



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

## PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

Introduction to Psychology can be a difficult course to teach and an equally difficult challenge for students. Many students select this course to fulfill the general education/social science requirement for their degree. Often, they attend class out of a sense of "have to" rather than "want to." They may not be highly motivated by the study of psychology nor extremely interested in it. How can we make the sometimes "boring" study of psychology more fascinating and relevant to our students?

One method I have been using is the *personal application*. Personal applications are one page or less in length and can be handwritten. Students are asked to explain how the information they are learning pertains or applies to them, how they have used or applied this knowledge in the past, or how they can use or apply these principles in the future. Grading is on a scale of 0-2 points—2 points if the student describes the topic and makes a good application to his or her life, 1 point if the student addresses only one of the criteria, and 0 points if the student completely misses the mark.

Applications are made weekly for 10 weeks (for a total of 20 points for all applications written according to the criteria). If there is any confusion about how the application should be written, it is usually gone by the second or third attempt. I critique the applications and provide feedback. Almost all students receive the full 2 points by the second or third application. Even mundane chapters/topics on scientific method or statistics lend themselves to personal applications. The students just have to think a little harder and be more creative to apply them.

The purpose of these applications is threefold. First, the students are stimulated to think about the topic or chapter we are discussing in class. This helps them be more prepared for class and stimulates some good discussions. Second, by applying the topic to their lives, students develop a better understanding of the principles of psychology. Students become more aware of how psychological tenets and precepts are integral parts of everyday life; moreover, learning takes place

when these principles are applied to individual situations. Personal applications incorporate a hands-on approach to learning psychology. This makes the subject matter more user-friendly, stimulates thinking and discussion, and facilitates learning. Third, applications give students additional writing practice.

Feedback on these applications has been very positive. It is exciting (and personally rewarding) to read an application in which a student has applied a particular principle to his life and has come to a new understanding about himself or about his friends, family, spouse, children, or situation. Students are constantly commenting, "I never realized that before!" or "I really learned something about myself that I will be able to use from now on!" or "I am going to try that on my kids!"

Personal applications have been efficacious in teaching psychology and can be adapted to almost any other course. Students taking an introductory course in psychology may not have a grasp on some of the basic, foundational tenets needed to make personal applications and may need some of the tools learned through the introduction to develop the introspection necessary to write an insightful application. However, the benefits of this exercise outweigh the difficulties; and the activity has become a standard teaching tool in my classes.

**Tom DeQuimpaul**, *Instructor, Psychology*

For further information, contact the author at Danville Area Community College, 2000 E. Main Street, Danville, IL 61832.  
e-mail: [tdequimpaul@dan.cclcustom.com](mailto:tdequimpaul@dan.cclcustom.com)



## CREATIVE WRITING: MAKING THE CONNECTION

What do Diana Ross and The Supremes have to do with a poem written by Anne Bradstreet? What does Pink Floyd have to do with Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle"? Or what about Hank Williams Jr. and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, or Men at Work and Christopher Columbus? In an ongoing effort to keep students' interests alive and illustrate the relevancy of American literature, I implement a creative approach to writing about literature, using the rhetorical method of comparison/contrast in an analytical paper. Students are given an assignment—a three-to-four-page typed paper comparing and contrasting a popular song of their choosing to a selection from the course anthology. The assignment following demonstrates the similarities and differences between a reading from the course's anthology in American literature and a popular song.

### Description

On one occasion, we were covering Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown." I played "Puff the Magic Dragon," by Peter, Paul, and Mary in Atlanta's Chastain Park, discussing how it was similar to and different from "Young Goodman Brown."

Although the students were receptive to the general idea and did well pointing out similarities and differences between the story and song, they were not too keen on my musical selection—it demonstrated the generation gap! However, a thematic approach was chosen, and the students recognized that both works of art express the concept of journey and a loss of innocence, which can be seen as positive or negative, depending on one's point of view.

Brown takes a literal and metaphorical journey into the forest; and little Jackie Paper, too, goes on a journey with his friend, Puff, the magic dragon. Brown's newlywed bliss fades, and he becomes aware of the evil in himself, his family, and his society. He loses his innocence, but his loss can be a positive experience since he heightens his awareness; however, some students prefer to see his loss as a negative because of his attitude toward family and society after he returns to Salem. Jackie Paper, also, loses his innocence, as signified when Peter, Paul, and Mary harmonize and sing:

"A dragon lives forever,  
but not so little boys.  
Painted wings and giant's rings

make way for other toys.  
One gray night it happened;  
Jackie Paper came no more,  
and, Puff, that mighty dragon,  
he ceased his fearless roar."

Again, one can see this change as positive or negative. Jackie's growing up is a fact, but what seems sad is that he loses his imagination.

After the illustration was completed, assignment sheets were distributed. Students were told to select songs they liked, regardless of type. I asked that they bring a cassette or CD for me to hear or a printed copy of the lyrics for me to read and that they submit rough outlines, describing the connections they see.

### Findings and Implications

Sometimes, I do not understand the music that students bring to me, but I trust them enough to go with their choices. After I have reviewed their selections and their rough outlines, I write them notes and agree to meet with them individually to answer questions or provide other assistance. They show up at my office, not because they have a great many problems, but because they are excited about what they have found. Of course, musical selections are dependent on the persons making them, but they have included rap, religious, country, pop, hard rock, and alternative music. Sometimes, a more nontraditional student will select a 50's or 60's song to which I can relate.

Prior to this assignment, students often moaned and groaned about having to write yet another paper and often questioned how the readings were related to them. I have found students to be more interested in the readings and to write better papers because they are enjoy seeing the various connections between their favorite songs and selections from the anthology. Comments have changed from speculation about relevancy to amazement about connections. While this assignment and method clearly are geared toward English faculty, faculty in other disciplines who adopt the methodology of writing across the curriculum may find this assignment to be practical, as well.

Niles Reddick, *Assistant Professor, English*

For further information, contact the author at Motlow State Community College, P. O. Box 88100, Tullahoma TN 37388-8100. e-mail: NREDDICK@MSCC.CC.TN.US

Suanne D. Roueche, *Editor*

February 4, 2000, Vol. XXII, No. 3

©The University of Texas at Austin, 2000

Further duplication is permitted by MEMBER institutions for their own personal use.

*Innovation Abstracts* (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, SZB 348, Austin, Texas 78712-1293, (512) 471-7545. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Innovation Abstracts*, The University of Texas at Austin, SZB 348, Austin, TX 78712-1293. Email: sroueche@mail.utexas.edu