To assist them in their undertaking, students are not only given an introduction to basic fieldwork methods but also are given a list of possible concepts they might want to use in their analysis. I also devised an in-class workshop that leads them through the process of how to “de-familiarize” their well-known environment, learning to see cultural artefacts and social relations with new eyes, through the help of the now famous anthropological text, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” by Horace Miner (1956).

“Nacirema culture,” Miner tells us, “is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people’s time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity, … [t]he focus of [which] is the human body…” (Miner, 1956, p. 503). Miner then dives into a description of “mouth-rites” that take place over a bathroom sink (1956, p. 503). While originally intended to engage American students in an examination of their own ethnocentrism (cf. Ferraro, 2004) – “Nacirema,” after all, is “American” spelled backwards, something that many, but not all, of my students discover as they read along – Miner’s essay also has the effect of showing how a different interpretive lens can make even the most mundane, familiar scene (brushing one’s teeth, for example) worthy of examination (cf. Spiro, 1990).

With these practical and conceptual tools in hand, students initiate their own mini-fieldwork projects. Over the years, I have been struck by the diverse settings they have chosen to locate their investigations, from university dorms, food courts, and bus stops to churches and synagogues, soccer fields, bars and pool halls. They have examined the gendered nature of sport, the meanings of consumption, and the constitution of transitory labor forces. They have looked at social dynamics in dance halls and considered how ethnic food can create a sense of belonging.

Once students settle on a topic, the next challenge they often face is coming to terms with what exactly an ethnography needs to encompass. Is it, some wonder, a bit like a blog? Or a different form of travel writing? (Spray, 2015). A key turning point for many students is recognizing that they are being asked not just to describe what they observe, but in the words of one of the course’s tutors, “to extrapolate from your observations to make some theoretical discussion about what you’re seeing, why and how it is produced and why it matters” (Spray, 2015, p. 17).

In many cases, the outcome is that students are compelled to grapple with not only aspects of Auckland’s social and cultural life that may have previously blended into the background of their lives, but also, and perhaps more importantly, with how researchers come to theorize the dynamics they encounter. It is one thing, for example, to describe spatial relations on a city sidewalk, and another to ask oneself whether these relations are determined primarily by class, gender, or ethnic identification. In the process, students
learn for themselves some the challenges and triumphs of attempting to portray and analyze the behavior they have observe (and, in their case, in 900 words or less).

This melding of first-hand experience and theory aims to make students more comfortable with using theoretical concepts to describe the world around them. It also prepares them to assess ethnographic research, enabling them to ask questions about what is and is not represented in the text and, as Golde advocates, to get behind the making of the text in order to gain an understanding of the processes of knowledge production. In subsequent assignments, I found that many students demonstrate a better grasp of how the positionality of the researcher (aspects such as one’s gender or age, as well as one’s pre-existing networks and cultural knowledge) can impact the production of anthropological knowledge. There is also far less confusion over whether ethnographic research (and anthropology, more generally) can be relevant for understanding all societies. Going out and documenting social dynamics and cultural forms in their own neighborhoods compels students to reckon with how they themselves are encultured subjects; no longer can they assume that “culture” is something that only certain kinds of “other” (that is, ethnically- or nationally-marked) people have. As noted by a colleague who took over the course when my three year stint came to a close, the result of this exercise is that “many students found themselves ‘exoticising the familiar’ and, in the process, seeing their world in a fresh way, or discovering aspects of their culture that they had never before questioned” (Shore, 2015, p. 35).

Ethnographic fieldwork is a usually a long and multi-faceted process that rewards its practitioners through the unexpected insights it affords us into the complexities of human behavior. The 50 minute mini-ethnography cannot replicate the nuanced levels of understanding, and sometimes transformative effects (cf. Jackson, 2013), that fieldwork can engender. It does, however, enable students to become collaborators in the classroom (cf. Smith & Waller, 1997), setting their own research agendas, delving first-hand into research areas that they find meaningful, decentering their taken for granted assumptions about the behavior they are going to see and how to interpret it, and imbuing them with a new understanding of how knowledge can be produced through ethnographic methods.

Analyses of the pedagogical effects of engaging students in ethnographic methods at higher levels of learning have come to the conclusion that fieldwork and ethnographic writing are often challenging for students, in large part due to logistical difficulties such as limited time for collecting data, or concerns over ensuring researcher’s safety (Stallings, 1995; Trujillo, 1999). Many educators, however, suggest that despite the challenges of teaching ethnography, it is a vital skill (Fetterman, 2010; Spradley, 2016). Hands-on ethnographic research is a powerful means of enabling students to concretely grasp an understanding of how culture and social relations shape behavior. Engaging students in ethnographic practice has also been noted for encouraging more creative and participatory approaches to knowledge production, including co-authorship and other collaborative endeavors between students and their research participants, as a key facet of any ethnographic inquiry is taking seriously the voices and perspectives of people in the communities in which we do research (Trujillo, 1999; see also Fetterman, 2010; Spradley, 2016).
While it is too much to expect that beginning students be able to grapple with the logistical and ethical complexities raised by undertaking multi-week ethnographic studies, I have argued here that there is much to be gained by adopting similar methodologies, albeit on a much smaller-scale, as part of first-year courses. Nor do these lessons need to be restricted to anthropology, as the mini-ethnography can be productively used across a range of disciplines as a way of encouraging students to observe a range of real-life interactions and assess the kinds of behavioral patterns and social dynamics that are revealed through them. Doing so opens up an important avenue for students to recognize the often implicit relationships between empirical data and theory – a powerful lesson across a range of academic contexts.

References


Soft Toys as Instructional Technology in Higher Education: 
The Case of Llewelyn the Lynx

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Abstract

Scholarship on instructive technologies in higher education has emphasized the use of high-tech facilitative technologies for long-term use, and low-tech props to illustrate single topics. This paper, on the contrary, discusses the use of a long-term, low-tech instructional technology: Llewelyn the Lynx was a soft animal used to assist with discussions in first year seminars. In-class questionnaires and anonymous online reviews on RateYourLecturer show Llewelyn was popular, facilitated equal contribution to discussion, and made seminars less intimidating and more enjoyable. Llewelyn may have functioned as a tactual or kinaesthetic stimulus, and an assistive technology for students with learning difficulties. His use does not seem to have infantilized most of the students although there was some disagreement here.

Keywords: Instructional technology; soft toy; talking stick; teaching prop; RateYourLecturer.

For the past two years I have been bringing a soft toy into my university seminar classes. The soft toy’s name is Llewelyn the stuffed lynx and he now has an impressive teaching resume. Llewelyn has now met 160 students of medieval and renaissance history and literature and had 170 close-contact hours with these students across eleven seminar groups and five modules.

