

## Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy follows in the footsteps of an extraordinary mentor, Howard G. Hendricks, who taught in a college of theology for exactly 60 years. He was devoted to his students and known as a disciplined researcher and writer. I took every course possible from him during my master of arts degree and was his teaching assistant for two years. His indelible legacy on me, and about 13,000 other students, was this: *teaching is not measured by what you do, but what others do because of what you do*. Inspired by his dedication to education, my own philosophy takes form, but only in part. The other part of my philosophy is influenced by two things: first, my own experience of being privileged to work alongside teachers and learners at all levels (K-20, graduate, postgraduate, post-doctoral, instructors, faculty, deans, continuing education, and even citizen scientists); and second, my own research of teaching and learning in higher education. I promote the scholarship of teaching and learning and practice cooperative learning environments because my research has shown that a strong learning community emphasizes collaboration, connection, competence, and confidence. I would like to describe how I put these influences into practice using two examples, which fundamentally draw from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective of teaching and learning.

First, I build relationships through rapport. Building rapport with participating learners helps me understand their interests, issues, problems, and paradoxes. This comes about in different ways and I'll highlight three that I encounter regularly. First, in a semester-long undergraduate education course, I typically meet with students on an individual or small group basis to discuss, first, their expectations and objectives for the class, and later their approaches to and reflections on each project. Students are encouraged to self-organize, problem-solve, and share their work as a group throughout the term in order to cultivate trust and cooperation and socially construct a collective pool of knowledge. Second, in a day-long workshop with faculty, I have a lot less time to build rapport but we can just as effectively share each other's interests and needs, and achieve intended learning outcomes. For instance, breaking into small work groups allows participants to make deeper and broader connections, and throughout the day, pausing for moments of individual reflection allows participants to make that personal, intellectual, or scholarly connection to practice. I also build rapport in workshops by carrying great respect for disciplinary culture, protocols, and traditions. For example, I led a faculty development workshop at the Department of Food Science where it was customary to be informal, opening every session with an entertaining icebreaker; in contrast, I led a large workshop for medical educators where it was customary to be formal, opening with a clearly defined agenda and explicit learning outcomes. Third, in one-to-one curricula consultation with, let's say, an associate dean of graduate studies, I build rapport by listening carefully to needs, values, assumptions, concerns, and goals. I find that success usually comes through respectful dialogue and I strive for thoughtful propositions and context- and evidence-based solutions. Most of all, I like modeling rapport building rapport through honest social interaction—conversation, commentary, and constructive criticism—and rigorous intellectual pursuit because one of my core values is to help others succeed.

Second, I emphasize good communication. Developing the participating learners' ability to communicate complicated concepts and narratives clearly and decisively is a vital part of curriculum and strong communication skills are essential to implementation. In the case of assessed learning environments, such as college classrooms, I employ reading, writing, and discussion-focused learning tasks. Transparency of expectations is a critical component to helping learners develop strong communication skills because it builds trust in the learning

environment. I practice articulating my expectations, explain my rationale from the very beginning, and share the process of evaluation with participating learners, which is important because then participating learners are exposed to the variety of responses regarding assessment instead of narrowly imagining the existence of one right answer. The purpose of evaluation is not to compare learners to each other but rather to evaluate a learner's progress from the beginning to the end. I'd like to provide two examples of how I build communication skills with writing from two different undergraduate courses that I have taught.

In my writing course for first-year international students, whose first language is not English, I initiate their meta-cognitive awareness of writing in English through a method of freewriting. For example, on the first day of class, I may ask the students to finish this sentence, "If I were to tell someone on the bus about this topic/class/project, I'd say...." This gets students to explain what they know about the subject in clear terms and raises an awareness of their interest. After several minutes of writing, I then ask the students, "The reason I care about this topic/class/project is...." And I emphasize the "I" and "why I care" because this can provide the opportunity to comprehensively differentiate academic justification (i.e., taking the subject for credit) from personal rationalization (i.e., reasoning with assumptions and motives). With the first exercise, the student often writes in the passive voice, absent of the author. With the latter, the student takes ownership and writes in a clearer tone. I cultivate this further by creating a supportive environment with regular and constructive feedback so that they can start to develop simultaneously as self-directed learners and strong communicators as they begin to consider their major field of study.

In my advanced courses, it is equally important to create a supportive environment with regular and constructive feedback, but it can be cultivated for deeper levels of engaged learning and critical thinking. I pose different kinds and levels of interesting questions, drawing them in, maybe connecting issues to current news, recent research, or their academic experience, internships, and professional lives. In my courses with pre-service teachers, I may pose a Socratic question, *what does it mean to teach writing?* and then model my assignments around different themes that not only reflect the traditions of the discipline but also the intellectual development of pre-service teachers and their competency in communicating fundamental tenets of the teaching profession, such as writing self-reflective teaching journals, creating careful lesson planning with rhetorical awareness of audience and purpose, or establishing learning goals and a means to determine if such goals have been achieved. I design seminar-style sessions that allow participants to give and receive feedback with each other, using core principals and resources from Barbara Walvoord, John Bean, and Nancy Sommers; I scaffold the learning with a variety of exercises that allow pre-service teachers to become mutual partners in learning and teaching; and I always include a debriefing session so that I learn from participants how to improve my teaching and the content of my course(s).

Building relationships, using rapport, and emphasizing effective communication skills foster strong, cooperative learning communities with collaboration, connection, competence, and confidence. My teaching philosophy has been inspired by an indelible teacher-mentor, impacted by my experience and research, and influenced by my socio-cultural perspectives of education. Beyond my teaching philosophy, I am a teacher who loves to teach and wholeheartedly believes that my teaching is not measured by what I do, but what others do because of what I do.