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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Technology has fundamentally changed the way younger generations process information. Answers are immediate, attention is competed for, and the expectation of instant access has quietly eroded the practice of sitting with a difficult question long enough to actually think through it. Independent thinking is not disappearing because students are less capable. It is becoming less practiced. That is where teaching comes in. Facilitating genuine critical thought in today's classroom means creating structured, consistent opportunities for students to slow down, engage deeply, and do the intellectual work themselves.

Philosophy and Approach

My classroom runs on an open communication floor. Seminar-style discussion is the primary mode of instruction, with direct lecture woven in when students need foundational knowledge before they can engage meaningfully with a problem. Students are not passive recipients of information. They are active participants in building understanding together.

There is a principle behind this structure: true mastery of a subject means being able to explain it, defend it, and teach it to someone else. With that in mind, group projects, collaborative activities, and game-based learning tasks are built into the course alongside critical thinking writing and discussion-based practice. These are not supplementary. They are the spaces where students discover what they actually understand and what still needs work. A student who can answer a multiple choice question but cannot explain their reasoning has not yet mastered the material.

Every course is designed using backward design, starting with the skills and outcomes students need to demonstrate and sequencing instruction through a deliberate learning progression. Scaffolding is introduced early and reduced gradually as student independence develops. Skills are revisited, deepened, and applied to increasingly complex tasks as the year moves forward.

Assessment

Formative assessment is frequent, varied, and often informal. Close observation of student discussion, group work, and in-class writing gives a clearer picture of where each student actually is than any single test could. Some of the most useful formative data comes from assessments students do not realize are assessments, which requires careful, consistent attention to how students are processing and applying the material in real time.

Formal formative assessments in my courses are built around writing rather than multiple choice. Students may respond to a prompt they received in advance and had time to research, or to a broader prompt that requires applying knowledge on the spot. Both formats serve a purpose. Together they reveal how students think, not just what they have memorized.

Feedback is most critical at the start of a course, and it is most fair when it follows direct instruction. It is unreasonable to penalize a student for not meeting an expectation that has not yet been explicitly taught. Before students are held accountable for the structure, methodology, and sourcing standards of their writing, those things have to be taught clearly and practiced with feedback. Once direct instruction and guided practice have occurred, expectations can and should be held firmly. Feedback at that stage shifts from instruction to accountability.

Equity and Access

Students come from every socioeconomic background, racial and ethnic identity, culture, religion, and orientation. All of it is respected and celebrated in my classroom. Those identities also sometimes shape where a student is academically when they walk through the door, and meeting students where they are is not optional. It is the job. The standard does not shift, but the path to reach it is built with each student in mind.

Nobody goes into teaching for the salary. Educators choose this work because they genuinely care about students and about the kind of society the next generation will build. That care is what makes it possible to hold high expectations and still show up every day committed to making sure every student has a real opportunity to meet them.