

Teaching Philosophy

I subscribe to the Socratic teaching method and philosophy and I believe that students possess all the knowledge they require before entering any course, they just do not realize it. My job is to question my students in such a way that they engage in active learning and think on a higher level. Through this type of interaction students use knowledge they already know they possess to reveal deeper meaning and to answer tougher and more complex questions.

To achieve my goal of nurturing student development and to encourage them to take an active role in their own learning I use complex problems frequently during class to help explain difficult concepts or to help students see how the knowledge they possess can be applied in unfamiliar settings. This strategy helps them to improve their problem-solving ability and prompts them to ask even more complex questions and elevate them to a higher plane of learning.

These skills along with pattern recognition and the ability to ask good questions are traits found in a good scientist and all are intimately tied together, and this understanding has helped me to develop my teaching style and philosophy during my tenure at East Carolina University. In class I encourage students to talk through problems step by step, a technique that has been shown by Dhaliwal to be effective. In addition, students are asked to question any answers they generate, to ensure they make sense and to consolidate their learning, an approach suggested by Polya. I design all my exams to offer question choice, but they do not offer multiple choice questions. Although grading takes significantly longer this is a fairer system that allows me to track students working through the problem and it allows me to reward those using the correct thought process, even if the answer is incorrect. We all make mistakes and I expect my students to make many mistakes but, in this way, they can learn from those mistakes without being heavily penalized. This strategy encourages them to take more risks and helps them to develop confidence in their own ability.

I firmly believe this approach is working for me and my students and although it requires a lot of effort from both them and me my teaching reviews reflect that they appreciate the effort, they appreciate being worked hard and they value the learning experience.