

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Bryan L. Jones

The most effective and unforgettable teachers in my career do not simply transmit a static series of right or wrong bits of information. In fact, these teachers persuaded me to think beyond the sets of facts that I had been compelled to accept as absolute truths, and praised me not for my ability to answer questions, but to come up with them. A memorable high school physics teacher made this attitude clear to me when, due to my interest in his class, he requested that we meet regularly after school to expand on the topics I was learning. To my surprise, he did not want to teach me more formulas; instead, he invited me to read a novel that explored a narrative world constructed upon abstract mathematical concepts. The novel did not conclude with some enlightening theory or complex equation that offered a clarifying description of the world, as I had anticipated and desired, but rather proposed an open-ended query that brought into question the underlying presumptions of all such formulas. This unique experience made me realize that the most remarkable teachers orient students not to answer, but to question what they know and how they as individuals can reach a deeper understanding or a more complex approach to a certain issue. This particular teacher motivated me to explore what I was capable of accomplishing by offering questions to guide the way, not simply a list of right or wrong answers.

In this way, I believe that one of the most stimulating approaches to teaching is to encourage students to explore learning as a dynamic, never-ending process that transcends any sort of immediate retention of knowledge or univocal path to meaningful comprehension. To teach, in effect, is to motivate students to continue questioning and thinking critically through constructive and positive feedback that keeps this process focused on what the student has done and is capable of doing, instead of concentrating on what the teacher already “knows.” Ultimately, the only reason a teacher exists as a teacher is not necessarily a direct

consequence of superior knowledge or understanding, but because she or he was once a student, and the best teachers foster this humble and motivating attitude towards their students as fellow learners. When I was an undergraduate student, two of my professors of literature exemplified this approach not only with their willingness to continue and expand upon class discussions with me outside of the classroom, but also because they shared their own work in progress with me to contribute, on different levels, to both of our learning processes. These professors made one of the greatest impacts on my own education because they led me to new ways of thinking and seeing, instead of simply approving or disapproving my answers or ideas. They accepted that teaching is another step of learning that they are undergoing from a different position. Good teachers may be content with their own expert knowledge, but great teachers challenge both themselves and their students to constantly re-evaluate what they hold as truths, encouraging all levels of learners to find new, creative ways to think and explore their own capabilities.

As new technologies continue to impact our everyday lives and are reaching new levels of quality and accessibility, my approach to teaching uniquely accounts for these indispensable tools for success. I firmly believe that taking advantage of these resources and promoting new ways to use them are essential for classes of all levels and subjects. Integrating new technologies in and out of the classroom not only fosters a stimulating learning environment, but also reaches students in a more familiar and intriguing way than ever before while preparing them for any career path they may choose. As more detailed and complex information is available instantly at the click of a mouse, I feel that my philosophy of teaching is uniquely equipped to handle the necessary change in classroom strategies. As exposing students to “right” answers is easier than ever before, I consider my goal as a teacher to motivate students to think critically and creatively through their own unique capabilities that enables them to continue along the path of learning beyond the classroom.