I did not gather personal information about the students in these classes, but I was able to retrieve data on general student demographics in 2015-16 from an equality and diversity report (Department of Strategic Planning and Governance, 2017) and through a Freedom of Information Request (FOI17-081). In 2015-16, the average undergraduate in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences was female (62%), white (only 10% of domestic students were black or minority ethnic), under 21 (56%), heterosexual (83%), atheist (47% - 26% Christian), and able-bodied (9% of all university undergraduates were disabled). These figures seem approximately correct for the courses I taught, with the exception that because I taught only first-year courses, a greater number of learners were aged below 21. The figures here are approximately typical for an elite university in the

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UK, but less diverse than the typical UK university (21% black or ethnic minority, 11% disabled).

In this report, I want to discuss the experience of bringing a stuffed animal into the higher education classroom, and discuss some of Llewelyn’s successes and failures.

### Review of Relevant Literature

Originally Llewelyn was intended to function as a technology to facilitate discussion without the need to pick on learners directly, and as a confidence building ‘talking stick’. This is based on the work of Valerio (2001) who suggests passing round a ‘talking stick’ where only the person holding the technology can talk, whilst everyone else must listen. Talking sticks are used especially to help construct safe spaces for controversial discussions. The first year curriculum in Medieval and Renaissance History and Literature at the university I teach at includes many controversial topics: there are discussions of the medieval and early modern roots of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and the need to introduce provocative feminist, post-colonial and eco-critical readings of texts. It can be hard for students to discuss such topics without feeling safe, and harder still if there are no rules to prevent a few students from dominating the discussion. However discussions are also unavoidable, they are one of the only effective ways to challenge learners’ attitudes to the world (Kozma, Belle, & Williams, 1978, p. 235). It was hoped that Llewelyn could function as an informal talking stick in this context.

Llewelyn was additionally intended to function as an assistive technology for me: I have an abysmal memory for names, and therefore wanted a way to target individual students for questions without having to name them. Other students with the same problem could use Llewelyn in the same way. The intention of the talking stick was that learners threw Llewelyn around the room, and were therefore always ready to speak and listen to each other. In practice, Llewelyn is usually passed around our seminar circle clockwise, or thrown from group to group, meaning that Llewelyn also functions as a facilitative technology for the class, to ensure equal contribution from each learner.

I was first introduced to the use of soft toys as a classroom technology in a Welsh for Adults language class (see Acknowledgements). The practice is common in Welsh as a Second Language teaching (Talfryn, 2014). Generally, the use is as prescribed by ‘desuggestopedia’; in language teaching, tutors have learners pass objects between themselves (more usually balls) and speak when they hold the object. The idea is that the excitement and fast-paced nature of the passing can bypass learner fears and barriers to learning and teach language at a much faster rate (Larsen-Freeman, 2010, pp. 73, 77).

Although this is not the way I use Llewelyn (as described above) this innovative usage inspired me because case studies of the use of instructional technology in higher education usually focus discussion on ‘high-tech’ solutions. For example, Evans (2014) looks at the use of Twitter for learners, Sorensen (2009) reflects on the use of virtual worlds and Wagner (2014) considered the use of Pinterest. In the cases where low-tech technol-
ogies are discussed, they tend to be described as ‘props’, directly relevant to single topics (for example, Pollard & Duvall, 2006; Vossler, 2011). This is not the case here; Llewelyn the lynx is not generally relevant to the subject matter, but instead acts as a low-tech facilitative technology.

Before proceeding further, we should perhaps note that in pedagogical parlance, high-tech refers to expensive, sophisticated devices, usually with a specific function to help learners (e.g. a dvd player) while low-tech refers to simple, cheap ‘bare bones’ props (Astrachan, 1998), which are usually generic and may not be ‘technological’ at all in ordinary parlance but nevertheless assist with learning (e.g. a whiteboard) (Wirkus, Comer, Swenson, & Weingarten, 2009).

As noted above, most previous case studies of low-tech tools in higher education have focused on the use of props rather than assistive technologies. These previous case studies are nevertheless significant in that they emphasise that there is a surprisingly high level of enthusiasm for low-tech instructional technology among students. Astrachan (1998) notes that some element of showmanship can make classes more enjoyable. Vossler (2011) points out that humorous examples and props can be especially memorable. Perhaps the greatest use of teaching props has been by Pollard & Duvall (2006) who have built up a ‘bag of tricks’ to provide concrete props to help understand abstract issues. They found the use of props can make students excited about the class. It was hoped that Llewelyn would similarly add some fun and energy to the class, despite being a facilitative technology rather than a prop.

Considering this enthusiasm for low-tech props, it is significant that I have not found any direct parallels to Llewelyn the Lynx. Discussions of specifically soft toys in educational settings have been generally confined to early year settings. Such studies are of limited relevance, although tips about, for example, how to keep soft toys hygienic (Koza & Smith, 2009, p. 32) were valuable and easy to neglect with older learners.

Teaching props are also hypothesised to assist learners with tactual and kinaesthetic learning styles. Learners with these styles learn best when able to physically touch learning objects and move physically through a learning environment. The tactual and kinaesthetic learning styles are generally not well catered for at higher education level (Boyle, 2000). One of the initial hopes I had for Llewelyn was that holding him and passing him round would help low-visual and low-auditory learners take in information. The physical game aspect of holding, throwing, and passing Llewelyn before speaking was hypothesised to reinforce important points for kinaesthetic and tactual learners, who clearly benefit significantly if learning has a physical aspect (Whitley & Littleton, 2000).

There is also some evidence that low-tech technologies like Llewelyn may provide useful attention-holding fidgets for learners with ADD (attention deficit disorder) and ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) (Hartanto, Krafft, Iosif, & Schweitzer, 2016; Wirkus et al., 2009). The slower, more-structured and relaxed discussion which Llewelyn aimed to make class debates more approachable to some learners, although I was also concerned it could make discussion less exciting to others (Kozma et al., 1978, pp. 235, 237).
Finally, one of the biggest concerns about bringing a soft toy into a higher education classroom has to be whether students consider it infantilising. Silver’s (1996) study of the roles given to objects by students entering higher education is especially relevant here. Silver carried out ethnographic research on students in a Midwestern American university in 1996. Silver found that although soft toys and dolls were the valued possession of several female students, they were generally embarrassing reminders of childhood, and kept to a minimum for identity reasons.

This study would seem to suggest that including a soft toy in a higher education class would be infantilising. However, the research was undertaken before many of the students I taught were even born, and in a different country. It is conceivable that a generational gap might exist on this subject.

The debate has also been taken up by medical practitioners. Nurses of patients suffering from Alzheimer’s and dementia have found that the use of soft toys and dolls can be beneficial for residential patients, but there is concern that the practice may be infantilising there too (Milton & MacPhail, 1985). The current consensus is that the practice is positive, but some are still sceptical (Higgins, 2009).

Whilst the comparison of first year university students with dementia patients seems extreme, it is worth remembering how stressful the first year of university can be for many students, especially the younger learners. All of my seminars were with first year students, and if holding a stuffed animal can be a tactile comfort, without being embarrassing, this is a factor to consider. The success of the ‘soft classroom’ experiment, where chairs and desk traditional classroom was redecorated and added colourful throws, curtains and carpets, suggests that students do appreciate attempts to make classroom settings less intimidating (Sommer & Olsen, 1980; Wong, Sommer, & Cook, 1992). For whole group discussions to be successful, students need to feel safe and valued (Kozma et al., 1978, p. 238).

