

Martha Combs
Teaching Statement

The development of a teaching philosophy is a process that, in my opinion, takes more time than one semester allows. A philosophy is a way of thinking that generalizes across circumstances and settings and influences behavior. The only context I have for developing a philosophy of teaching is one class in one semester of one academic year. However, as limited as that context might be, I feel that I have been able to at least begin the process of finding myself as a teacher. The aspects of teaching that I have come to regard as most important are: a display of personal enjoyment of the material, humor as a way of relating to students, application of concepts through everyday examples, and compassion for the college student experience.

There is a quote by Belgian poet Maurice Maeterlinck that has been an inspiration so far throughout my teaching experience. It says, "Remember that happiness is as contagious as gloom. It should be the first duty of those who are happy to let others know of their gladness." I truly believe this as true and have tried to implement it in the classroom. Students will respond more positively to a topic presented with positivity and enthusiasm than to one laced with disinterest or pessimism. I can honestly say that I have been enthusiastic about the majority of the material in this Psychology 101 class. Maybe that is because it reminds me of the enthusiasm I experienced when I was first presented this material my freshman year of college. Maybe it is because, through my studies, I have gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for the material. Regardless of the reason, I am enthusiastic about this material and excited about the prospect of instilling enthusiasm in others.

I have never really thought of myself as funny. However, it has become evident that my students are of a different opinion. I have come to find out that presenting chapter topics in a light-hearted manner and being willing to address any potential flaws or absurdities in the material allows students to feel comfortable. Humor has been used as an "icebreaker" of sorts for centuries. It allows others to feel comfortable in the setting and encourages their attempts to connect with the material without fear of being judged. I have found that students, when engaged in humor, are more willing to express opinions and less fearful of being "wrong." If humor can have this effect on students' willingness to engage in the classroom, it is something I will continue to employ.

Beginning teachers are encouraged to create an "active learning environment." Research has demonstrated that students learn more efficiently when they actively participate in that learning. One of the most compelling methods of engaging students in the material is to demonstrate how the psychological concepts we are studying can be directly applied to students' lives. Sentence deleted. Students are more likely to understand the material when it is presented with modern and relevant examples. I have found a specific method of doing so to be especially impactful. From the beginning of my teaching experience, I have engaged in a fair amount of self-disclosure with my students. For example, I have shared funny stories from my family and childhood to demonstrate points about development, adolescent identity, romantic relationships, gender roles, and health behaviors. As a consequence, I have found that students tend to refer back to my real-life examples in explaining

themselves. Although self-disclosure can be a “slippery slope” if not used prudently, it can be a very effective method by which to help students apply course concepts.

Lastly, I believe that to be an effective teacher it is essential to understand the experiences students that are going through and to actively display interest in and compassion for those experiences. I have found that students are far more positive and engaged when they believe I am concerned for their overall well-being. They also appear very appreciative of any attempts I make to learn about their cultural climate or specific emerging adult experiences. For example, my students have expressed gratitude when I have asked them about other classes and displayed sympathy for tough course schedules or the overall transition from high school to college. After struggling with deciding on a topic for my first reaction paper for class, I finally realized that writing assignments were a perfect opportunity to display interest in the student experience. Therefore, my last three writing assignment topics have required students to be introspective about their own personal experiences. I believe that incorporating this sort of compassion and interest into actual course content is beneficial not only for the students (who appreciate the interest and the opportunity to express their thoughts and beliefs), but also for the teacher (who has the opportunity to learn about student experiences and allow that information to inform his or her teaching).

Overall, I believe there are countless components to a teaching philosophy and that there are certainly ones I am not aware of as a new teacher. However, in my recent and very limited experience I have come to believe that indicating personal enjoyment of the material, utilizing humor in lecture and discussion, applying concepts through appropriate self-disclosure, and demonstrating compassion for students’ experiences are all crucial aspects of efficient teaching.