

Teaching Philosophy

Developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson maintained that generativity, an important aspect of adulthood, involves a sense of productivity due to one's role in the betterment of society and future generations. For me, teaching is an expression of generativity and my teaching philosophy is rooted firmly in the belief that teachers can make a difference in the lives of their students. I aim to make a difference by guiding students as we explore the world of human development and family science.

An instructor is like a tour guide, sharing and exploring knowledge and ideas with students. The guide possesses a more advanced understanding that can be shared through a connection with others. Therefore, I view the teaching-learning process as a collaborative effort that requires a mutually respectful connection between teacher and student. Beginning the first day of class, I consistently express my interest in my students' learning and my belief in their ability to succeed in the course. I build rapport by arriving early to prepare and interact with students. During lectures and activities, I walk around, ask questions, call students by name and express my gratitude for their participation. I convey enthusiasm for both teaching in general and the subject matter. Students cite this enthusiasm as being contagious; they report more interest in the topic, pay more attention, and report learning more as a result. My hope is they will carry this enthusiasm for learning with them in the future.

One cannot thoroughly explore the world from the seat of a tour bus; rather, more enriching experiences arise from multiple modes of transportation and involvement in the world. Similarly, no single teaching method is sufficient for exploring the world of human development and family science. I employ a variety of strategies to keep learners of various backgrounds and abilities engaged (e.g., case analysis, video clips, peer learning jigsaws, discussions, and brief in-class writing activities). These strategies are all considered active and/or authentic learning. I believe that people learn best by experiencing the world first-hand, or learning by doing. Therefore, whenever possible, I try to incorporate experiential learning into my courses. Finally, my favorite teaching mentor used to say, "Learning doesn't happen by surprise." With this in mind I aim to provide students with structure, feedback, and scaffolding that focuses on meeting the course learning objectives. Learning often occurs when one reaches the edge of their comfort zone, so I think this structure provides a sense of security to students on their learning journey.

A benefit of exploration is exposure to diverse people and their unique worldviews. Students have their own knowledge and experiences that they carry with them which shape their learning; therefore, I encourage student interaction and collaboration. For example, I often use "think-pair-share" activities in which students individually write a response to a question or problem which is later discussed with a partner and eventually the whole class. Another favorite group learning activity is a gallery walk, where students move around the classroom in groups to summarize what they know about various course concepts. We can then compare their collective understanding to current research and theory. Students report that they learn from other classmates' perspectives through group learning activities and class discussions.

Am I making a difference? I typically receive favorable student evaluations which state that my courses are well-organized, challenging, professionally relevant, and rewarding. My emphasis on connecting with students also appears to have an impact. Current students request me as a supervisor for honors projects or independent study courses and former students contact me for professional guidance after graduation. I think I am supported in my belief that, just like an adventure in the world, some learning experiences can leave a lasting impression.