

STEVE WHITAKER

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I believe that [the] educational process has two sides – one psychological and one sociological – and that neither can be subordinated to the other or neglected without evil results.

- John Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*

I teach as I believe. My philosophy drives my methodology and what I do as both an educator and a learner. Through my experiences, I have developed a series of theses that serve to convey my beliefs, and I am happy to share them with you here.

Education is a compact between learners and educators. The best teachers are those who are willing to acknowledge this, to consider their students as collaborators, and to change the power structure of their classrooms in order to place more control into the hands of learners. The most successful learners are those willing to acknowledge that they have an active role to play as well, to take on more ownership of the learning environment and content, and to critically examine what is being taught, and why.

Learning occurs through connections. One of the responsibilities of a good instructor is to help students understand the relationship between what they're learning and their own lives. This isn't just true for adult learners, as Knowles proposes, but for students of all ages. The more relevant the connection, and the more obvious it is made, the more motivated a learner will be to engage with the content. For this reason, educators cannot dismiss the affective aspects of their classrooms – emotions help bring students closer to what they're learning.

Different learning styles are real, and must be considered when planning and teaching. Students learn in different ways, and whether we refer to their natural inclinations as "intelligences" or just preferences, a strong teacher respects the fact that all students benefit from employing multiple modalities when representing information, varied methods of presentation and conversation, and a general willingness to avoid adhering to a single teaching style.

Students want to be inspired, challenged, and validated. My goals in teaching are not just to cover information or make sure that learners are able to demonstrate mastery. I also want to make students *want* to learn. I want to make them struggle at times so that they feel like owners of what they've mastered, and I want to give them experiences that will let them begin to believe that they're capable of such mastery over different information and in different situations.

Learning is about the environment, too. The classroom environment contributes greatly to how effectively teaching and learning occur within it. The best classrooms are not just collections of individual students, but rather collaborative groups with common goals, regardless of how different the backgrounds are of those who comprise the groups. A good teacher facilitates relationships between learners, helps them to draw connections, and pushes them to see themselves as a unified cohort. A high-quality learning environment feels safe at all times, even when an instructor encourages risk-taking and asks students to go beyond their established comfort zones.

