

# Philosophy of Teaching

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"In the Western tradition, we have focused on teaching as a skill and forgotten what Socrates knew: teaching is a gift, learning is a skill." — Peter Drucker

From my very first experience, I have always loved teaching! When I was a graduate student at the University of Florida, I enrolled in a teaching practicum in Calculus I with Dr. Moore. It was really an excellent experience for both of us. Since Dr. Moore was occupationally blind, it was a great help to him to have an assistant to help grade papers and participate in classroom activities. I was able to sit in a class that I really enjoyed and observe his teaching. Then, it was my turn! Dr. Moore said to me, "Would you like to teach the next section?" I was ready!! I prepared my lesson plan, and standing before that class, I began to explain the lesson. As I taught, I was able to establish eye-contact with every student in the room. I could see by the expressions on their faces that they were getting it, that they understood what I was saying! When students didn't understand something, they didn't even need to ask a question—I could tell by the puzzled look on their faces when something wasn't clear to everyone. The students seemed to really understand the lesson, and they really liked and appreciated my teaching style.

In this, my very first teaching experience, I learned the most important requirements for good teaching—*eye contact* and student interaction! Dr. Moore was an extremely nice man, a gentleman of highest caliber with an excellent grasp of mathematics. But because Dr. Moore was occupationally blind, he could not interact with his students as he taught. When he spoke to the class, he was not able to see how the class was responding to what he said. Likewise, the members of the class had no way of communicating with him that his words were understood or not understood, that his efforts were appreciated or not appreciated. In teaching there must be constant interaction, signals of body language back and forth, between instructor and students.

The communication between these students and me continued for the rest of the semester. It placed me on what I call the "**spiral of teaching**." Hearing students tell me that they liked my teaching and appreciated my effort motivated me to work harder to become a better instructor. The spiral continues with teaching skill inspiring positive student comments, and vice-versa. Teaching skills are sure to improve with years of experience, inspired by the efforts of diligent students. A few years ago, I received an Email from Debbie Franzese, a former student who was a teacher in a middle school in Lake Mary. She said, "You made teaching look so easy, but it's really a LOT of work!!! Maybe when I've been teaching for 30 years it will be easy." She's right! It is hard

work, but it is very rewarding to see students learn math who never seemed to grasp it before and to see former students become math teachers themselves.

Yes, I was blessed that my first experience as a teacher in Dr. Moore's class was a positive one setting me in the right direction on the spiral of teaching. Now, as I near the end of my career at Seminole State, I have learned that good teaching requires a special gift and great patience. What is required to create an excellent sound from a violin? First, it takes a fine violin. Second, it takes a maestro with many years of practice. My philosophy of teaching and my goal in life was to take the gift of teaching that was given to me, to work hard to develop that gift, and to play the best violin I can play. Then, when it was time for me to sit down, perhaps they will say, "That was good music!"

And some of my students will begin to play . . .

As expressed by Socrates and Drucker in the quotation above, teaching is a gift. However, good teaching is much, much more. Good teaching requires practice and patience, as we learn from our own experience by trial and error, and as we learn vicariously from the experiences of others. This God-given gift must be developed and skills added to it:

1. Communicate by using eye contact and body language with your students.
2. Never embarrass a student in class.
3. Treat all students, faculty, and staff as if they were your own children.
4. Let your students know you care about them.
5. Believe in your students, and never give up on them.
6. Develop both passion and patience for teaching and learning.