

Ideas for Teaching History and Systems

R. Eric Landrum

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

This article presents some ideas and activities (reaction journal, intellectual genealogy, textbook comparisons, and multiple timelines) for the history and systems class. Instead of formal testing, students prepared topic summaries that integrated their knowledge from lectures, text, and original articles. These activities can be used to increase the richness of students' experience.

The history and systems course is a popular and important one in many psychology departments (Riedel, 1974), often serving as a capstone course. Previous contributors have suggested strategies or themes for teaching the course (Hart,

Vol. 19, No. 3, October 1992

1986; Robinson, 1979; Smith, 1982; Tobacyk, 1987) as well as specific exercises to facilitate classroom learning (Benjamin, 1979; Berrenberg, 1990; Caudle, 1979; Coffield, 1973; Davis, Janzen, & Davis, 1982; Weigel & Gottfurcht, 1972). In this article, I suggest specific revisions for some old ideas and present some new ones.

Class Assignments

During the fall 1989 and fall 1990 semesters, I taught History and Systems of Psychology using Hergenhahn's (1986) textbook. For the fall 1989 class, a straight lecture format was used, with four essay tests given periodically. The course format was changed drastically for the fall 1990 semester. Lectures were presented, but the four essay tests were dropped and the following five new assignments were added.

Reaction Journal

Students read original articles from the history of psychology available at the library on reserve. Each student kept a journal containing reactions to the material. Journals were graded four times during the semester. Instructors should select articles that highlight points covered in lectures or that supplement the textbook. Excellent sources for original articles are Dennis (1948) and Benjamin (1988). Students kept a double-entry journal with notes about the readings on one side of the page and their personal reactions on the other. Journal entries should demonstrate students' critical thinking on the subject.

Intellectual Genealogy

The idea of a genealogy is not new. Weigel and Gottfurcht (1972) suggested that students study the genealogy of their faculty adviser to gain insight into how past experiences influence psychologists and psychology. The assignment was changed so that students could understand the influences on their own behavior. Students created their own "intellectual genealogy," indicating the major influences in their intellectual development. The genealogy included four to eight individuals who significantly influenced the students' intellectual development. Each selection was accompanied by a half-page description of the persons selected.

Textbook Comparison

The history and systems course should sensitize students to changes in psychology over time. One index of change can be found by examining the contents of introductory psychology textbooks. I provided students with the tables of contents for James's (1890) *The Principles of Psychology* (Vols. 1 and 2), Woodworth's (1934) *Psychology*, and Santrock's (1988) *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behavior*. Working in groups of three, students compared and contrasted tables of contents of the three books. Each group developed a format for comparing the treatment of a topic (e.g., learning) across textbooks. Students also noted when new topics

appeared and when old topics disappeared from the tables of contents.

Multiple Timelines

One major challenge of teaching history and systems is to overcome students' linear time perception. From their viewpoint, all psychological events occurred in a certain sequence. This assignment was designed to demonstrate that many events and developments in psychology happen concurrently and to promote a more global perspective of the discipline's evolution. Students working in groups of three completed timelines of psychological events from three general locations: the U.S., Europe, and the nonwestern world. Students were also asked to speculate about the future of psychology.

Topic Summaries

Replacing essay tests given in the fall 1989 semester, topic summaries were a central component of the fall 1990 course. Students wrote six topic summaries throughout the semester. They created their own reference guide of important ideas from lectures, the textbook, and library reserve readings. Each student determined what to include. Students were told that the end result should be a well organized document that provides a guide to information covered in the course.

Summary

What was the impact of these activities? Students seemed to enjoy the different assignments and were relieved not to have tests in a "history" class. I enjoyed the variety that the activities provided, and I believe that they added to the richness of the class experience.

References

- Benjamin, L. T., Jr. (1979). Instructional strategies in the history of psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 6, 15-17.
- Benjamin, L. T., Jr. (Ed.). (1988). *A history of psychology: Original sources and contemporary research*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Berrenberg, J. L. (1990). Integrative and goal-relevant essay questions for history and systems courses. *Teaching of Psychology*, 17, 113-115.
- Caudle, F. M. (1979). Using "demonstrations, class experiments and the projection lantern" in the history of psychology course. *Teaching of Psychology*, 6, 7-11.
- Coffield, K. E. (1973). Additional stimulation for students in history and systems. *American Psychologist*, 28, 624-625.
- Davis, S. F., Janzen, W. C., & Davis, R. L. (1982). Teaching and learning the history of psychology need not be boring. *Teaching of Psychology*, 9, 183-184.
- Dennis, W. (Ed.). (1948). *Readings in the history of psychology*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Hart, J. J. (1986). A strategy for teaching the history and systems of psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 13, 67-69.
- Hergenhahn, B. R. (1986). *An introduction to the history of psychology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology* (Vols. 1 and 2). New York: Holt.
- Riedel, R. G. (1974). The current status of the history and systems of psychology courses in American colleges and universities. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 10, 410-412.
- Robinson, D. N. (1979). The history of psychology and the ends of instruction. *Teaching of Psychology*, 6, 4-6.
- Santrock, J. W. (1988). *Psychology: The science of mind and behavior* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Brown.
- Smith, A. H. (1982). Different approaches for teaching the history of psychology course. *Teaching of Psychology*, 9, 180-182.
- Tobacyk, J. J. (1987). Using personal construct theory in teaching history and systems of psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 14, 111-112.
- Weigel, R. G., & Gottfurcht, J. W. (1972). Faculty genealogies: A stimulus for student involvement in history and systems. *American Psychologist*, 27, 981-983.
- Woodworth, R. S. (1934). *Psychology* (3rd ed.). New York: Holt.

Notes

1. I thank Bill Van Pelt (English Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) for the reaction journal activity, Chuck Lee (History Department, University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse) for the multiple timeline idea, and the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows program sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-System Undergraduate Teaching Improvement Council for its support.
2. I am grateful to Charles L. Brewer and three anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this article.
3. Requests for reprints should be sent to R. Eric Landrum, Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, WI 53818-3099.