Altogether, whilst the literature to date is cautiously optimistic about the use of teaching props, there are some uncertainties especially about whether the use of a soft toy is too infantilising. For this reason, I wanted to obtain some learner feedback on the use of Llewelyn in the classroom.

**Measures**

As well as my own experience using Lleweyn across the eleven seminar groups, I have been observed six times by colleagues (see Acknowledgements). In Lleweyn’s second year I also sought out learner perspectives on Llewelyn through a quantitative in-class Likert questionnaire (Figure 9) undertaken by 51 students 2015-16. Finally, at the beginning of the second year I set up a profile for Llewelyn the Lynx on RateYourLecturer.co.uk with the co-operation of website staff there in order to receive on-going anony-
mous and in-depth reviews\(^2\) (see Figure 8). Over the year since then, Llewelyn has been
given 18 qualitative reviews on this platform, from both cohorts of students, which have
allowed me to check that I am representing learner voices despite the quantitative nature
of the initial Likert questionnaire. I will be quoting from these reviews in the discussion.

It’s worth pointing out here, that each time I distributed the questionnaire in class, and the
first time I gave out the link to the RateYourLecturer profile by email, I gave the follow-
ing brief:

> There has been some discussion about Llewelyn. Some lecturers seem to like him
> but others worry that he might make you feel like you’re at nursery rather than
> university. I’ve been asked to write a report about it, and hoped you could help...

This introduction signposts the idea that Llewelyn might be infantilising, which may par-
tially account for the high number of students discussing this idea on the online profile
and in the questionnaire.

It is also worth noting that the sample of learners who gave reviews on RateYourLecturer
were self-selecting. Most learners ignored the website, presumably meaning that only
those who had the strongest feelings on the subject, or the most spare-time, left reviews.
The end-of-year questionnaire was handed out to all learners and filled in during the
class, so was only self-selecting in that learners who missed the final classes did not get
the opportunity to give feedback.

The questions themselves are presented in the Appendices (see Figure 10).

### Results

The responses to the Likert survey were generally positive. 51 learners (all present in the
second year classes) took part in the classroom survey. I have presented the raw results in
the Appendices, but Figure 1 gives a graphical depiction:

To unpack these results briefly: 100% of learners agreed that Llewelyn worked as a talk-
ing stick. His use in the class was not distracting (82%) or stressful (90%) but it made
seminars more exciting (88%) without slowing them down (75%). Most learners did not
dislike touching Llewelyn (82%) and liked having him in the seminars (86%).

Some learners were optimistic but many were not convinced that Llewelyn helped aid
confidence (65%), helped them to think (51%, Figure 3) and avoided infantilising them

---

\(^2\) RateYourLecturer has received very bad press from academics in the UK since it was launched in 2013
(see especially (Cooke, 2013)). However, I believe it can be a very useful tool for pedagogical develop-
ment, particularly in cases like this where the ‘lecturer’ being rated does not have an ego to bruise (Lle-
welyn sadly has an average ‘hotness’ score of only 3/5 flames), and the novelty of rating a stuffed toy may
help prevent the reviewing task from becoming a chore. Llewelyn’s page is:
http://rateyourlecturer.co.uk/cardiff/cardiff-university/llewelyn-the-lynx/
Fig. 1. A stacked column chart showing the % of learners who agree, are unsure/neutral and disagree with each statement.

(59%). The figure for Llewelyn’s perceived usefulness (76%) was lower than the figure for his popularity (86%).

Learners tended to disagree or were uncertain that Llewelyn taught them about cultural or wildlife history (53%) as seen in Figure 2.

Seventeen learners voluntarily gave Llewelyn in-depth review on the anonymous RateYourLecturer webpage (see note 1), and he has a score of 8.0/10 there. Learners’ feedback here was also overwhelmingly positive. Only six learners produced serious Cons (puts you on the spot, seems a bit forced, may be childish). Fourteen learners gave useful feedback in the Pros section (helps everyone speak so no-one dominates and everyone forms independent opinions, makes seminars lively yet relaxed).

Discussion

Was Llewelyn a prop in himself?

Originally, Llewelyn was intended to have a minor significance as a prop in himself. His name was chosen to be one which would help English and international students become familiar with a Welsh name and learn to pronounce Welsh letter ɬ (a voiceless alveolar lateral fricative). The name ‘Llewelyn’ was also intended to be a reference to my medieval research: there may have been an Old Welsh word for the lynx (llewyn) which was
The Case of Llewelyn the Lynx

Fig. 2. A bar chart showing whether learners agreed or disagreed that Llewelyn taught them about cultural or wildlife history.

Fig. 3. A bar chart showing whether learners agreed or disagreed that Holding Llewelyn helped them to think.

lost when the lynx became extinct in Wales, and was later mistaken for the name Llewelyn.


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To question whether Llewelyn was a prop in this way I asked learners whether Llewelyn taught them anything about cultural or wildlife history. The result was ambiguous. Unsurprisingly, my research topic of the extinct British lynx did not come up in any of the modules I taught. Using a more relevant soft toy might have been preferable on this note, although Vossler (2011) suggests that keeping humorous physical props in the classroom for too long often serves to distract the group and embarrass the teacher. It’s clear that Llewelyn’s main function is as a facilitative technology rather than a prop.

*Did Llewelyn assist tactual and kinaesthetic learners?*

There were occasional hints that Llewelyn did assist tactual and kinaesthetic learners. Whilst some learners were embarrassed to throw Llewelyn, others seemed to enjoy this aspect. Some learners left Llewelyn on the desk, but some stroked or cuddled him as they spoke. One learner had an unconscious habit of twirling him by one ear or his label whilst they spoke. These actions may have helped reinforce learning, but they may equally have been expressions of nervousness. Three learners filling in the end of year questionnaire added a note that although they agreed that Llewelyn slowed down the seminars, this was “in a good way”.

The qualitative feedback given on RateYourLecturer did not address this issue. Three learners did comment on the tactile element:

*Pros*

He’s fluffy!

But this provides little evidence on which to base conclusions. Learner response to this issue in the in-class questionnaire was also tepid:

Most learners were positive about this aspect, but the result was ambiguous, and less positive than most of the other results. On the other hand, this does not necessarily suggest that Llewelyn was not useful in this way. This element would only have been noticeable to the minority of high-tactual and high-kinaesthetic learners anyway, and, in retrospect, the idea was not well conveyed in the questionnaire. Further study on the issue of whether soft toys are helpful or tactual or kinaesthetic learners at higher education level would be beneficial.

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Was Llewelyn Infantilising or Comforting?

