

My Practice and its Possibilities:

A Statement of Teaching Philosophy

As John Dewey writes, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” Guiding students toward an understanding that coursework and scholarship are not just investments in “somedays,” but are also part of their everyday lives on and off campus, is foundational to my philosophy. Writing and reading are not limited to the page, to books, or to school. We read and write our realities. Because language and communication is at the heart of life’s complexities, I commit curricula to holistic-critical practices that address students’ systemic learning needs. Assisting students as they write life narratives of academic success, community engagement, and develop intrinsic purposes that gives meaning to their lives, helps me to animate and embody Dewey’s claim in ways that matter to my students.

“No one is born fully formed,” Paolo Freire contends, “it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are.” This notion of becoming, the sense that teaching and learning are intertwined, shapes the making of knowledge as collaborative inquiry and discovery. While students learn about themselves and their perspectives in and of the world, they also learn the vital roles reading, listening, writing, and speaking play in their understanding of, and engagement with, others. Rooted in democratic practice, focused on community and process, my pedagogy and underlying philosophy invites students to contemplate this possibility: Once we have found and committed to our passions, we become teachers of them, willing to share, model, and lead others to do the same. Whether in academic or everyday life contexts, this notion of entering college as a student and leaving as a teacher — of field, career, purpose or perspective — is reliant on rhetorical awareness and skill. Ultimately, this is why the work done each day in the writing and reading classroom is so important to me, my students, and our communities.

Like William Ayers, I believe the work we do within a classroom affects the world outside it. “Teaching, if it is to be done well, must be built on vision and commitment,” Ayers writes, “and learning, if it is to be meaningful, depends on imagination, risk taking, intention, and invention.” A writing and reading education rooted in classic and modern rhetorical theories prepares and emboldens students to make the most of their creativity, risk complexity, determine their intentions, and become bold entrepreneurs in local and global communities. My work and commitments rest with sponsoring rhetorical literacy so that students leave my classrooms as instructive beings committed to making civic and academic contributions to their world. It is not easy work, but nothing of value comes easy or quick. Because we struggle, because we must come to terms with our own uncertainties while making knowledge, success is no longer fortuitous happenstance. Instead, it is a deliberate outcome of our awareness, resilience, and grit. Writing, reading, and thinking become powerful interrelations. The convergence of “the personal” and “the public” becomes more visible and embodied. Writing and reading become more than a set of skills to be mastered for one course before moving on to another. Through our work together, writing and reading become the means, and the methods, for enacting change in the world while scripting life narratives of possibility, responsibility, and justice. This is my goal, and yet the strategy. It is my practice, and its possibilities.