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Spring 2009 Teaching Skills Study Award Final Report

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Conference Name: *Developmental Science Teaching Institute*, co-sponsored by the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology and the Society for Research in Child Development
April 1, 2009, Denver Colorado

Teaching Methods and Strategies Studied: At the institute we discussed and saw examples of multiple strategies for engaging students in the complex discipline of developmental science. Areas studied included, research on college teaching, strategies to foster student engagement, teaching from multiple perspectives to facilitate students' construction of developmental knowledge, and facilitating conceptual change in students.

Impact on Teaching: By participating in the institute I learned more about recent research on college teaching. I found the presentations on this research very interesting and liberating and believe they have made me a more effective consumer of this type of research. Several important points were discussed. One issue discussed was that it is important to contextualize the results of research on college teaching and not think that they can be universally applied to all situations. For example, most of the research that touts the effectiveness of using advance organizers with students to facilitate reading comprehension was actually done with students that had extreme reading problems. Thus, while this approach is useful for this particular population of students, it does not readily generalize to all students. This fact illustrates that one should not be too quick to change ones approach to teaching because of the latest research results until one has carefully examined how the research was done and whether it is actually relevant to the students in your classroom. Another interesting finding that was presented was that there are multiple ways of being an effective teacher (e.g., activity based, process oriented, lecturer, etc.). I found this finding particularly liberating because it frees one up to discover their own teaching style and perfect that rather than trying to make yourself over into something you are not. Personally, there have been times when I have down played my own skills as a lecturer because I felt this approach was not consistent with my constructivist learning philosophy. I realize now that this is not necessarily the best thing to do. That is, if I feel I am being effective with an approach like lecturing I should not limit myself, based on preconceived notions, and feel free to use it in the classroom along with other approaches that address my student's needs. Hence, hearing the research at the conference helped me expand my repertoire of teaching skills so I can apply different approaches as the context demands.

Finally, we spent considerable time talking about the role that content knowledge has on teaching developmental science. Research on expert knowledge underscores the importance of deep content knowledge for structuring effective lessons. Discussing this furthered my commitment to the maintenance of this content knowledge and being an effective instructor.