

Dr. Desi Cameron Teaching Philosophy

I believe the purpose of education is to understand others, the world, and ourselves. I aim to achieve three main goals in my teaching. First, to challenge students to develop metacognitive skills through frequent reflections and self-assessments. Second, to encourage students to collaborate and build a community of learners and share their knowledge through peer feedback and student-generated rubrics. Third, to motivate students to ask critical, open-ended questions in response to selected readings and observations. These questions should challenge selected literature, classroom encounters, and their own understanding of education.

My role of teacher is that of facilitator and collaborator. I do not presume to be the one who has all the answers; rather, I present myself as co-learner. While my syllabi offer an outline for the semester, I often tailor my lessons based upon students' interests and needs. I cherish the backgrounds and experiences my students bring to the classroom. Their life experiences and interests are just as valid as my own.

In one of my early class sessions in one of my courses, students step into multiple roles to create a classroom community. First, students assume the role of various experts who have been recruited to help interpret artifacts on a recently discovered utopian island society. Participants introduce themselves as their new roles and areas of expertise and brainstorm what makes a perfect society. Based on this information, students step out of their roles and are given the task to create certain artifacts: the map of the island, the flag, the anthem, and the laws of the land. Students step back into their roles as experts and interpret the artifacts as a way to build belief and reveal important information about the perfect society. Students then take on the roles of citizens of this island and bring it to life through a morning ritual of singing and performing their anthem while saluting their flag and creating island rituals. In this scenario, students are literally building a community in which they can problem pose and problem solve.

Students continue to build belief by portraying the good and the bad moments in the lives of the islanders. In the middle of their role-play, students receive a message that one of the islanders ran away from home and can't be found. This citizen's home is then investigated. Students step into the role of detectives who are given the task to infer what might have happened to the citizen based on clues and facts. The detectives then make observations prior to hypothesizing what might have happened and why. The detectives conclude the islander has been bullied based upon clues that include a turned over chair, a journal entry, a broken cell phone, and a picture. Marked by a sign posted on the wall, we return to 'detective headquarters' to define bullying. In the role of parents and school administrators, we brainstorm ways of making the islander feel safer at school and at home. We debrief the lesson and conclude with reflection cards.

As the above class session demonstrates, I believe understanding happens through interaction and reflection. By sharing our viewpoints and collaborating with others, we have the opportunity to gain insight into other people's perspectives. This lesson provides a guideline for my students to create a community from scratch in their own classroom through a fictional lens. They grasp what it takes to build a caring classroom community and how to react when things may go wrong.

Learning isn't just doing; it's reflecting on what you do. Students track their goals, describe how they aim to reach those goals, review what new questions arise, and record the connections they make to broader contexts throughout the semester on weekly reflection cards. Students refer to these cards as they write up their final self-assessment for the course. I also ask students to assign themselves a grade for the course with cited evidence of their learning. I do this in order to encourage my students to be in charge of their education and making their learning visible. It forces them to demonstrate their process as well as their product. This is not only more challenging, but is also more valuable as students see their understanding shift and change over time, thus embracing learning as a lifelong process.

While this is my current teaching philosophy, I am thrilled to know that it too will shift as I continue to grow and learn from my students whom I consider to be my best teachers.