

# Teaching Philosophy

## Teaching as Teamwork

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In my opinion, the essence of teaching, ironically, is not the transmission of knowledge to the students, but instead the creation of an environment filled with confidence so that working together, students and the professor, develop the ability to think for themselves, creating new knowledge. Thus, knowledge has to be created in the classroom and not just transmitted from the professor to students. This is why teaching is, in essence, a team activity where the teacher's responsibility is to encourage their students to develop their own critical thinking skills and to question the things he teaches. Only in this manner, by questioning and finding creative answers to problems, will both students and the professor succeed together expanding the knowledge frontier.

As a teaching assistant at UW-Madison I have been privileged to meet many students with different backgrounds. Conversely, as a student, I have met many professors that have really altered my way of thinking. This has allowed me to notice that teaching is not an individual activity that only happens within a classroom. Instead, each course truly creates a team that, led by the professor, works together around knowledge, stimulating the ability for everybody in the class room, students and the professor, to think for themselves.

It is precisely because of this, because this ability is awakened in all of those who are in the classroom, that teaching cannot be seen as an individual activity. It must always be seen, and this is how I see this wonderful activity, as teamwork among the students and the professor. The latter is the one who leads, presents and examines the current state of the art, always encouraging critical reasoning and creative questions in their students. Those new points of view, observations and student's new answers are what, in turn, encourage the critical thinking in the teacher. This way, students and the teacher are immersed together in a magnificent circle of learning and knowledge creation with lifetime consequences, which are never forgotten. This philosophy has always guided me in what I consider the art of teaching.

Obviously, if the knowledge we acquire is not used frequently, it is often forgotten. However, the ability to think for ourselves is something that leaves a permanent impression, which cannot be lost, resists time and once it starts to develop, constantly grows. Additionally, when we routinely exercise and develop this ability, we are better prepared to face even more vital issues of our lives. This should be a focus of dedicated teaching, an important part of my teaching philosophy as it can truly change the lives of both the student and the professor. This is why I always strive toward developing each class individually, so that none are identical - not just in terms of the topics taught - but also in terms of the way I

reason with my students, discuss and solve the problems. This way of teaching is what provides students with knowledge that transcends the classroom and is never forgotten.

Good teaching not only benefits the students by awakening their ability to think by themselves about the world, but also is highly beneficial for the teacher. The beautiful thing about teaching is that when we teach something, somehow we learn it again. Each class is a new conversation with new perspectives, new questions and new solutions about a topic. That is how knowledge works; the more we think about an idea and contrast it with new views from new students, the more deeply we understand it. However, this is only true if we are conscious that teaching is teamwork and when we, the teachers or teaching assistants, are all willing to learn from our students. We have to enter the classroom willing to learn always, even when we are the ones teaching. Thereby the more experience a teacher has, the clearer his ideas and the deeper the scope of his thoughts. So it is natural that teaching is very appealing to those committed to the research and creation of knowledge.

By contrast, when the class is a simple recitation of a recipe without interaction between students and the teacher it becomes a chore for everybody. Of course this interaction in a class will be even better if the professor transmits his ideas as clearly and efficiently as possible. Thus, we also face the additional challenge of becoming great communicators and leaders to transmit our ideas and philosophies. This is another way that teaching is an enriching activity both ways - to the teacher and the students. It is, thus, a real joint process of creating value.

I think the ability to genuinely think for ourselves comes from curiosity and a tendency to wonder about new things in the world. During the course of our lives we are indifferent to many phenomena that occur around us daily. To optimize the learning environment in the classroom, the aim of teaching is precisely to end this indifference and amaze students with the scope of the topics that are being taught. Just as an answer raises many other questions, the knowledge we teach in a classroom will generate many other questions. The art of teaching and the teacher leadership then consists of promoting this ability to wonder about mysteries, in order to understand them, question them and, together, broaden knowledge.

I personally think that when we are aware of this, then our classes acquire much greater depth and are transformed from simple recitations into a value creating process in which what is being created is nothing less than the ability to think, see the world and expand the knowledge frontier. When this happens, then our lives change and, in some cases, we may even gain a chance to change the world.

This is my teaching philosophy that I recall every day when entering a classroom. I always go willingly to lead my classes to motivate my students to think critically and challenge what I teach them, so that I also learn from their new points of view and answers. Teaching cannot be seen as an individual activity. If it were so, the classes would be simple recitations and monologues with limited value. Teaching is a team activity that culminates with the creation of new knowledge for everyone in a classroom, including the professor. But above all, it is the discovery of ways to deal with problems in novel and creative ways that transcend the classroom and last forever.