

B I S H O P H A R B E R

For my teaching philosophy, I try to believe in as many as six impossible things before breakfast.

Count them with me.

One, there *are* students that come to college for the pheromones but stay for the classes.

Two, learning and teaching is a non-zero-sum game – *if* done properly.

Three, professors profess only to teach that which professors profess actually to know.

Four, critical thinking leads to critical compassion.

Five, there is a place called a library that really is still used by students.

Six, I *can* follow a lesson plan – when it doesn't interfere with learning.



B I S H O P H A R B E R

My Teaching Philosophy, Redux



One, there are students that come to college for the pheromones but stay for the classes.

*When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.*¹ The classroom is a place of intellectual stimulation, critical and creative thought, and mastery of *conceptual discovery*. I approach each student with the expectation that (a) they want to learn, (b) they can learn, and (c) they have something meaningful to contribute to learning. I believe given that expectation, students will rise to that level of enthusiasm and succeed wonderfully.

Two, learning and teaching is a non-zero-sum game – if done properly.

*To find deeper meaning, one must become able to transcend the narrow confines of a self-centered existence and believe that one will make a significant contribution to life – if not right now, then at some future time.*² My role with students is as a guide through transformational learning, replacing ignorance with knowledge in a never-ending cooperative effort that broadens the horizons of both student and instructor. Students should be able to begin to understand (and eventually master) conceptual discovery, rational thought, and critical thinking skills not only in my classes, but also transfer these skills to any other subject as well.

Three, professors profess only to teach that which professors profess actually to know.

*Under Plato, the classical paideia assumed a deeper and metaphysical dimension in his Academy, holding forth the ideal of inner perfection realized through disciplined education.*³ Engagement with the student is the key to unlocking the creative spirit into a rational relationship with the course material. Real world experiments, field trips, personal case studies, discussion boards, interactive lectures – all these, and more, are used with students to gain traction for the maximum visceral efficiency to ensure that the lessons gained are not merely topical but holistic. Critical and creative thinking skills are encouraged, explored, and employed in each student to their fullest potential. As a professor, I can only illuminate; my students, emulate. Hypocrisy is *not* a virtue.

Four, critical thinking leads to critical compassion.

*The only purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his life – by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality.*⁴ Bringing the ivory tower into the streets has always been my goal, to relate critical thinking with critical compassion. Mentoring students in the skill sets necessary for success – critical and creative thinking, intuitive logic, functional philosophy, and social psychology – would come about through both formal and informal avenues: formal in the classroom, informal based on institutional policies (fraternities & social club sponsorship, mentoring, etc.). Offering opportunities for students toward educational success and volunteer work would further harmonize a life balance between *legitimate* social justice and academic excellence.

Five, there is a place called a library that really is still used by students.

*I accept the statement that a text can have many senses. I refuse the statement that a text can have every sense.*⁵ For me, a library is the **icon** of intellectual and moral freedom. So long as there is a library – physical or digital – there is freedom of thought, freedom of voice, and freedom of creativity. That said, a student without a book is a student that is being deprived of the freedom of experience to determine their own opinion, to extract some sense from the text. I believe that experience and opinion should be *assessable*. In this assessment, I prefer to see development through the personal narrative of the student. (In some cases, objective assessment in the form of traditional testing and grading scales may be necessary, in addition to projects and presentations by students.)

Six, I can follow a lesson plan – when it doesn't interfere with learning.

*Vi veri universum vovis vici.*⁶ Sometimes you just have to throw out the lesson plan and ad hoc the class for the day. The same applies for my own professional development. I will continue to push the boundaries of technology and social engagement to continue synchronizing classical education with modern integration points (mnemonics). Furthering my own education with new cross-training in different fields, harmonizing the specialties I have with experience, education, and explorations through current trends will allow me to remain focused on bringing new ways of reaching students while keeping tried and true methods from the past.

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:11 ESV

² Bettelheim, B. (1977). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. New York: Vintage Books.

³ Tarnas, R. (1991). *The passion of the western mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.

⁴ Rand, A., & Schwartz, P. (1999). The comprachicos. In *Return of the primitive: the anti-industrial revolution* (51-98). New York: Meridian.

⁵ Eco, U., & Collini, S. (1992). *Interpretation and overinterpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Crowley, A., Neuburg, V. B., & Desti, M. (1998). *The vision & the voice: With commentary and other papers*. York Beach, Me.: Samuel Weiser. [By the power of truth, I, while living, have conquered the universe.]