

Philosophy of Teaching

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My personal and professional mission is to teach, organize, and host people in transition, so they grow in faith and hope, control their own decisions and resources, and use their gifts and talents. This mission influences my philosophy of teaching.

My approach to teaching is about transformation rather than information. In other words, as a teacher, I am intentional about seeking ways to transform concepts into terms that can be understood, internalized, and applied by learners. In the past, teachers created the future; now, too often, we are reacting to the future. I want to foster the development of colleagues who take informed action to create the future. Teaching is important to me because it exercises one of my natural gifts, and teaching gives me an opportunity to influence the future. I want to teach with such distinction that others would be able to identify our graduates by their distinctive lives.

My approach to teaching has been influenced by

John Dewey (1859 – 1952), an American educator, known for his exploration of the relationship between thinking and reflection, and about the importance of a learner's interaction with environments for learning.

Lev Vgotsky (1896 – 1934), a Russian developmental psychologist, known for describing the role that social interaction plays in cognitive development, particularly related to language.

Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980), a French-Swiss developmental psychologist, known for organizing cognitive development into a series of stages.

Jerome Bruner (1915 -), an American developmental psychologist, known for describing the role of active psychological processes (influenced by culture) in an individual's perception and mental development. More recently he has emphasized narrative and the nature of interpretive activity in fostering development.

Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997), a Brazilian educator, known for emphasizing education as respectful dialogue within the lives of learners and teachers in ways that enhance community and transform reality.

My objectives for learners include:

1. achieve and nurture an enthusiasm for learning
2. apply their knowledge to their professional career
3. become reflective practitioners who apply problem solving strategies to new situations
4. become responsible for their own continuous learning and contribute their new knowledge to the profession

As I construct learning experiences, I use this decision-making process:

1. Describe what we want the learners to become. This description is developed with the program's goals of teaching, professional standards, and the institutional program scope and sequence. Because I want learners to be life-long learners, I demonstrate teaching

and learning as a collaborative relationship that involves the teacher and learners in partnerships in which both “sides” teach and learn from the other. Because I want learners to grow into professionals, I seek to demonstrate ethical standards and practices.

2. Describe where learners are now. This description is based on understanding and respecting diverse talents and ways of knowing. Learners in my courses are similar (in terms of human development) and unique (in terms of background and culture). I start my teaching based on “where the learners are now.” They have differing ways of perceiving and processing information. In my classes, I seek to encourage and establish open and supportive interpersonal relationships that respect and foster inclusion of diversity.
3. Determine what will move learners along through the next step of development. These decisions are based on resources available for learners to interact with new ideas and experiences, to explore and practice skills, and to respond with applying their knowledge to new life situations. As much as possible, I want to connect real-world experience and knowledge to the course materials.

I want to create a classroom climate that nurtures enthusiasm for learning and teaching. I also want learners (and myself) to think and speak critically about issues in new ways. So, I try to engage learners in critical thinking and interpretation of information and scholarship. In my teaching methods, I try to incorporate methods that empower learners to question, discover, explore, interact, experiment, search, construct and reconstruct. I demonstrate a teaching role that guides, coaches, facilitates, models, encourages, motivates, and mentors learners within a set of content-related objectives. This means that together we integrate what we know from our personal experiences and understanding with the research literature in the field.

I encourage learners to understand and embrace the values and concepts of their own cultural, religious, or ethnic background, yet remain open to the ideas of those from other backgrounds. I encourage learners to value the knowledge they have developed through their own life experiences and push the established body of professional knowledge. I strive to create positive relationships between myself and the learners, so they understand that I am personally interested in their success. I want to treat upper-level students as colleagues and, for example, will offer feedback on their work that is similar to that which I give colleagues on the faculty.

I work hard to intentionally and thoughtfully determine best uses of space and environments, technology and manipulative materials, and active learning techniques. I try to vary the style in which I present information so I can reach as many students as possible. I alternate between lecturing, interactive activities, small group discussions, in-class writing assignments, and in-class demonstrations. I encourage students to engage in the course through: requiring participation, forming learning teams, making activities interesting and active, encouraging on data and rational discourse, requiring hand-in assignments, involving myself to foster learning, and incorporating peer grading.

As much as possible, I intentionally try to align the curriculum and instruction with assessment and evaluation. With in-class activities and short assignments, I encourage learners to record

their accomplishments and progress during the teaching series. I vary my evaluation techniques, so learners with different abilities have an opportunity to perform well. I incorporate many “low stakes” assignments throughout the term, so the learners can receive feedback on their thought processes and their understandings in ways that will not jeopardize their progress toward a degree. I design assignments that build or scaffold on each other, so that skills learned in earlier assignments can be applied to new material. For major assignments, I create rubrics that define and illustrate the standards of performance. Peer review is used so that learners practice valuing each person’s contribution. I have found that group members may dislike grading each other’s work, so I also include having students reviewing the work of other project groups beyond their own.

The evaluation of my teaching is based on several strategies, including student surveys throughout the term and colleague observation and feedback. As courses progress, I may make mid-course changes in methods or materials based on what I learn about the students in the course.

My personal developmental edge is related to integrating diversity into my teaching and incorporating technology in appropriate ways for diverse learning audiences. I am exploring these edges by intentional dialogue with colleagues whose backgrounds are different than my own, by participating in professional exchanges and teamwork opportunities, by fostering collaborative learning communities of faculty and learners, and by reflective journal activities.