

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Educational, Culturally-Relevant Games to Reinforce Psychology Theories

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

This innovative practice is designed to give developmental psychology students opportunities to apply learned concepts in practical classroom environments. For this project, students work in pairs to design and implement lessons teaching developmental psychology to elementary school students through educational games. The project is broken into three parts: research, planning, and implementation.

In the first part of the project, student pairs research developmental theories from the following categories: motor, cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. Examples of developmental theories include Piaget's cognitive development stages, Kohlberg's moral understanding stages, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Although this project is aligned with the course textbook, students use scholarly literature to find existing educational game models while expanding on their foundational knowledge of developmental psychology.

Using their research findings, student pairs create their games. All educational games are centered on the objective of teaching developmental theories to elementary school children. Before moving to the next phase of the project, students submit a written justification supporting the efficacy of their game in achieving the objective above using three to four academic sources.

After receiving instructor approval, students begin the planning stage. Lesson plans must include the following: (1) well-defined learning objectives, (2) a minute-by-minute breakdown of lesson activities, (3) clear game instructions appropriately written for elementary-aged students, (4) a suitable lesson teaching the theory of development targeted in the game, (5) a closing activity, (6) a list of relevant materials, and (7) two to three scholarly references.

During the planning phase, students adapt their lessons to be culturally-responsive to their audience. In class, students learn about culturally-relevant pedagogy and apply their learning by writing a 10-item list of thought-provoking, culturally-relevant, open-ended interview questions. Students then interview a community member of a different culture or identity to develop a deeper understanding of the local community's culture. Students write a one-page reflection paper using quotes pulled from the interview as evidence for their takeaways. This paper gives students opportunities to differentiate important quotes and practice weaving quotations into their writing as evidence for their ideas. Students then reinterpret their developmental theory to be culturally-responsive to their elementary school audience.

The implementation portion of the project begins once student lesson plans receive instructor approval. As a class, students visit a local elementary school to implement their 15-minute lessons. While students are teaching, the instructor provides support and

grades student performance using a rubric. Students are graded on a four-point scale: 4 – exceeded expectations, 3 – met expectations, 2 – needs improvement, and 1 – does not meet expectations. Examples of rubric categories include the educational game was age-appropriate, the theory was adapted to be culturally-relevant, and the learning objectives were clear and attainable. Students earning 4's in all rubric categories earn A's while performances warranting all 1's receive D's.

Through this project, students engage with the local community to apply their learning in real-world contexts. Students demonstrate high levels of critical thinking as they adapt their lessons to be culturally-relevant and synthesize their learning to create educational games.