The results of the questionnaires specifically about infantilising were ambiguous. Worries about infantilising were picked up by several learners in their reviews (although note the bias in the methodology section above). One anonymous learner explained:

**Cons**

*It does seem a little childish and some people may not want to use such methods once moving up into university.*

Although another argued:

**Pros**

*... He is great as an ice breaker, and makes the seminars feel less formal. Plus, who doesn't love cuddly toys.*

On the in-class survey 59% of learners disagreed or completely disagreed that Llewelyn made the seminars seem childish (Figure 4), 29% were unsure and 12% agreed or completely agreed. This was one of the more ambiguous results but the lack of explicit agreement does suggest the idea of a generational shift since Silver’s research (1996). Further research is needed to confirm this theory.

![Bar chart showing whether learners agreed or disagreed that Llewelyn made the seminars childish.](image-url)
Fig. 5. A bar chart showing whether learners agreed or disagreed that People paid attention to whoever had Llewelyn.

Was Llewelyn a talking-stick?

In this context, Llewelyn was absolutely useful as a talking stick, as the in-class questionnaire showed (Figure 5).

This 100% agreement rate was the best result; Llewelyn’s main function was also recognised as such by all six observers as well as the learners. In the reviews on RateYourLecturer, nine of the seventeen learners there suggested that Llewelyn helps facilitate discussion. Here are two examples:

Pros:

Llewelyn gets me talking.

Pros:

Llewelyn was good for getting everybody to contribute to the discussion, instead of having just a few voices dominating. He also helped keep things lighthearted.

On the reverse side, the use of a talking stick might lead to learners being forced to speak when they are not ready to. We had a pass mechanism, but learners may not have always been comfortable using this. Four learners on RateYourLecturer explained that Llewelyn sometimes made them feel “on the spot”. I was initially concerned about this aspect, but the end of year questionnaire revealed 90% of learners either disagreed, or completely disagreed that “Llewelyn made the seminars more stressful” (Figure 6). Five learners also
commented positively on RateYourLecturer that Llewelyn made seminars relaxed, friendly, light-hearted or less formal.

Was Llewelyn well-liked?

Finally, it is worth noting that Llewelyn by the end of each year was becoming a kind of ironic celebrity in his own right. In the end of year questionnaire, Llewelyn managed an 86% approval rating. I also noticed laughter and smiles at the beginning of the spring seminar when I announced that Llewelyn was now the third most popular lecturer in each subject at the university on RateYourLecturer. Evans (2014) notes that instructional technology may be especially appreciated by the new generation of students who are at university to get a job rather than out of love for the subject. Perhaps for these students, Llewelyn may have provided light relief during a dull topic (see Figure 7). One classroom observer, Melanie Bigold, praised Llewelyn’s ability to bring energy to the room and keep learners alert, an idea supported by at least one RateYourLecturer review:

Pros:

Makes the room more lively.

As well as the end of year questionnaire:

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Fig. 6. A bar chart showing whether learners agreed or disagreed that Llewelyn made the seminars more stressful.
Fig. 7. A bar chart showing whether learners agreed or disagreed that Llewelyn made the seminars more exciting.

Llewelyn’s ongoing profile on RateYourLecturer was also very important because it moved him from a low-tech teaching prop to a seminar celebrity with a virtual presence. Learners could find him, not just in seminars but as part of the greater experience of the module. We should not over-emphasise this point however. The online reviews continued to reflect only his classroom performance:

**Pros**

*He’s fluffy!*

**Cons**

*Sometimes he falls off the table*

On the other hand, the popularity of Llewelyn on RateYourLecturer alone suggested that Llewelyn was becoming a true class mascot. One learner, reviewing Llewelyn a year after the seminars finished expressed it succinctly:

**Pros**

... *The touch of crazy that a soft toy brought to seminars made them far more engaging and memorable.*
Conclusion

There is room for doubt about whether Llewelyn was useful as a prop-in-himself (e.g. teaching about lynxes or about Welsh history) or as a tactual stimulus. However, although previous scholars have suggested that soft toys may be infantilising for adults, Llewelyn appears to have been well liked and comforting. There was 100% agreement among learners and observers that Llewelyn functioned as a talking-stick discussion tool to get everyone talking equally. Most importantly, there was a consensus that he made seminars more enjoyable. This may reflect the demographic of student involved (predominantly 18-20 year-old white British learners, in female-dominated classrooms).

Generally, Llewelyn has been a successful addition to the classroom. His position as a low-tech facilitative technology makes him nearly unique in higher education, and goes against the normal practice of using low-tech technologies to illustrate single activities, and using high-tech technologies to facilitate learning in a digital environment. Llewelyn’s success suggests there is room for a low-tech facilitative technology.

On a personal note, the success of Llewelyn has prompted me to continue using soft toys in the classroom. I think for some classes a subject specific prop would have the benefit of helping to solidify the curriculum; for example, a Chaucer the Poet doll would help teach the complicated authorship and narratorship of the Canterbury Tales. However, I can see there is some benefit to having a single, non-subject-specific teaching prop to visit multiple classes. As explained, Llewelyn has built up a popular following online, and exists as a personality outside and between classrooms. Llewelyn will therefore not be retiring from duty for some time to come.

Acknowledgements

I first experienced some of the potential of the use of soft toys in a Welsh for Adults class in 2012, as taught by Sion ap Glyn, and he inspired my use of the soft toy as a teaching technology. I also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Michael Willett and Jenny Needs in researching this topic. Llewelyn’s use was praised and commented upon with surprise by six colleagues: Melanie Bigold (October 2014), Kay Westoby (March 2015), David Mason (November 2015), Nathan Munday (February 2016), Katherine Mansfield (March 2016) and Michael Willett (March 2016), I am thankful to all, especially the encouragement of Melanie and Michael. The RateYourLecturer team kindly facilitated a profile for Llewelyn the Lynx on their website, I am grateful for their assistance and understanding. Most importantly I am very grateful to my eleven seminar groups for indulging my unusual teaching practice and giving such useful feedback. If you are a student reading this, thanks for all the memories, and I hope I have been able to represent your views. Please feel free to email me with corrections if you feel misrepresented.
References


Cooke, B. (2013). We are not dancing bears: opposing Rate Your Lecturer. Retrieved from http://www.criticalfaculties.org/we-are-not-dancing-bears-opposing-rate-your-lecturer/


Appendices

Fig. 8. The RateYourLecturer review system.
Fig. 9. The in-class review questionnaire.

Please visit Raye’s ResearchClector page to give detailed comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>I liked having Lewelyn in the seminars.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Lewelyn was distracting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewelyn made seminars more stressful.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewelyn made seminars Children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lewelyn slowed down seminars.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding Lewelyn helped me to think.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>People paid attention to whoever had Lewelyn.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Lewelyn made me more confident in seminars.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Lewelyn taught me about cultural and wildife history.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewelyn made seminars more exciting.</td>
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Fig. 10. The collected results of the in-class questionnaire

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<th>Unsure/Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Llewelyn made me more confident in seminars.</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Holding Llewelyn helped me to think.</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>I didn’t like touching Llewelyn.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked having Llewelyn in the seminars.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Llewelyn was useful in the seminars.</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>Unsure/Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>22%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>27%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<td>82%</td>
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<td>76%</td>
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A Full-Time Dilemma: 
Examining the Experiences of Part-time Faculty

Krista M. Kimmel and Jennifer L. Fairchild
Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY 40475

Abstract

Part-time faculty now account for more than half of all faculty in American colleges and universities. Existing scholarship primarily has focused on the teaching effectiveness of part-time faculty. In this exploratory study, the authors employ a qualitative approach to examine the perspectives of part-time faculty members at a public, regional institution. We identify several significant themes related to the experiences of part-time faculty members, including teaching evaluation; student-centered instruction; instructors’ use of technology in the classroom; and disconnection from the university. We also offer pragmatic recommendations for administrators and other faculty designed to improve the overall experience of part-time faculty.

