

Teaching Philosophy Statement

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Teaching in higher education environments is guided by one's intentions, actions, and beliefs. In other words, teaching in a university setting is informed by personal theories on the teaching discipline and approaches to it. Suffice it to say that such ideas have informed my own values, and importantly, the strategies I employ in my own teaching. Nurturing and developmental perspectives or theories inform my central teaching philosophies. With regard to nurturing, I believe that purposeful and rewarding learning takes place when learners are nurtured towards information seeking, as well as the incorporation of newly acquired knowledge with existing insights. As per development, I accept that much is accomplished when learners commit to developing a skill set or acquiring new insight by themselves, rather than having such "fed" to them. Thus, my focus on teaching tends to be on development, engagement, involvement, and caring. In many ways it subscribes to the old Oriental adage: "Tell me, I will forget; show me, I may remember; involve me, and I will understand".

I firmly believe that long-term, insightful, and purposeful learning comes from the heart and not the head. My intention has always been to inspire, empower, encourage, and motivate my students. I try to fuse my teaching goals with my intentions. The goals for excellent teaching should include helping students critically analyze ideas and concepts, develop intellectual skills, and comprehend principles or apply generalizations. However, such skills can only be achieved when students are made to realize that their achievements stem solely from their own efforts and abilities, rather than the benevolence of their instructors. In that regard, I endeavor to emphasize, "good learning", which I tell students involves seeking and organizing information for personal use, understanding, and development. What is my role in the learning process? I see myself as a facilitator or coach in the intellectual development of my students, a role I am passionate about. The learning-teaching mechanism is a complex social process. It goes without saying that "good learning" benefits from "good teaching", and vice versa.

The actions and strategies that I employ in my teaching environment are summarized as follows:

- I challenge my students to search for personal meaning in the content I deliver and to align newly learned ideas with their everyday life experiences. In grounding my students' knowledge on topics being discussed, I often rely on the use of real-world examples and at times, ask them to draw on their own personal experiences. Whenever possible, I try to integrate my own research into my teaching curriculum. I know that connecting theory with practice serves to enhance the learning experiences of my students.
- I promote active involvement and engagement in my classrooms by encouraging students to become active participants in their own learning. To encourage this, I make them feel free and relaxed in classes. Moreover, the sort of class work and assignments that I provide help me in achieving this objective. Active participation makes it possible for knowledge to be shared. My students learn from me, I from them and they learn from each other.

- I get to know my students individually. I diligently learn their names on the first day of class. My students often joke about the “quirk method” I employ to memorize their names. For example, students with the name Charles or Jennifer would be referred to as Prince Charles or Jennifer Lopez. I encourage them to call me by first name. More importantly, I listen to and respond to their individual needs by providing personal encouragement, direction, and support whenever needed. My students have access to me during and outside my official office hours.
- I am aware of the fact that student learning results from a fusion of complex internal and external forces. I strive to provide an atmosphere of respect and trust for all the students I teach, as I understand that students’ learning experiences are enriched when a teacher shows sensitivity toward, and empathy with, students’ needs. My global exposure has shown me that students are conditioned by their cultural environments. I know that what works for an African student may not for a European student. This understanding places me in a good stead with respect to the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of classes across higher learning institutions in Canada and beyond.
- As a coach, it is my responsibility to help my students identify learning resources and to help them develop the capabilities to learn independently. To that end, I provide them with links to relevant, useful sources and tools.
- I facilitate a two-way feedback loop. In one regard, I provide students with feedback on their execution of assigned tasks and tests. I point out where key concepts and ideas were missed. In the other, I solicit comments on how to improve my course contents, and its delivery. I believe their opinions count.
- In order to encourage the growth and development of my students, I tend to evaluate them in a manner that does not diminish their confidence and self-esteem (It is worth noting that this item is more applicable to less gifted students). I strive to evaluate and reward competence and not performance. The evaluation methods used in my classes underscore the critical importance of the foregoing statement. It is worth noting that, over the years, I have accumulated beneficial experience in how to fairly and justly evaluate the students I teach.

In striving for quality teaching and learning experiences, I accept wholeheartedly that there will always be a need for me to continue to explore effective ways of meeting the changing needs of my students. It is always fulfilling to be able to pass on knowledge to my students and help them become “good learners”. Pratt and Associates (1998) encapsulate my passion for teaching by noting, “If to teach is to aid in the awakening of an inner quest for knowing oneself without externally imposed limitations, then I can accept the designation.”

Reference:

Pratt, D.D. & Associates. (1998). Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult & Higher Education. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.