



TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

“Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connections; learning naturally results” (John Dewey, 1916 *Democracy and Education*, p. 148)

Over the course of my eight years as an instructor at American and German universities, I learned that teaching is not a delivery system where teachers deliver and students absorb information, rather, it is a creative and collaborative process which inspires, provokes, and celebrates curiosity. Inspired by Dewey’s pragmatic-democratic approach to education, I consider myself not as an instructor, but as a facilitator of learning experiences. By interacting with their environment and engaging with others, students adapt and learn naturally. To this end, I create a **culture of curiosity and collaboration** which encourages students to question their own assumptions about communication. Students often view human communication as an ordinary phenomenon that does not require any practice, explanation or analysis. My teaching motivates students to explore the extraordinary aspects of their own and others’ communication.

To create a culture of curiosity and collaboration, I use student-focused and constructivist methods of learning. Instead of preparing my material from the perspective of a teacher, I prepare my material from the perspective of a participant and facilitator. This way, my students not only realize that they are equally responsible for the success of a discussion or activity as I am, but also that intellectual and personal growth requires collaboration. This type of Teacher-Student and Student-Student collaboration encourages my students to actively reflect and engage in their own learning experience, which activates higher levels of learning like synthesis and evaluation (Mayer, 2004, p. 14). This then helps me to build a learning relationship with my students where **curiosity and collaboration are keys to learning and problem-solving**. However, for this process to be successful, it is my responsibility to not only encourage collaboration, but also to ensure an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance of diverse opinions; an atmosphere safe enough to allow for constructive collaboration on controversial topics. **Argumentation & Debate show don’t tell, Research - Teaching relationship** Finally, this student-focused and constructivist nature of my teaching allows me to combine and integrate activities, discussions, and lectures, by which I further immerse myself into my students’ process of learning.

One toolkit for teaching that I am particularly drawn to is the **use of group activities**. In recent years, I discovered that while my experience as an international instructor enables me to quickly put controversies into perspective, it is group exercises that effectively reduce cultural differences, foster collaboration, raise curiosity, and generally bring about a healthy learning environment. Often I use the Jigsaw Classroom method, which not only teaches students the importance of cultural diversity and moral leadership, but by encouraging all students to be experts in their assigned segment, it also builds confidence in students who would hesitate to participate otherwise. In addition, group activities and the Jigsaw Classroom method in particular teach my students the importance of division of labor and thereby help them to identify their communicative strengths and weaknesses. By assigning different segments of an assignment to different group members, students also see how individual segments work together to produce a single project. Finally, letting students learn in culturally diverse groups is a great way to teach the importance of audience adaptation and audience analysis.



I also embrace the **use of technology** inside and outside of the classroom. As an educator in the 21st century, I consider it important to demonstrate to my students how to use new technology in appropriate and meaningful ways. The value of a teaching technology, however, is not measured by its uniqueness, but by its potential to create curiosity, enhance student engagement, inspire collaboration, and stimulate self-reflection. I use technology not to replace traditional teaching tools, but to accommodate students' individual learning styles and tailor the course to their way of living. To this end, I create video lessons (e.g., Camtasia Studio) and material that incorporates video clips for creative application, online discussion boards (e.g., Padlet) to visualize discussions and track students' learning progress, and online surveys (e.g., Poll Everywhere) to further engage students and immediately adapt to their level of knowledge. These and other programs (e.g., Backchannel Chats), help me to empower students who hesitate to participate or prefer anonymous channels of communication.

In line with John Dewey's pragmatic approach to learning, my lessons generally follow a **Experience-Reflection-Theory-Application** pattern. I believe that learning is more meaningful when students can experience the links between theory, application, and reflection. For this approach to be successful, it is essential that application and practice precedes reflection. Whether it is over the course of one lesson or a series of lessons, asking my students to first apply theory or try out new practices and then reflect on moments where they "failed", helps them to identify room for improvement. In turn, this equips them to evaluate the quality of a theory against their own experience. Moments where my students "failed", then turn into moments for curiosity, collaboration, and learning. The ultimate goal of this Experience-Reflection-Theory-Application method is for students to realize that theory is not only the result of reflection and evaluation, but also a tool for application and practice.

I am committed to helping students prepare for their life as citizens. In all of my courses, I help students experience the importance and power of engaging with one another to deliberate and resolve problems of common interest. Public deliberation and collaborative problem-solving are important skills not only for the world of work (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993), but also for building healthy communities. Through my group exercises and emphasis on collaboration, students realize that surrendering one's narrow self-interest to the needs and goals of the larger group builds community. They see how they depend on each other and how their individual actions are connected to their relationships with others. Thus, the primary value of teaching communication, which distinguishes it from all other disciplines, is its potential to build and advance democratic communities.

In summary, then, by creating a culture of curiosity and collaboration and engaging students in a conversation inside and outside of the classroom, I immerse myself in their learning process, rather than trying to control it. This empowers students and builds a healthy learning relationship and environment. My students' evaluations and my Tiffany Hunnicutt Outstanding Teaching Award (2016), a competitive department-wide teaching award, confirm me in my approach to teaching and encourage me to further refine it. To ensure that my teaching philosophy continues to resonate with students, it is my responsibility to not only tailor my teaching toward their way of living and individual learning styles, but also to continuously adapt my approach to the demands of the community in which I teach and society as a whole.



References:

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