Keywords: Part-time faculty, teaching, contingent faculty.

The professoriate in the United States is diverse, complex, and evolving. More than 1.5 million faculty members (both full- and part-time) are employed in American colleges and universities. The number of part-time, or adjunct, faculty increased by 162% between the years 1991 and 2011. Part-time faculty now account for more than half of all faculty in degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2012). In addition, the percentage of full-time, non-tenured faculty (e.g. lecturers or instructors) grew by 22.7% from the years 1992 to 1998 (AAUP, 2014b). Part-time and full-time, non-tenured instructors, collectively referred to as “contingent faculty,” account for 70% of all faculty today (AAUP, 2014a).

Contingent faculty are appealing options for institutions for myriad reasons. First, in the era of budget cuts and constraints contingent faculty are more economical hires than tenure-track faculty (Ochoa, 2012; Umbach, 2007). Most part-time faculty do not receive benefits, which results in savings for their universities. Tenure-ineligible full-time faculty generally have few, if any, service or research obligations, and therefore can carry a heavier teaching load. Additionally, once a faculty line is shifted from the tenure-track, the funds are reallocated with little likelihood of the tenure-track position being restored (Ochoa, 2012). Second, some argue that the tenure system is contributing to the contingent faculty trend, because of associated costs and a lack of faculty productivity (Umbach, 2007). Third, an aging faculty (driven largely by the elimination of the mandatory
retirement age) and a multitude of newly minted PhDs seeking employment are other factors in the growth of contingent faculty. Administrators can no longer plan for a faculty member’s retirement; as such, hiring contingent faculty is more attractive and offers increased flexibility. Fourth, the prevalence of distance education contributes to the hiring of contingent faculty, as they are often employed in this capacity. Finally, a new competitor has emerged on the academic scene: for-profit institutions, whose enrollments have increased. These colleges and universities generally do not offer tenure, which may be appealing to business-minded trustees and directors at non-profit institutions (Ochoa, 2012).

Contingent faculty enjoy little or no job security, receive few benefits or opportunities for career advancement, and are generally underpaid (AAUP, 2014a). Moreover, contingent faculty are often excluded from socialization, curriculum development, promotion opportunities, and faculty governance (Kezar & Sam, 2013). Thus, contingent faculty may be relegated to an “outsider” status, with little institutional support.

Despite the increasing reliance by colleges and universities upon contingent faculty, relatively little is known about their experiences, particularly at four-year institutions. Current scholarship on contingent faculty is largely confined to the community college context. The existing research on contingent faculty at four-year institutions has generally examined the teaching effectiveness of such faculty.

Teaching Effectiveness

Perhaps the most salient questions surrounding contingent faculty involve student learning, teaching effectiveness, and faculty members’ interactions with students. Current research primarily has examined the role of contingent faculty in undergraduate education (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Ochoa, 2012; Umbach, 2007). Such studies have sought to investigate the quality of teaching by contingent faculty, especially as compared to faculty in tenure lines. Others have analyzed possible grade inflation attributable to contingent faculty and the instructors’ role in student retention.

Eagan and Jaeger (2008) cite some benefits associated with employing contingent faculty. In addition to offering reduced labor costs and budget flexibility, contingent faculty are known to be “student-centered.” In particular, part-time faculty are flexible with their teaching schedules, instructing courses in the evenings, on the weekends, and online, which is beneficial to many students. Full-time, non-tenure track faculty tend to be dedicated teachers, and presumably, without scholarship or service expectations, can devote all their efforts to student learning. However, Eagan and Jaeger observe “full-time nontenure-track faculty teaching loads are often higher than tenure-track faculty teaching loads, which may leave these faculty members with less, rather than more, time for students” (p. 41). Furthermore, part-time faculty are often employed across multiple institutions and may hold jobs outside of higher education, which suggests less accessibility for students and diminished involvement on campus (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008).
Umbach (2007) hypothesized contingent faculty would exhibit lower levels of commitment to their institutions and lower measures of performance as indicated by relevant good practices in undergraduate education (e.g. student faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning techniques, and setting high expectations for students). Umbach found “contingent status, particularly part-time status, is negatively related to undergraduate education” (p. 102). Part-time faculty spent less time preparing for their classes and were less likely to utilize collaborative and active teaching techniques than their full-time peers. While tenure-ineligible full-time faculty and tenure-track faculty were similarly likely to engage with students outside of class to discuss course content, part-time faculty were less inclined to do so. However, all contingent faculty were less likely to interact with students outside of class on matters unrelated to course content. Overall, tenure-ineligible full-time faculty behaved more similarly to their tenured and tenure-track counterparts (Umbach, 2007).

Eagan & Jaeger (2008) examined the effects of contingent faculty in “gatekeeper” courses (i.e. introductory courses that are prerequisites to the major field of study), namely the retention of students and their continuation in their major. Eagan and Jaeger found tenure-ineligible, full-time faculty had little impact on students’ continuation into their second year of studies. Students appeared to be negatively impacted when taking courses taught by part-time faculty in gatekeeper courses. This may be attributable to students having more limited access to these instructors and thus feeling disengaged. For example, gatekeeper classes tend to competitive, larger in size, and delivered in the traditional lecture format, therefore leading students to pursue additional assistance and feedback. Since part-time faculty may lack office space and hold fewer office hours, students might not receive the extra help they are seeking (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008).

Baldwin and Wawrzynski (2011) sought to advance the study of the effects of contingent faculty on undergraduate education. They examined the likelihood of contingent faculty using various teaching strategies (learning-centered or subject-centered) versus tenured or tenure-track faculty. Baldwin and Wawrzynski found contingent faculty were more likely to employ subject centered techniques (e.g. multiple choice exams) than their tenured or tenure-track peers. Part-time faculty were less likely to utilize learning-centered strategies, such as short-answer exams, group projects, and research papers. However, full-time contingent faculty were more similar to their tenure-eligible counterparts in this regard. Additionally, part-time faculty were less likely to use technology, such as email communication and websites, to interact with students. Thus, most part-time faculty’s interactions with students are face-to-face. Both tenure-eligible and full-time contingent faculty were more inclined to use technology to communicate with students (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011).

