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Educational Philosophy

I have been teaching in one capacity or another for most of my life. Over the last several years as an Instruction Librarian and, previously, as a freshman writing professor, several principles have come to the forefront as foundational to my life as a teacher. These five principles are evident throughout my syllabi and every class that I teach. These are not simply words but the foundation on which I build every assignment and every lesson and which I hold onto myself as a life-long learner.

To learn you have to do

Although I can and do lecture as necessary, I am a strong believer in getting students engaged, and to do that I use a variety of strategies to try to reach every type of learner in my classroom. Mixing explanations, visual aids, small group activities, class discussion, and student led instruction I strive to get each student involved and make learning enjoyable as well as effective. To this end I have employed activities such as a drawing activities, citation relay races, student created wiki pages, MLA Jeopardy quizzes, interactive poem annotation, and Twitter summaries to name a few of my favorites. I love presenting information in new and creative ways and finding the best way for students to practice the skills they have read about or that we have talked about. I strongly believe that students who actively engage in learning retain information better and have an easier time applying that knowledge outside of the classroom, setting them up to be lifelong learners.

Pursue the *why's* and the *how's*

These two words can be heard daily in my classroom. I push my students to move beyond simply thinking and stating *what* happened or *what* they think to *why* it happened or *why* they think it and *how* it relates to a larger context, whether it is their thesis statement, their personal beliefs, or the world at large. Accepting a claim, fact, or statement at face value is boring at best and dangerous at worst. Asking questions is one of the bases of learning. Thinking critically is a skill that must be developed, especially in the world of information overload in which we live. Encouraging students to stretch their minds and think outside of the perspectives they are comfortable with allows them to grow academically and personally and pushes me to stretch beyond my comfort zone as well.

Communication is key

When issues arise in the classroom, I find that the root is often a breakdown in communication. A lack of communication in any situation leads to misunderstandings, missed opportunities, and mistakes. In my teaching and professional life I believe that open lines of dialogue lead to better working relationships and better results. I am always open to listening to what my students have to say as individuals and as a class. I also do my best to be up front with my students to ensure that they understand my expectations. Conversations in class or in one-on-one meetings as well as course reviews have led me to make changes in my teaching to better serve the students and the course and program goals. I love gathering my colleagues' insight, ideas, and recommendations. Communication allows everyone to gain a broader perspective.

Everyone's perspective deserves consideration

We all come from different life experiences. Conversation and debate lead to better ideas and to a larger sharing of knowledge. No matter how hard we try to be objective or give "just the facts" we will be biased by our beliefs, our prior experiences, our families, and our education. Ignoring this fact can lead to larger problems; embracing it can reveal a world of possibilities. While this does not mean that every opinion is accurate or that there aren't times to pursue objectivity, it does mean that acknowledging our different

opinions can allow new ideas and perspectives into our lives. Dismissing a different view simply because it is different closes the mind and stagnates the brain. I encourage my students to look at things through a variety of lenses. I endeavor to make my classroom a place of openness and respect where students can debate and disagree without fear of ridicule or disregard of their opinion.

Believe passionately

While I believe that it is important to question, to communicate, to listen, to explore, I also believe that there comes a time when each person must take a stand in what they believe. Pursue new ideas, research and study, but don't simply change who you are or what you believe because of a compelling argument. Consider things carefully and make up your own mind. Listening to other's opinions doesn't mean you must agree with them. Be open to change but know what is important to you and believe that passionately and joyfully.