

Teaching Philosophy Statement

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The cast is in

Sitting down to write a first teaching philosophy is a kind of existential rite of passage for the new educator, who is brimming with knowledge and the experience of scholarly work. All the theories and “right” answers are there, they are just waiting to be applied in practice. I remember being one of these “multiple-success-theories” educators 13 years ago, when I was taking on a job as a corporate trainer and I was ready to conquer the world with my excellent teaching skills. There were just some small insignificant details, like the fact that the project was in a foreign country (India), in two cities with culture and traditions as different as they come, the fact that the students were 150+ employees who had never used anything even remotely close to the software I was about to show them, and the fact that I had to lead my instructional sessions in English, which I had absolutely no experience with, since English was consequently my fifth language. Was I scared? Of course not! I had everything figured out- what I would be teaching, how I would be teaching and most of all, what kind of results I would get, all based on my assumptions about what had worked for me in the past.

I was looking out the airplane window of my 12 hour flight and I was thinking of my impact on this team. I was seeing Mary Poppins flying in on her magical umbrella, I was hearing Meryl Streep playing the “Music of the Heart” near my ear, I was punching in the air in tune with the “Eye of the Tiger”, while all along, I was being cast in “Les Miserables”.

On the first day I waltzed with a song in the classroom as Gavroche and walked out with an expression that would have frozen Javert’s blood, and that moment changed my life and my perception about teaching. At that moment I realized that I am an educator who puts the student at the top of her teaching philosophy pyramid. I learned to stay away from defining myself as a particular kind of teacher and get out of the comfort zone of what I know or what had worked for me before, because I realized that no matter how many years of teaching experience I would have, I would never walk into the same “river” twice.

My teaching philosophy is based on what I don't know, what I need to learn, change, improve or completely disregard in order to connect with my audience. This connection was the key to my success in India, and has worked for me ever since.

Five steps up

As a person with a lot of travel and a heavy bag of multicultural experiences, I learned how to open a communication channel between diverse background audiences through five simple steps- integrity, respect, communication, trust, and inspiration, or in other words, be who my students need me to be. It is never about what I want to teach my students or how I want to teach them. It's about what my students want and need to learn and it is my responsibility to find a way to make that happen. This is not an easy task, but I have established that to learn from my students and help them grow by teaching me how to help them, is the way to go.

Me, myself and them

Why is my teaching philosophy entirely student centered? It is simple. In my experience as a student, and a teacher I have encountered many different teaching and learning styles. The most effective ones, however, had one thing in common- they all used the WIIFM (What's In It For Me) principle. To understand what drives a particular person is not an easy job, but it is not impossible either and it is definitely the cornerstone of my teaching philosophy.

My goal is for my students to be able to take full advantage of a completely customizable curriculum and assignments that correspond with their needs, by using all the resources I can provide them access to. I want to find what drives the people I work with and the ones that I teach, and use it to change their lives. If I have to stay late for committee meetings, do research digging through dusty 10 lbs. books, fly in for conferences, break my leg during trust exercises on Professional Development Day, build faculty relationship bridges with homemade cookies, poke around Facebook accounts and compare Klout points, bring it on! This is the way I learned to make a difference and inspire my online and offline students to pass on the passion I have for changing lives, one student at a time.