**Grade Inflation**

A serious concern in higher education has been the prevalence of grade inflation (Sonner, 2000). In many cases, higher grades have been attributed to contingent faculty for various reasons. First, some hypothesize that contingent faculty may assign higher grades in order to diminish student complaints, in fear of being terminated. Second, contingent faculty
may have less teaching experience, and therefore, are unable to distinguish among grades (Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005).

Kezim et al. (2005) examined grades of business students over a 20-year period at a small, private college. The authors compared student grades across all faculty ranks: tenured, tenure-track, and adjunct. Although student grade point averages rose across all faculty classifications, the GPAs of students of adjunct faculty reflected the most significant increase (Kezim et al., 2005). In a similar study, Sonner (2000) investigated the grades of students at a small, public university, at which approximately 70% of courses are taught by adjunct faculty. The results indicated, even when controlling for class size, instructor credentials, and course discipline area, adjunct faculty assigned higher grades than full-time faculty (Sonner, 2000).

**Online Education**

Facing economic uncertainty, many institutions are utilizing online educations as a means to save funds (Mueller, Mandernach, & Sanderson, 2013). Contingent faculty are often employed to teach such classes, in part because of the flexibility contingent employees offer (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Mueller et al., 2013). Mueller et al. sought to compare student performance in online courses taught by adjunct faculty and full-time faculty whose teaching loads were exclusively online. Student performance indicators included grades, withdrawal rate, failure rate, and student satisfaction following the course. The results suggested students were more likely to complete the course successfully when taught by full-time online faculty. In addition, students reported higher satisfaction with their learning experience in courses instructed by full-time faculty. One result is of particular note: students taught by full-time online faculty received higher grades than students instructed by adjunct faculty (Mueller et al., 2013). This is the reverse of findings by Sonner (2000) and Kezem et al. (2005) and may result from the teaching expertise of the full-time faculty.

**Evaluation of Contingent Faculty**

Although all faculty are subject to evaluation, some marked differences exist between the evaluation of tenure-track and contingent faculty. Contingent faculty are evaluated almost exclusively by students through course evaluations (Heller, 2012). Thus, non-tenure track faculty may be more vulnerable to student complaints than their tenure-eligible peers. For example, contingent faculty are more likely to teach lower-division courses, have larger class sizes, carry heavier teaching loads, and share crowded office space with several other instructors. Any number of these issues may impact students’ views of an instructor or course, and as such, the instructor’s evaluations may suffer (Heller, 2012). Furthermore, contingent faculty are more susceptible to losing their jobs as a result of poor student ratings. Heller asserts tenure-track faculty are more apt to receive mentorship from senior faculty if they receive lower student evaluations and argues contingent faculty should be treated similarly.

“In consultation with contingent faculty, colleges and universities should establish fair,
consistent, and objective procedures for performance review of instructors…These procedures should resemble those for evaluation of tenure-line faculty and include peer reviews of teaching, community service, institutional service, conference presentations, and publications” (Heller, 2012, A10-A11).

In an effort to further understand the evaluation process of adjunct faculty, Langen (2011) aimed to determine what sources of information administrators use to evaluate adjunct faculty, as well as the criteria used for such evaluations and decisions of reappointment. In most cases, administrators (usually department chairs) are responsible for evaluations and decisions of reappointment. Student evaluations were the most common method of instructor evaluation, followed by classroom observation and syllabus reviews. Administrators ranked classroom observations as the most accurate criteria for evaluation purposes. When asked to rank factors relating to reappointment, administrators cited teaching performance as the most important criteria, ahead of student evaluations, availability, and work experience (Langen, 2011).

**The Contingent Faculty-Institution Relationship**

Although the number of contingent faculty on college campuses is markedly increasing, very few institutions have crafted policies and practices in support of these instructors, which may contribute to a negative working environment for such faculty. Kezar and Sam (2013) sought to identify institutional strategies to move forward policies and practices related to contingent faculty, and the associated challenges of implementing such policies and practices. In a series of interviews conducted with contingent faculty, Kezar and Sam note several points of interest. First, developing awareness was instrumental in overcoming apathy and mobilizing contingent faculty for change. For example, some contingent faculty reported they were unaware of pay disparity between tenure-eligible and non-tenure track faculty until they were provided with the data. Second, disseminating information through various communication channels (e.g. newsletters, listservs) was critical in recruiting and uniting faculty to effect change. With appropriate levels of awareness and participation, the contingent faculty were able to enlist the help of various allies, such as tenure-eligible faculty and administrators, to implement policy changes (Kezar & Sam, 2013). These findings suggest the importance of communication between contingent faculty themselves and other members of the institution.

To examine adjunct faculty’s institutional loyalty, Hoyt (2012) investigated adjunct faculty’s reasons for teaching, their job satisfaction and teaching methods, and perceived departmental and institutional support. Hoyt found that the majority of adjunct faculty held more than one position and primarily taught for enjoyment. Only about half of the faculty reported attending a departmental orientation and being assigned a faculty mentor. Most adjunct faculty utilize discussion and lecture as their primary teaching method. Perhaps most importantly, the majority of respondents indicated job satisfaction and strong loyalty to their institution. However, several adjunct faculty suggested better pay and benefits, professional development, opportunities to serve on committees, and more interaction with the department chair as ways to improve their work environment (Hoyt, 2012).
Likewise, Eagan, Jaeger, and Grantham (2015) examined the association between part-time faculty satisfaction and campus climate and their use of institutional resources (e.g., office space). Their findings indicate part-time faculty are unsatisfied with their relationships with administrators and colleagues; however, workplace satisfaction increased when part-time faculty reported feeling respected. Seemingly small gestures, such as access to office space or personal computers, appear to increase part-time instructors’ workplace satisfaction.

**Mentoring Contingent Faculty**

Emerging scholarship has suggested the need for mentoring among adjunct faculty. For example, Franczyk (2014) discusses several strategies employed by an academic department at a four-year, regional institution to address some of the challenges encountered by adjunct faculty. This department, whose part-time instructors outnumber full-time faculty by a four-to-one margin, assigned an adjunct mentor to support and develop their part-time faculty. The adjunct mentor was a practitioner with more than 30 years of professional experience and was a seasoned part-time instructor. The adjunct mentor serves as a liaison between the adjunct faculty and departmental leadership and regularly engages with part-time faculty through meetings and workshops (Franczyk, 2014). In addition, the adjunct mentor advises part-time faculty on teaching practices, including assessment and classroom protocols.

Similarly, Santisteban and Egues (2014) suggest that mentoring programs for adjunct faculty be a comprehensive initiative, with sufficient resources and clearly defined goals and expectations. Further, they recommend all faculty participate in a mentoring orientation, during which the roles of both the mentor and mentee are clearly defined and program goals are articulated. They also assert that the mentoring process requires frequent evaluation, with adjustments made as necessary.

