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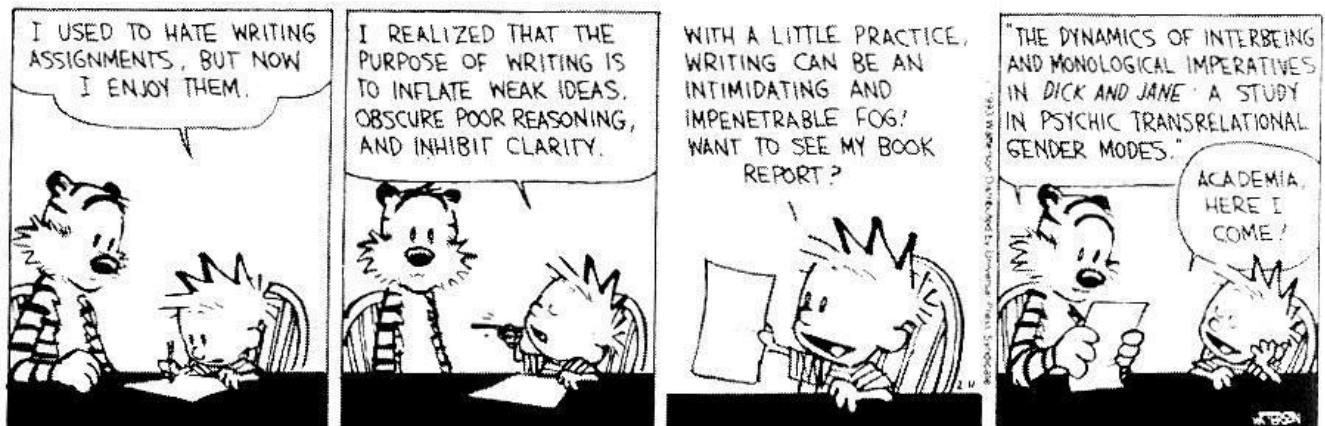


My Personal Teaching Philosophy: A Commentary

Sonya Curry

Abstract

Beyond striving to ensure that students learn the fundamental content of the courses, the objectives as any professor should be: (a) to foster critical thinking skills; (b) to facilitate the acquisition of lifelong learning skills; and (c) to prepare students to function as highly skilled and competent communicators across the scope of their career. Furthermore, my overall teaching philosophy is based on two principles, which are supported extensively in the literature, constructivist, and social cognitive theory.



Although, Calvin and Hobbes cartoons are meant to be purely entertaining, I have always enjoyed the implicit irony in the interaction between a willful little boy and his sage-like cat. Consequently, as an English professor, I often incorporate this short cartoon into my teaching philosophy, because it embodies the misconceptions regarding college-level writing. Listening to students lament as they struggle with editing essays prompted me to write this commentary.

Within classrooms, the role of the professor has to be multi-faceted. These roles include cheerleader, facilitator, and coach to students as they work through the lament, and move toward confidence in their writing abilities. For instance, while teaching English Literature to students who are assigned Literary Analysis projects based on the works of authors within the literary canon, such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Morrison, Baldwin and Sophocles, I can easily observe students' initial dismay. However, by the end of each semester, when students make a 15-minute presentation on their assigned author, the presentations are amazing. It is enlightening to witness how students come to the realization that the major themes that dominate their current lives are not foreign, but rather, themes that have plague humankind for centuries. During the presentations, I usually sit at the back of the room, with a box of tissue.

Goals and Foundational Principles

Beyond striving to ensure that students learn the fundamental content of the courses, the overall teaching objectives as a professor should: (a) foster critical thinking skills; (b) facilitate the acquisition of lifelong learning skills; and (c) prepare students to function as highly skilled and competent communicators across the scope of their career. My own teaching philosophy is based on two principles, which are supported extensively in the literature: constructivist and social cognitive theory. Employing constructivist methods of teaching in the classroom encourage students to take an active role in their education by making choices and assuming responsibility for intelligent inquiry and discovery. This approach facilitates differentiated activities for each student's distinctive ambitions, making the subject more relevant to every student's life. My teaching philosophy is also grounded in the social cognitive theory of learning, because as long as knowledge is relevant to a students' life, it inspires lifelong learning and scholarship (Philosophy, n. d.).

Teaching and learning are reciprocal processes. When teachers nurture the individual talents in each student, it tends to increase their self-esteem and encourages the development of lifelong skills. By supporting these abilities, teachers guide students' research, and students in return, enlighten teachers about subjects in which they may not be as knowledgeable. This mutual respect for individual skills cultivates a professional academic relationship, leading to a give-and-take educational alliance. This liaison allows students to feel that they are on equal intellectual ground with their teachers, thus creating a strong academic atmosphere (Philosophy-Edurise, n.d.).

Overall Value of the Teaching Role in the University Setting

One of the main reasons I chose a career in academia was for the opportunity to work with future generations of leaders and innovators in an instructional capacity. It is my hope that my teaching will "keep the flame of scholarship alive" in some way and inspire students to remain focused on their professional goals. Students deserve an educator's passion for both the subject matter and learning as a whole. Teaching and learning become a simultaneous journey for both the teacher and students when students' energy is aroused by a teacher's genuine intensity for learning, because everyone is ready and willing to participate in active learning.

A successful career as a university professor renews one's personal and professional commitments and encourages students to be distinguished academic, personal, and ethical role models for future generations. It is my goal to have an enriching teaching career by keeping an open mind and through ongoing communication with colleagues and students. I am prepared to rise to the challenges of teaching in the 21st century, and promise to provide an honest, well-rounded education to every student.

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About the Author

Sonya J. Curry, M. Ed, is a visiting professor of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at DeVry University. Sonya has been a professor at various colleges and universities for the past 10 years. Contact Sonya Curry at busybsonya@gmail.com.