

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea. -Antoine de St. Exupery

As a professor, my fundamental goal is inspiring my students. I bring passion, creativity, and a sense of humor to my classes every day. I want my students to "yearn for the sea." In most of my courses, the "sea" we study is humanity: the miraculous nature of the mind and the challenges of stimulating it and helping it change. I want my students to appreciate the wonder and obstacles of this work, and to feel knowledgeable and confident in their careers. I teach for understanding by designing backwards from big ideas, including organizing principles, useful insights, and promising strategies. I teach my students to respect complexity, to use multiple perspectives and multiple cases, and to distrust simple answers.

Respecting complexity and messiness is partly why I'm a constructivist. I give my students some ownership of their learning, like letting them teach parts of the class. This keeps my curriculum authentic: we talk about ideas like social covenants and reciprocal vulnerability, and then they practice them. Sometimes my students stumble but that's how I know they're striving at the edge of their abilities in the "Wobbly Place" (the zone of proximal development). I know they're learning as much as they can with a minimum of training wheels. When a student facilitates a 15-minute lesson, they learn more than they would from a lecture five times as long. I use meaningful assessments, including detailed rubrics with comments, so that my students can aim for clear goals even as they wobble.

I want my students to feel courage in the face of challenge. Challenge is one way we know we're alive: when we're striving in the Wobbly Place. I encourage striving and I protect my students' freedom to fail. Admitting ignorance, taking risks, and owning mistakes are powerful catalysts in learning and creativity. I try to create a safe space to foster those "Trying Trio" behaviors. I practice an authoritative teaching style—a mix of structure and caring. The structure includes high expectations as I push my students to the edge. The caring includes trying to understand my students' lives, dreams, and anxieties. I seldom need to use traditional classroom management strategies, because I treat my students as novice colleagues. Instead, I focus on teaching professionalism and collegiality. But I don't hesitate to act if any students are interfering with their peers' opportunity to learn.

The Trying Trio



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I understand that my students come from different backgrounds. Some are veterans and some are parents. Some are changing careers, out of necessity or to finally build their dreams. Many are trying to redefine themselves without losing their roots. They may cherish some of the values they received from their families, communities, and past teachers, while questioning others. I promote inclusivity and tolerance with strategies like people-first language. I explicitly teach how to honor difference. I try to be understanding about my students' personal problems, and I readily make accommodations for issues and events like disabilities and life crises.

The most important part of my job is modeling. I try to make my teaching and design choices transparent (e.g., by explaining why I do what I do). I extensively infuse technology. I demonstrate an openness to feedback from my students, coupled with a commitment to life-long learning and self-improvement. I tell my students that there are many ways to be present in the world and the workplace. I hope that some students follow my example. But I only want them to embrace the choices that make sense to them.

Education is the best solution to most problems, including increasing tolerance, finding or creating good jobs, and becoming better citizens of our global community and our planet. Good teaching is immeasurably important. Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." I teach to be the change I want to see.