**Research Design**

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state that personal experiences are opportunities for research. Research can originate from one’s life experiences. They further state that “however, it is not simply the fact that we experience something that matters. What matters is how we think and feel about the experience. In other words, we problematize our experience.” (p. 73) The goals of this project were to first, determine what types of narratives part-time faculty told regarding their teaching experience, in order to see what the common themes, if any, arose in the narratives. Second, we wanted to discern how the part-time faculty members viewed their role at the university. Finally, operating from a pragmatic perspective, we wanted to learn if there were specific strategies recommended by the contingent faculty to help them succeed that administrators could implement, regardless of the academic department or institution where they work. The design for this study was inspired by one author's former personal experience as a contingent faculty member. The second author's experience serving as the Basic Course Director for communication courses, where she works primarily with part-time faculty also inspired the study, as well as the fact that both authors are motivated to improve the working situations for part-time facul-
The method of interviewing part-time faculty allowed for a deeper, richer understanding of how these faculty members see their teaching roles and how they construct their identity as faculty members. Qualitative research methods, particularly interviewing, were the ideal methods for studying this often neglected, yet vital, group of faculty members.

**Recruitment**

There were several criteria for inclusion in this study. In order to be legally able to volunteer to participate, subjects had to be at least 18 years of age. All participants must have self-identified as part-time faculty and must have currently been teaching at least one college class in order to participate in the study. Talking with part-time faculty about their experiences was necessary in order to understand how they viewed their role in the functioning of the university and how they evaluated their teaching practices.

The recruitment of subjects was done solely by email. Since one of the authors is the Basic Course Director at her university, she has access to an email list-serve, which made it very easy to send an email recruiting participants. This approach resulted in 7 respondents, which was the entire data set. The authors knew all of the respondents personally. Snowball sampling, which involves asking respondents for names and contact information of others who might be interested or qualify for the study, resulted in no responses. Since this was exploratory research, we felt comfortable proceeding with the smaller sample size as our analysis yielded significant results.

**Sample Demographics**

The sample included a total of seven part-time faculty members from a regional, public, institution: three women and four men. All of the participants live in Kentucky. The participants’ ages ranged from early 30's to late 60's.

**Interview Procedures**

Seven interviews were conducted over a two month period. Interviews occurred at one of the author's office. Two part-time faculty members were unable to come to the author's office, so we conducted two telephone interviews in addition to the five in-person interviews. Interviews were useful because they allowed for an understanding of “the social actor’s experiences and perspective” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). The first thing that we did at each interview was that one of the researchers presented and read an informed consent form to the interviewee. We answered any questions that the research participant had and were careful to obtain the participant’s verbal consent before we proceeded with the interview. We received approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. The actual range of the interview time was 30 minutes to 60 minutes. What was of paramount importance to us as researchers was that the interviewing process yielded knowledge that was valuable to the authors but also to the participants in our study. We recorded the interviews on a digital recorder, which allowed us to focus our attention on the interviewee and his or her experience, rather than writing notes.
all the time. We did take some notes on phrases or words that stood out to us during the time of the interview.

Method of Analysis

We reviewed the data looking for themes that emerged during the interviews. The process of reading the data and coding it was a highly interpretive one. Using Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) concept of saturation, we never had an exact number of part-time faculty we planned to interview. Our results show that even with only seven participants in the study, there were several themes that emerged multiple times, and we believe we reached saturation (1967) of the sample. What follows is a discussion of the most prominent themes as a result of analyzing the data.

Discussion

Evaluation of Teaching

One of the more significant themes emerging from this research was the faculty members’ perceptions of their teaching evaluations. The participants were especially vocal about the use of student ratings as the primary vehicle to evaluate their teaching effectiveness. As Heller (2012) observes, student ratings are the most commonly utilized method of evaluating contingent faculty. The seven participants in this study were interviewed about the method(s) used to evaluate their teaching effectiveness. All seven participants in this research reported student evaluations are conducted for every course they instruct, each semester. The instructors’ perceptions of the accuracy of these student evaluations were mixed. Two faculty members stated student evaluations of their teaching were “absolutely not” fair. Participant #2 characterized student evaluations as “cruel” and “gripe sessions,” and admitted to barely reading them. Five instructors indicated the student ratings were somewhat or partially reflective of their teaching effectiveness, while only one faculty member believed the student evaluation process was “fair.” Participant #3 expressed concern that students may feel pressure to “help themselves” when completing faculty evaluations, in an effort to improve their grades. As a result, this instructor believed his evaluations tended to “skew higher.” Two instructors believed students are often in a rush to complete the evaluations, which may affect their accuracy. Participant #4 stated, “There is so much variance [in the evaluations] between years. I know I don’t change that much.” Overall, most of the participants felt student evaluations of their teaching were somewhat accurate and/or helpful; however, the majority of the faculty members interviewed expressed some concerns with the practice.

In addition, the faculty members revealed different experiences related to classroom and/or peer observations. Five out of the seven faculty members reported being observed by the basic course director, who serves as their immediate supervisor. One of the participants who had not been observed by a peer or supervisor teaches at a satellite campus. This instructor considered recording a class session to be used for an observation, but this idea has never materialized. The other faculty member who had not been observed in the classroom by a peer or supervisor primarily instructs online or hybrid courses. Notably,
only two of the participants had been observed in the classroom by someone other than the basic course director. In both of these instances, the faculty members were observed by the department chair. All of those interviewed indicated classroom observations had been beneficial. Participant #2 believed the observation conducted by the basic course director had proven more helpful than students’ evaluations. Another faculty member, Participant #6, stated the department chair’s observation was a “positive experience” and noted the observation encouraged him to include more group activities within the classroom.

**Student-Centered Instruction**

A second significant theme that emerged from this study was the instructors’ perceptions that they are very student-centered in their instruction. The results from our research align with Eagan and Jaeger’s (2008) work that states that contingent faculty are known to be “student-centered.” Almost all of the participants echoed, to some degree, the words of Participant #1, when she said, “I feel like I'm helping somehow.” Participant #3 said that he was "proud to be serving these students. It's a service." Participant #5 went as far to state when talking about a student, "He's my friend, he's not my student.” Comments such as these were echoed by varying degrees from six of the seven participants.

Many of the participants stated that they felt that, by teaching these college courses, they were making a difference, and that what they were doing as part-time instructors contributed to the mission of the university. Participant #3 stated that he was "very proud" to be associated with the university. He further stated, "This is not a job, but an opportunity." Participant #5 stated when it came to the mission of the university: "I'm bought in." Participant #7 said she was "happy for the opportunity to interact with students."

When examining our data and the comments made by the majority of the respondents, it is clear that our data contradicts the research presented by Umbach (2007) that hypothesized that contingent faculty would exhibit lower levels of commitment to their institutions or that having contingent faculty in gateway courses is detrimental to student success. The participants in our research were student-centered faculty who thought they were making a difference in the lives of their students and believed that they were contributing to the mission of the university. The majority of our respondents indicated in the interviews that they were committed to student success.

