

Mila Parrish
Teaching Philosophy

As a professor, I have come to believe that I must know my students, how they live, how they learn, and how they apply what they learn in the classroom to their daily lives. I recognize that my students come with varied backgrounds, abilities, and levels of prior knowledge. Accordingly, I know that I must aim to reveal my students' prior experiences so that I can tap into – and build on – that knowledge. By deepening students' understanding of the core arts standards while creating new frameworks for education that prioritize students' lived experiences, I make available to them more vibrant ways of accessing the world.

I work to facilitate this type of exchange through the development of strong interpersonal mentoring relationships in the classroom. While this connection takes time, it has enormous potential because it is in the practice of human interaction that one finds the essence of learning along with respect for diversity, difference of opinion, and human rights. I also encourage my students to make connections between the subject matter and their past experiences, present interests, and future goals. For example, my issue-based integrative curriculum encourages students to weave together art, music, theater, and dance with overarching topics such as overpopulation, healthy relationships, bullying, body image, and the plight of refugees. Using this inspiration, students then develop their own curricula that they enact in area schools to relay their talents in dance while also fostering inquiry and civic engagement in a younger student population.

Beyond these essential connections developed between myself and my students, and in turn between my students and their larger world, I also ensure that the instructional methods in my classes are informed and augmented by research. A focus on research is applied to student work, an example of which occurs in the Issues in Pedagogy course as part of the Masters in Dance Education program. In this course, students conceptualize, implement, evaluate, and present comprehensive research projects that have in the past included such diverse topics as “Strange Fruit: Developing Student Voice Through Dance and Poetry” as well as “Developing Healthy Relationships Using Karma Circles.”

I also aim to incorporate aspects of my own research, particularly within the realms of constructivist practice and my experience in multimedia development. An advocate for technology integration in the delivery of postsecondary dance education, I encourage students to bring their own device (BYOD) to class. While often considered counterintuitive and taboo, smart technologies used thoughtfully expand the classroom experience by deepening critical thinking and self-reflection. When students BYOD to the dance class they create digital archives: students film their dance experiences, document and analyze creative work, and record self-discovery by tracking thoughts, writing questions, and describing challenges. As a result, they create a digital journal of growth over the course of the semester and beyond as they continue their dance training.

I have found that this documentation proves essential not only for individual growth but also to reinforce my goal to create a student-centered learning environment where I act as a guide working side-by-side with my students. In my classes, I strive to keep participants aware of each

other's differing perspectives and shared interests because I believe that greater diversity increases the breadth and depth of learning. I teach my students not what to think but rather how to think critically; I also teach them how to investigate others' ideas so as to inform new ones of their own.

Complementing these practices is my goal to employ various instructional methods to accommodate my students' respective learning styles. For example, a typical class format might begin with a short introductory lecture, followed by a small creative group work exercise incorporating sharing and class discussion, and conclude with individual journaling. I strive to create a classroom space that is adequately flexible to accommodate my students' needs, and I have found that collaborative problem-solving activities and interactive multimedia are valuable tools for creating such an environment.

Effectiveness as a professor, I believe, rests upon an evolving understanding of her field through engaging in research and participating in professional development conferences and workshops to expand her knowledge base. It also mandates respect for her students and the belief that all are capable and potentially have something novel and valuable to contribute. I encourage my students to take an active role in class by participating in discussions and by discovering and using their new knowledge. Communication is key in my classroom, not only of core concepts and of students' ideas but also of the expectations and evaluation that each course comprises. I believe that when students are made aware of course objectives and goals, they can determine when they have mastered them and therefore realize that the development of knowledge requires hard work and time.

My instructional goals are to:

- Expose students to new ideas and skills, generating excitement and motivating students' mastery.
- Illustrate the core arts standards through various interesting examples and applications.
- Provide a framework for refining new ideas and skills, either independently or in subsequent coursework.
- Encourage student learning through lively exchanges of opinions that heighten student interests and spark intellectual curiosity.

Consequently, my teaching philosophy can be summarized by the following beliefs:

- Students must be able to see how research, instruction, and evaluation constitute the underlying principles of teaching and learning.
- Students learn when they see how knowledge can be applied in real-life situations.
- Students need to see instructors who are passionate about the field; who convey professionalism and commitment to excellence in and out of the classroom; and who contribute to the professional community.

Teaching is a rewarding occupation to which I am deeply committed. I work diligently to help my students set and achieve goals. It is my job to inspire, critique, correct, and offer solutions. Through observation and experiential instruction, I facilitate the development of imaginative thinking, problem solving, and recognizing connections, all of which give form and meaning to students' experiences.

With every class, I feel that I learn something new about my subject, my students, or myself. I continue to research, analyze, and define new methods along the way. The opportunity to work with students and discuss subjects about which I am passionate is extremely personally rewarding. Above all, however, I endeavor to promote academic excellence and learning as a life-long process, and I seek to inform students of the myriad opportunities they have to contribute to the lives of others.