

## Teaching Philosophy

My goal, as a teacher, is to expand the knowledge of my students. Acquiring this knowledge is akin to traveling to a foreign land. Although the basic land features are the same, the customs, language, food and dress may be completely different. The journey is made safer, more enjoyable and enriched by hiring a guide to show you the sights, explain the customs, and recommend food and activities that embody the new territory. My role is to guide students on their journey to new knowledge.

Critical to the success of the journey is a positive learning environment: non-competitive, non-intimidating, and non-threatening. This environment must support the different learning styles and talents present in the class. Students are treated with dignity and respect and are not stigmatized for asking for help. They are encouraged to investigate and digress; their curiosity will determine the path.

Before embarking, I convince the students of the need for the journey. My argument is based on their background and the destination. They must believe there is value in the knowledge being offered and buy into the concept of its relevancy. If students do not perceive the need, there is no sense continuing the journey.

In the first few classes, I provide the students with the necessary supplies for the journey. I introduce the subject matter and its relevance, offer definitions and cover fundamental concepts. I pique their curiosity by telling them how this information affects them. To help with their understanding, I use plenty of relevant examples and relate the concepts to things they already know. For example, if I am discussing the importance of customer service with non-traditional students I use an example dealing with health care providers. A completely different example, say service at a fast food restaurant, is used for a class consisting primarily of lower classman.

Once students have acquired the basic skills, the fun begins. They learn the material by experimenting with the concepts just presented. For example, in a statistics class students learn the concepts by solving a real problem. They collect sample data, calculate the necessary statistics such as the mean, standard deviation and range and show the results on graphs. Interaction during this experiential phase is essential. Students need to discuss how the processes should be applied and what techniques are the most effective. To develop their critical thinking skills, students are encouraged to try new techniques and see what happens. During this investigative phase, I guide the students by providing feedback, hints and targeted questions.

At the end of the experiential phase, the class and I summarize the journey. We reflect upon the processes and jointly decide what worked the best, what did not and why. The value and the relevancy of the new knowledge is discussed. Questions such as "Where would you use this information?", "Is it useful?", "Do you want to know more about this topic?", and "What comes next?" are discussed.

By having the students involved in every step of the learning process, they develop a strategy for acquiring the new knowledge. Using Thomas Carruthers' description, I make myself progressively unnecessary. I know the journey has been successful when the students apply the concepts learned in class in other environments. They have assimilated the new information and have expanded their knowledge.

*Sharen Bakke*