

Teaching Philosophy, Rev. January 2021
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I **first started teaching** in the summer of **2009**. I accepted an adjunct position in the math department at the university where I was working on my master's degree. The department was kicking off a new initiative to support developmental math students, and they hired me to support the project. Aside from having a deep passion for math and all of the pre-requisites to teach developmental math courses at the college level, I had no formal background in education. This position became a turning point for my career and shaped the way I view teaching and instruction. I found that students were feeling very overwhelmed by the learning experience, and it was up to me as their instructor to provide a safe space to learn and be vulnerable. This was where I found my passion for teaching. Since then, I have acquired training in educational principles and have conceptualized a teaching philosophy that is grounded in seven objectives for teaching, learning, and mentorship. Not to be considered a "linear checklist of items," the following objectives are non-linear and interconnected, and guide not only how I develop my curriculum and deliver content, but also how I connect with students and move to create and engage in a safe and welcoming environment that inspires learning for all.

1. **Learning Expectations.** Principles of learning tell us that setting the temperature early (for both child and adult learners) is key to successful adoption of a healthy and inclusive classroom climate. For K-12 settings, co-developing a list of classroom expectations (i.e., "the classroom rules") with students increases buy-in, and allows for re-teaching throughout the year. For higher education, the same is true, although the conversation tends to be more collaborative and fluid. Particularly for older students, discussions around critical thinking and the importance of self-reflection in an effort to expand our understanding are paramount. I use the reading, *How to Be a Critic of Your Own Thinking*, by Drs. Linda Elder and Richard Paul from the Foundation of Critical Thinking (n.d.) with my students at the start of each semester, and refer back to it frequently as more challenging dialogues emerge. This tool is particularly useful as a guidepost for my own learning. I emphasize with my students that critical thinking and self-reflection are pre-requisites for lifelong learning. And while frequent self-reflection requires a tremendous amount of time and effort, we have the duty as ethical and moral practitioners and scholars to ask questions that will guide our learning and improve our practice.
2. **Real life applications and hands-on learning in a developmental context.** How many times have we heard, "When am I ever going to use this?" As a former math teacher, this was my students' anthem. By introducing current events and real-life experiences within the context of an ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1970), we can see that everything is tied together. Further, together we can encourage students to investigate their own development and learning and devise a plan to grow in a way that is practical, feasible, and fun for the learner. In this way, it is useful for me and students to ask, "What did I learn?" after each real-life application activity. Educating students on the "amount of challenge" or anxiety needed for a healthy learning experience and how we view ourselves as learners (e.g., visual, kinesthetic) are embedded in these reflections. These reflections become an act of empowerment, an understanding that we can polish our craft and expand our skill set every step of the way.
3. **Accessibility, affability, and mutual trust.** It is my view that effective partnerships emerge from consistency in accessibility and affability. It is a gift to engage in a working relationship that is equal parts professional, friendly, and fun. Consistency creates a foundation for mutual trust in the teacher-student and mentor-mentee relationships. I inform my students and colleagues of these norms early in the working relationship, and remain consistent in the way I communicate them in both my actions and my words. I believe that modeling these behaviors guides students in developing their own professional profiles. Prompt responses to email, showing up on time for meetings, preparing adequately for lectures, and seeking regular feedback from students are just a few of the ways I remain accessible to students and create a trusting space for learning.
4. **Collaboration and adaptability.** Working with students, educators, administrators, researchers, and other practitioners requires a strong conviction for collaboration, acknowledging that each individual will bring a unique and valuable perspective to the conversation. Exercising flexibility and a willingness to

change course should the circumstances evolve allows for partnerships to develop a shared vision, achieve agreed-upon goals and objectives, and solve common and unique problems. When it comes to problem-solving, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It is important to acknowledge early on that problems may arise, but as a team we can navigate them together. I work to provide a safe space for these problem solving events by actively addressing the concern; providing a safe space for the student to share their view and experience, and what concerns they have; identifying areas of strength and areas of growth (glows and grows); developing, implementing, and evaluating a plan that will include considerations for barriers that may arise and troubleshooting how to overcome them. And finally, it is important to remind myself, my colleagues, and my students that *everything is figureoutable*.

5. ***Integration of learning theory, behavior theory, assessment principles.*** Empirically, the foundations of learning and behavior theories provide useful information regarding how students absorb, process, and retain information. Cognitive processes, emotional experiences, and environmental changes influence learning. Further, acknowledging that principles of cognitivism, behaviorism, and constructivism will affect a student's motivation to learn influences my approach to differentiated instruction and my sensitivity to the unique characteristics of each learner. Results of summative and formative assessments, assignments, and projects should be used to make data-based decisions around the level of support required.
6. ***Cultural diversity.*** Cultural diversity permeates all aspects of our work as teachers, scholars, and practitioners. Difficult conversations must be invited into the classrooms, labs, and office spaces so that uncomfortable silences and discouraging remarks can be ironed into understanding and reverence for diversity in all its forms. I have a deep interest in learning about and understanding other cultures. I have learned to reflect frequently and deeply upon the privilege associated with my membership to various identity groups and how my membership and experiences affect how I view others and others' cultures. I assess my awareness frequently with tools, such as the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment (Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, 2015). Further, the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) Scorecard from the New York University Steinhardt School (Peoples et al., 2021) is a useful reflection tool when considering curriculum development. Where I lack understanding or awareness, I seek to fill the gaps through independent study – readings, workshops, seminars, conferences. I am fond of the work of Zaretta Hammond ([Culturally Responsive Teaching](#)), Ibram X. Kendi ([How to be an Antiracist](#)) and have enjoyed attending EdCamps for Educational Justice. As an educator, I feel strongly that is important to understand how my instruction and the content I teach affects those I serve. Therefore, I am leaning heavily into the research on Curriculum Violence. I return to the work of Jones (2020) to strengthen my understanding of racial trauma in classroom curricula and instruction. I reach out to colleagues, friends, and students as thought partners to expand my understanding. Offering my vulnerability and candidly engaging in these conversations helps reduce the taboo, helps me own my learning, and improves the relationship between and within us. It is important to model that awareness of and respect for cultural diversity is not a destination to reach. Instead, my understanding of diversity, equity, and social justice is a lifelong learning endeavor, a commitment to getting comfortable with being uncomfortable. By remaining active in this work, I strive for the advancement of these goals in education to promote a safe learning environment for all.
7. ***Passion and a commitment to lifelong learning.*** I tell my students, “I want to know all the things!” I seek to better understand the connections between theory and practice, acknowledging that learning is a lifelong endeavor and not always a well-polished experience. The *journey* is what makes it special. It is important that I own my learning, and encourage students to own their learning, too. The works of scholars like Viktor Frankl ([Man's Search for Meaning](#), 1985) and Bruce Patton ([Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most](#), 2010) have inspired my work as a teacher and mentor. Together these authors highlight the journey rather than the outcome. It is my mission, then, to not only help instill an enthusiasm for learning in my students, but also ardently admit that they inspire my learning, too.

“I therefore admonish my students: ‘Don’t aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one’s personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one’s surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge.’”

- Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 1985, pg. 12.

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