

Colby College

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My Teaching Philosophy

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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Marilyn R. Pukkila

Intentional Teacher '09

“Facts don’t change people – stories do.”

– Cynthia Jones

Learning has always been easy for me, so much so that when I encountered a high school calculus class in which I didn’t understand the material, I panicked. I had no experience with how to work through my incomprehension. When my mother saw my terror, she sat down and said, “Well, tell me what you **do** understand.” As I did so, somehow I began to understand what I didn’t know before, and I experienced first-hand the power of teaching.

I teach because I want others to have their own “ah-ha” moments, whether in research or literary study or religious exploration. I want to see the lights go on, the faces open up, and confidence soar. I want to share the things I am passionate about with others, and to learn from their passions. I want students to find their own voices, discover their own knowledge and wisdom, and realize their own capacities to inquire, discover, analyze, synthesize, and create. I want students to leave my classes knowing themselves a bit better, and more able to approach difference and complexity with curiosity and open hearts. If I am successful, students will leave a research methods class or a course I teach having developed critical thinking, self-awareness, empathy, curiosity, passion, and/or ongoing reflection.

My beliefs and assumptions about how people learn are a braid of cognitivist, constructionist, and humanist learning theories. Students in my classes acquire new insights, apply their learning in new contexts, answer questions, and do research and essays to connect ideas. They come to realize they are responsible for their own learning, that they can demonstrate personal meaning in that learning, and that it’s all

right to be inspired by what happens in the classroom. They experience my role as facilitator and build new knowledge as a group.

To accomplish this, I use story (personal and cultural), demonstration, multiple perspectives, discussion, response papers, experiential components, and questions. These tools address multiple learning styles, with emphasis on verbal, written, kinesthetic, and reflective activities. When I am teaching from my authentic self, my attitude to my students is respectful, listening, querying/challenging, compassionate, vulnerable, transparent, articulate, self-disclosing, accessible, honest, and open-hearted. I start where they are so I can accompany them on the path to where they need and want to be. I love to have them demonstrate to themselves that they already know more than they think they do, and that many rich answers lie within themselves. For this reason, I tell students in the first session of my courses, “It’s not my business to change a single one of your assumptions – even if I could, which I can’t. Only you can change your assumptions. It **is** my business to make you **aware** of your assumptions – then you get to decide which ones you’ll continue to hold, and which ones you’ll let go of.”

I have come to see my teaching role as “The Bard.” By telling my stories of research and experience, I invite students to be aware of their own stories, their own process, their own experience. When I am successful, the classroom is a safe place to explore, take risks, make discoveries, and be vulnerable, whether the course content is searching a database or discovering their own religious beliefs through the mirror of a popular novel. There is courteous and passionate discussion, creative connection, evidence-based discourse, mutual support, analysis, synthesis, courage, and appreciation of diversity and complexity.

Why do I teach? So that I may know myself and my fellow-travelers better – and because I love stories.