

**Ilse DeKoeyer-Laros, Ph.D.**

Teaching Statement: Teaching is a Journey

**Courses taught**

Since my initial employment at the University of Utah (starting January 26, 2000), I have taught many different developmental and other classes (e.g., PSY 1010, 2010, 1230, 3250; see CV). However, in the past few years, my teaching load has included:

1. Research Methods in Psychology (PSY 3010; 85 to 100 students & 5 TAs) – once a year
2. Development in Infancy (PSY 3215; 50-60 students – once a year
3. CSBS Internships in Psychology (PSY 4890; 15-45 students, depending on semester; all year)

I also teach for the Continuing Education department (PSY 3215 and PSY 3230), but this is paid by CECE and is independent of my work for the Psychology Department.

**Course load and administrative responsibilities**

1. **PSY 3010:** weekly meetings with the Lab TAs & coaching them to teach the undergrads to write an APA-style paper; supervising undergrad TAs; grading 5 written assignments over the semester; lecturing every week; reviewing weekly quizzes; student contact upon request. Contact hours (in person) include teaching two 80-minute lectures and max. 1 hour/week office hour; and email contact.
2. **PSY 3215:** lecturing twice a week (80 minutes) and student meetings upon request; supervising an undergraduate TA; assessments include a Powerpoint presentation (which students can do in groups, so this includes organization time): a Blog post; a term paper (Case Study) and a short Final Assignment (1-page written assignment); reviewing weekly quizzes; doing research on student questions.
3. **PSY 4890:** four meetings (monthly); reviewing and organizing contracts (approving, sending to supervisors); grading two short written assignments per student every month; asking supervisors to evaluate the students and sharing this with the students; collaborating with Dominique Blanc, CSBS internship coordinator; contacting site supervisors when necessary; maintaining an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of student placements, hours, contracts, and evaluations. This can be quite a lot of work (in semesters with higher enrollment).

**Teaching Statement**

Being a teacher is like being a guide on a journey of discovery: I know the terrain better than my students, but the territory is so vast and ever-changing that we can't know every nook and cranny of it. I have learned a lot about infant and child development, normal and abnormal, and the science and profession of psychology. However, what keeps me going is not what I already know, but what is still unexplored. I wish to instill in my students a similar curiosity and sense of wonderment. An example: the proportion of REM sleep is higher before birth. Does this mean that fetuses dream? If so, what do they dream about? What do you think?

I want my students to know about Piaget and Vygotsky and the benefits of play, but also about new discoveries. For years, I have been teaching about the exciting new field of epigenetics, and about the differential susceptibility hypothesis (aka, "The Orchid Hypothesis"). Such ideas are beginning to chart new territory in the science of psychology. I am so excited that we now have Faculty who are pioneers in these areas of research (Dr. Liz Conratt and Dr. Bruce Ellis), and I love to share their work with my students, too. Together, we travel to these new areas of research, but these new ideas and findings will also evoke more questions, more wonderment. I love to have my students discuss those questions and possible outcomes, ethical concerns, or anything else that comes into their mind. Knowledge is always co-constructed and although I serve as a guide who is more experienced and

knowledgeable, all of my students have something to contribute. Together we discover new meanings, knowledge, and questions.

Teaching is also connecting: to the class, the materials, the real world outside of class and one's own self. Psychology is all about people. What could be more meaningful for students than applying theoretical concepts and research findings to their own lives? To foster a sense of connection, I love to convey my passion and enthusiasm for the field of psychology in general and for each of the classes I teach. I have found that it is easier for students to feel engaged when I am passionate about the materials. To help students make immediate connections between the materials they are learning about and their own experiences, I also use many different teaching methods, including traditional ones (e.g., lectures, videos, discussions) and more innovative ones (such as relaxation/visualization exercises and asking students to write a Thought of the Week). Most of my students have extremely busy lives, combining their studies with jobs, families, and other commitments. I often begin class by having students relax in their seats, focus on their sensations and perceptions in the here and now, and connect them to the course materials for that day. I find that this mindfulness practice helps them focus and make the transition from their busy lives into this specific classroom and topic. Students often tell me that the relaxation helps them focus and relax. This way, they can be more present with the class, and they can connect better to the class and class materials.

To connect materials to students' own lives, I encourage them to write about topics or explore certain questions outside of the classroom, which help foster a connection between the course materials and the student's own life. For example, in my child development classes, I ask my students to create a prevention or intervention project to improve development, based what they have learned over the course of the semester. Many students get fired up when doing this, and some seem to see their project as something they could really apply in the world. I also ask students to write a blog-style post in which they describe an infant product critically. Assignments like blog posts and in-class presentations are meant to have students teach a topic to others, describing it in common language, so that they learn to apply academic knowledge to the everyday world. In the Internships class, students learn the other way around: they learn how to connect relevant psychological research to hands-on work in the field. Many have commented that this is the most meaningful class they have taken in their undergraduate careers.

To help students connect with the materials and to foster a more open learning attitude, I have decided to do away with traditional exams in my 3000-level classes. I had noticed that many students tend to become anxious at the prospect of doing exams and that they tend to focus on "what will be on the test." Exploring, wondering, discussing, discovering, and being curious seem to be hampered by the requirement to take exams. Assessing students through weekly quizzes, Thoughts of the Week, and written assignments helps them focus on the materials at hand, rather than worry about the tests to come. Students have reported that they still learn a lot because they are more engaged and less anxious. This more relaxed atmosphere contributes to a more engaged classroom of people who are eager to learn and discover together. Just today (1-29-20), a student wrote:

Thank you for your help! I am enjoying our class a lot. I really appreciate that you don't have exams in the class, I feel like I am actually retaining the information better because I am not stressing about what is going to be on a test or not. The miracle of life is truly the most incredible thing.

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Guided by modern insights into teaching effectiveness, I have learned about creating course objectives, aligned with teaching and assessment methods. I do create specific learning outcomes for every class (mostly for students to be able to understand, describe, or explain the main concepts learned in that class) and do my best to connect these to my methods of teaching and assessment. But across all classes, I strive to encourage curiosity, critical thinking, and making connections. Together, my students and I co-create meaningful learning experiences. I have met many former students who told me that they learned a lot in my classes. But each student also has something to bring to the class and to me: their own unique experiences, perspectives, emotions, and ideas.

As a teacher, I never stop learning. I'm amazed by all that my students are teaching *me*. I am very grateful for the moments when I see their eyes light up, and especially grateful when I meet students years after I taught them, and they tell me that my teaching has made a difference in their own lives (like the student who did not like infants all that much, and sent me a picture of his newborn, years after taking my infancy class).

I'm excited for all that we will keep discovering together on this never-ending journey!