

Teaching Philosophy

Wendy Tumminello

A man's mind, stretched by a new idea, can never go back to its original dimension.

-Anonymous

As a self-directed graduate student, I had specific results in mind for my education, and took responsibility for my own learning. But when I began teaching, I realized what worked for me was not necessarily ideal for my own students. Every student is unique, and as an instructor it is my job to procure their trust by meeting their specific needs. It is my hope that through mentoring students, and by encouraging active class participation, my students will ultimately be empowered their own learning.

The first day of a new class I discuss my philosophy of teaching with students to generate discussion and set expectations for the semester. I ask students what they will contribute to the class and how they can create an environment that is stimulating and attentive to each person's diverse views and experiences. It is my hope that by opening up a dialogue I can inspire in my students a desire to learn. I believe students learn the most when they experience the learning process rather than take on the role of passive participants. Since many of my students are visual learners I limit my lecture time to the first part of class, followed by group demonstrations and exercises. I find that by pairing students into groups it nurtures discussion and critical thinking of ideas. I find that students are more personally engaged in the material when the classroom experience is an interactive one.

One technique I use is quite simple. When students enter my class we rearrange the furniture from the "standardized" lecture format of rows to the more personable circle. I find that by changing the structure of the room students are more engaged in a dialogue with each other and myself.

I've also believe, however, that an open exchange between students and teachers can only take place when the instructor provides structure and direction. Students need a clear idea of what's expected of them in the classroom and in their assignments. I always provide students with a day-by-day syllabus, and an outline of class objectives on the board at the beginning of every class. I make every effort to have clear and concise assignments, and to inform students of the criteria by which I will grade each assignment.

Several times a quarter I open time for my students to individually meet with me to discuss their progress, and problems they may be having with assignments and overall performance. I find the individual attention spurs students to action, and encourages an open environment. Students can approach me with questions and be sure of a considerate hearing and appropriate response. In short, I do everything I can to create an environment that is intellectually stimulating, and a structure within which students will feel comfortable to take risks.