**Instructor Use of Technology**

This research yielded significant findings related to the faculty members’ use of technology in the classroom. When asked to describe their approach to utilizing technology when teaching, most of the faculty members indicated they embraced technology and often used it for instructional purposes. However, when asked to provide further details regarding specific technologies, the majority of the instructors struggled to articulate their precise usage. For example, six of the participants reported they brought laptop computers to class, which they connected to the room’s projector. Three instructors stated they regularly use the slide show presentation program, PowerPoint, during class sessions.
One faculty member preferred using Keynote for classroom presentations. Four participants indicated they frequently utilize Blackboard, a common learning management system. Additionally, six of the faculty members often incorporate videos from YouTube, TED, and NBC Learn to help facilitate learning. Just one faculty member expressed reluctance to integrate technology in the classroom. This instructor, Participant #5, felt it was “too easy to get caught up in technology,” which can lead to decreased focus on students.

The above findings reveal the limitations of the faculty members interviewed related to their incorporation of technology in the classroom. None of the faculty members reported using more advanced technologies than presentation programs, audio and video clips, and the learning management system, Blackboard. The audio and video clips were primarily used to provide examples of speeches, while Blackboard served as a means to communicate with students and record grades. Only one instructor, Participant #7, reported using the discussion board feature for classes that meet face-to-face. None of the faculty members indicated they use additional software, websites, or applications (e.g. AnyMeeting; Remind; PollEverywhere) for instructional or communication purposes.

A Sense of Disconnection

The majority of the part-time faculty who were interviewed in this study expressed a sense of disconnection from the university. Their insights support the findings from previous research that stated contingent faculty are often excluded from socialization, curriculum development, promotion opportunities, and faculty governance (Kezar & Sam, 2013). Our research underscores Kezar and Sam’s earlier work that found contingent faculty may be relegated to an “outsider” status, with little institutional support.

Although the part-time faculty members expressed the sentiments that what they did on campus was making a difference and was important to students' education, they still voiced their concerns about "fitting in" on campus. Participant #3 stated, "There's a disconnect as an adjunct." Participant #4 mentioned that he was a "lowly adjunct," and that he would "like to be connected with faculty." Several of the part-time faculty said that they do not hold office hours, even though all the participants in this study have access to a communal part-time faculty office for their use. Participant #7 used the word "disconnect" when describing her experience as a part-time faculty member. She further elaborated that part-time faculty "aren't included" in any of the events or meetings on campus that are held for full-time faculty. She then went on to ask the question, "Where do you really fit?" She mentioned her desire for professional development workshops that were created for adjuncts only. These findings relate to the work of Eagan et al. (2015), who emphasized the importance of part-time faculty feeling respected and supported on campus.
Recommendations

Holistic Approach to Evaluation

Most of the faculty members interviewed expressed at least some reservations about the student evaluation process. The instructors voiced concerns that students spend little time or thought completing the evaluations. Furthermore, some faculty members believed students feel pressure to rate the instructor favorably, even though evaluations are not distributed to faculty long after the grade submission deadline has passed. A few faculty members stated students use the evaluations a means to complain or vent, which was a source of frustration for the instructors. The faculty members in this study who had been observed by a supervisor valued the experience. However, most of the participants had never been observed by anyone other than the basic course director (i.e. Teaching and Learning Center Director or peer). Thus, the instructors receive only limited feedback about their teaching from peers or mentors.

To improve the evaluation process of part-time faculty, we recommend administrators employ a holistic approach, in which instructors submit a portfolio for review each year. The portfolios may include student ratings of instruction, peer observations, and examples of classroom assignments, exams, and activities. We encourage administrators to meet on an annual basis with all part-time faculty members to discuss their evaluations. In these sessions, feedback may be given on assignments, classroom activities, and peer observations. For example, if an instructor’s exams are composed mostly of objective, multiple-choice questions, chairs and administrators can discuss assessments requiring higher levels of critical thinking, and if needed, recommend professional development opportunities to the faculty member. In addition, holistic evaluations may alleviate some of the stress associated with the student rating system, as described by the participants in this study. Future studies could examine the effects of holistic evaluations on part-time instructors’ teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction.

A Sense of Community

All of the faculty members who participated in this research expressed gratitude for the opportunity to teach at the institution. However, some of the instructors indicated they felt, at times, disconnected from the university. Participant #7 remarked, “There is a sense of where do I [as an adjunct] fit?” Most of the faculty members recognized their role in fulfilling the teaching mission of the university, but a few described themselves as a “lowly adjunct” or “cheap labor.” The participants also revealed they spend limited time with other part-time faculty members. For example, two instructors stated they “don’t really know” the other part-time faculty in the department.

The above issues demonstrate the need for fostering a stronger, more inclusive community for part-time faculty. Although a challenging undertaking (e.g. significant variance in the schedules of adjunct faculty), a stronger community for part-time faculty may prove beneficial for the institution, in terms of both teaching effectiveness and the instructors’ loyalty to the university. More research is needed to explore the relationship between
part-time faculty and their institutions, and to what degree an inclusive community affects teaching performance. However, at this time, we encourage administrators to invite part-time faculty participation in professional development opportunities (e.g. academic conferences and workshops) and social events (e.g. end-of-semester gatherings). Professional development opportunities related to advancement in rank or educational attainment may prove beneficial to both the instructor and the institution (Eagan et al., 2015). Further, we recommend part-time instructors be given the opportunity to interact with each other at the departmental, college, and university levels. Often, adjunct faculty participate in a “part-time faculty orientation,” but rarely do they engage with each other afterward. Teaching and Learning Centers and academic departments should create specialized programming and events designed for part-time faculty. The implementation of a mentoring program for part-time faculty may also foster an inclusive and supportive environment (Franczyk, 2014).

Conclusion

Part-time faculty now account for more than half of all faculty in degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2012). Despite the increasing reliance by colleges and universities upon contingent faculty, relatively little is known about their experiences, particularly at four-year institutions. Previous research has only examined part-time faculty members’ teaching effectiveness and impact in the classroom. We hope that our research has shed light on the importance of the experience of part-time faculty and how they view their role in four-year institutions. These institutions could not survive without the work and the help of part-time faculty. Our study has illuminated some of the joys and the obstacles that part-time faculty encounter while teaching. As our work was exploratory in nature, we hope that others will continue this line of research, perhaps in larger studies on campuses that are diverse in size and in demographics. We have also offered some pragmatic suggestions to help improve not only the teaching practices of part-time faculty, but their experiences as members of these institutions as well. By implementing simple strategies to better the working environment for part-time faculty, we will also improve the experience of the student they teach. Small, but significant changes, can make a substantial impact on the working environment of this growing, and increasingly important, population.

References


**Appendix**

Interview questions for the part-time faculty research project:

Describe how you prepare for your classes.

Do you hold office hours? If so, how many? If not, why don't you hold office hours?


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What type of informal interactions do you engage in with your students outside of the classroom?

Describe your use of technology in the classroom.

Do you believe your teaching evaluation is an accurate reflection of your teaching effectiveness? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Have you been observed in the classroom by anyone other than the course coordinator at your institution? If so, who? Describe the outcome.

Describe what it means to be an employee at this institution as a part-time faculty member. Could the institution implement any strategies to improve your working environment? If so, explain.

Describe how you see your role fulfilling the mission of the institution.