

Dr. Amy Aldridge Sanford
Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

My abbreviated teaching philosophy is printed near the top of all of my syllabuses:

I am a facilitator of teaching and learning. The participants in any given classroom enter with different paradigms and truths. I aid in the exploration of those truths. I do NOT believe that the instructor is THE holder of Truth; therefore we must all participate to co-construct knowledge and create synergy. When a student starts to feel uncomfortable in his/her existing paradigm that means s/he is growing as a scholar. My desire is that all of my students feel the joy of discomfort from time to time.

I take the opportunity on the first day of class to talk about the philosophy and what it means for the classroom experience. It's important for me that the students understand that they will truly be co-constructors in the teaching and learning process.

Enrollees need to understand that there will be very little lecturing by me, that any tests will most likely be written by them, presentations will be peer critiqued, readings will challenge their existing paradigms, and classroom discussions will be student led. (This is all especially true for classes at the senior and graduate levels).

In my experience, most of my students have never encountered a classroom like ours before. Many of them have been sitting in rows, listening to lecturers, and regurgitating Truth for years. The change is welcomed by some and challenged by others, and the challenge is welcomed and understood.

It's tough for many students to understand that they can and should take responsibility for their teaching AND their learning. They have something both to offer and to understand. It is through this classroom experience that we become less ethnocentric and more empathetic.

This approach works for me. It meshes well with my truth and my pedagogical training. My teaching evaluations are wonderful, we learn the truths about the subject of the course, and my students are successful during college and after graduation.

Bottom Line: My students know I care and that our classroom is safe. It's a safe place to take risks and make mistakes; a safe place to disagree with me, their textbook authors, and their cohorts; a safe place to shift their existing paradigms; and a safe place to make recommendations about how teaching and learning can be accomplished in a different way.

"The purpose of education is to help students to feel together and to think for themselves, instead of thinking together and feeling alone." ~Sir Ken Robinson