

Teaching Philosophy Statement

“ . . . in all the phenomena of nature of which we are aware, the first thing we observe is that like elements adhere to themselves.” Goethe, *Elective Affinities*

Ideas fascinate me. I have always been inexplicably drawn to the expression of ideas through art, music, literature and film. Ideas and their expression through the arts are why I have spent most of my adult life working at a top research university. They are why my B.A. is in Humanities, why I integrated interactive multimedia and film production with my MSED degree in Instructional Technology and why I studied fiction, non-fiction and technical writing in the USC Masters of Professional Writing Program. They are, ultimately, why I am a teacher. Ideas cultivate curiosity; they are the creative, inventive, inspirational, inquisitive spark that, once understood, generate the “ah-ha!” experience, connecting meaning to information. Plutarch said, “The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.” Ideas kindle fire in the mind; if students are given the right combination of wood, they will strike the match.

“What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing.” Aristotle

All of the theories about learning distill down to one essential principle: People learn best by doing. “Doing” engages the whole person. It requires critical thinking, active participation, and responsibility for self-learning. Students achieve permanent learning and transfer of knowledge by doing tasks which enable them to construct meaning from experience, multiple media and interaction with others. Like a guided torpedo that continually adjusts its bearing to hit its target, students refine learning by making mistakes, researching, adjusting, examining, practicing, discussing and working with others until they make the knowledge their own. As a teacher/facilitator, it is my job to present ideas using creative, interactive, multidisciplinary, and transformational methods and media to ignite in the student the desire to learn and then guide the process until the learning outcomes have been achieved.

“No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.” Edmund Burke

As a teacher/facilitator, I believe it is my job to create a safe learning community in my online classroom. It is my goal to enable a group of adults with different backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, talents and opinions to risk developing a learning relationship with each other and with me. Although it is my job to facilitate their learning, I fully expect to learn from them as well, and it is by assuming this role of mentor rather than authoritarian expert that a feeling of partnership in the learning process is created in the group. A learning community can only be a safe learning environment if everyone is treated with respect, courtesy, and thoughtful consideration. When fear of failure or embarrassment is replaced by trust, students feel free to risk making mistakes and to learn from them; they are enabled to respectfully and constructively express their opinions and to grow personally, intellectually, spiritually and professionally. It is my job to supply the wood and a safe place to burn it. It's their job to light the matches and pass the s'mores around the campfire.

“The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.” Herbert Spencer.

I learned an important principle when I was an undergraduate student that defined me as a teacher and learner: synthesis. Ideas are often trans-disciplinary. The same idea is threaded through many subjects. For example, the ideas generated by the Romantic period permeate the art, music, literature, drama, philosophy, politics and society of that period and are a reaction against the previous period of Classicism. Connecting similar ideas adds variety and richness to how an idea can be perceived and taught. Providing a web of interactive, interconnected ideas ensures that the students will connect new information to previous knowledge and will recognize the relevancy and applicability of them in the real world. My job as a teacher/facilitator is to synthesize disciplines, media, teaching methodologies, learning theories and styles so that all students have an equal opportunity to learn to the best of their abilities. They can then put that learning into action in their lives, in their careers, in their communities and in the world.