

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Of utmost importance to me is developing an atmosphere of inclusion and critical thought in the classroom. Through my experience as a volunteer, private tutor, teaching assistant, and therapeutic support staff, I have learned that reinforcing a student's belief in his or her potential is equally important to teaching concepts and methods.

My experience in teaching has been focused on one-on-one and small group instruction. When I began as a volunteer statistics and Spanish tutor during my sophomore year of college at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and found myself equally enjoying my time on both sides of the desk.

During my junior year, I had the privilege for working for the Upward Bound Math and Science Program (UBMS), an organization that preps high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach their goals of succeeding in postsecondary education. I had the pleasure of tutoring a young gentleman in Algebra and biology, and conducted small group instruction in writing and Spanish for the UBMS Saturday Academy. During my year working with the Northwestern Human Services, I worked closely with four persons with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities with life skills development, a form of education that I had previously taken for granted. Additionally, I was hired to assist a junior high student with a minor learning (dis)ability in algebra, a challenge that reinforced my understanding of the necessity of understanding how my students learn in order to create a more inclusive learning environment.

As a McNair Scholar and UBMS tutor, I adhere to the importance of coaching and orientation. Without the assistance I received from the McNair Scholars Program, I would not have been as prepared as I was when I began graduate school. Similarly, I can see the young students that UBMS has trained excelling in their new lives as undergraduate students. Those experiences have taught me that enabling students to anticipate and dissect the challenges of their new environments will better enable them to cope with the stressors of progressing into the next stage of development. An inability to cope with a new environment can hinder the student's ability to undertake their primary task. I think that allowing a student to be stifled by his or her new environment is a disservice to the pupil and a misuse of her or his time and potential.

In addition to confidence building, critical thinking development is an essential element of a primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Merely consuming information is not enough. Being able to analyze and establish linkages between information and understanding the motives for which the information has been published is a more comprehensive means of understanding the world in a connected context. I do not place my discipline above all others. Rather, it sits beside, across from, within, and in some ways outside of other disciplines. To master my discipline, it will be necessary to understand how it fits within others, and how others fit within it. I think that this is the only realistic way to evaluate any discipline, as the world's places and events do not exist in a vacuum. I would like to encourage my future students to seek synthesis among other disciplines, and to learn to appreciate their field of study in a comprehensive context.

Of particular interest is the usage of problem-based learning, which I advocate is a highly effective way for students to deconstruct the connected nature of our existence. This harkens a period of my education during my primary years, during which I was in an enrichment class where we participated in "Fuzzy Situations". In short, our groups were presented with a problem and had to develop ten plausible solutions to confront the issue. The process of developing solutions required intensive group discussion and inspiration from a variety of disciplines. Rarely ever did we derive solutions that involved only one specialty, and that is indeed a reflection of the reality of many of the world's

conflicts and changes. As mentioned before, places , and events do not exist in isolation. Especially in the globalized era Changes and conflicts ripple throughout many aspects of daily life. While it is important to comb out the specifics of any problem, investigating the integrated nature of each individual factor is necessary in order to understand the interplay of living systems and structures.

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