

**Engaging Creativity:
My Personal Teaching Philosophy**

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*“My contention is that creativity is now as important in education as literacy,
and we should treat it with the same status.”*

~Sir Ken Robinson, speaking at the TED conference, Monterey, CA, 2006

“Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.”

~Aldous Huxley, *Texts and Pretexts*, 1932

Although I spent over 23 years pursuing formal education, the most formative educational experience of my life took place during the two and a half years I spent as a young scholar studying, living, working, and traveling in Southeast Asia. At the time, I found it difficult to translate this profound experience into my own pedagogical practice. It wasn't until after reflecting on this time abroad that I truly understood the value of experiential learning.

I have come to recognize that two specific facets of my life in Southeast Asia were particularly useful toward allowing me to not only learn from my experiences, but to ultimately transfer those lessons into positive future endeavors. These aspects include the high degree to which I was engaged in those encounters and the uniqueness of those experiences compared my previous experience in traditional educational forums. Having taken the time to consider the powerful impact that engaging in such unique, inspired experiences had on my own learning outcomes, I continuously strive to reconstruct a similar experiential learning environment for my students. As a result, I integrate an engaging, student-centered, and creativity-inducing approach to the contemporary management courses I teach.

My Philosophical Approach

My teaching philosophy is most related to that of David Kolb's theory of experiential learning¹. Students engaged in experiential learning directly participate in concrete activities (e.g. case studies, group projects, or simulated work experiences), and then have the opportunity to critically analyze and reflect on those experiences through class discussions or debates, individually written reflection exercises, or similarly insightful debriefing activities. Learning through experience is the natural thought language that we tend to use in our daily lives. As such, experiential learning is taught in a mode in which students naturally learn. The natural character of experiential learning allows for greater transferability and application of the lessons to other situations outside of the classroom. Further, the variety of experiences associated with this type of experiential learning tends to meet the needs of diverse learners.

¹ Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Teaching the Subject

Although experiential learning lessons take greater effort to prepare than some less involved teaching methods, they tend to promote higher levels of student engagement. Furthermore, students generally have more fun participating in experiential learning. The result is that students not only learn important fundamental lessons, but they also have the opportunity to actively experiment with their insights about each topic, thus developing their abilities to apply the lessons to situations outside of the classroom.

My goal is to create an engaging, student-centered, and creativity-inducing learning environment. To achieve these learning outcomes, I structure my course learning objectives to encompass critical thinking and application of skills. In order to realize this goal, I strive to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to such learning. A climate of trust and commitment in my classroom helps to create an environment in which students are empowered to aid in the construction of the learning environment. Subsequently, student and teacher discussions unfold as the students actively experience, reflect upon, and analyze the subject topic. While engaged in such discussions with my students and while leading the students through reflective debriefings, I am constantly aware that in my position as an instructor I can have a profound positive or negative influence on the students' learning experience. I continually monitor my behaviors and decisions via objective means (such as student evaluations and student performance) and subjective measures (such as informal discussions with students and peers). All of these mechanisms offer me opportunities to reflect and build self-awareness so that I can better contribute to a positive, balanced, and fundamentally beneficial classroom experience.

I understand that all students learn differently. As an instructor, I meet the individual learning needs of diverse learners by offering a wide assortment of learning methods in each of my courses. Students engage in a variety of class-wide, group-oriented, and individual exercises. Class-wide discussions and debates are supplemented by team-level problem solving exercises, group deliberations, and group presentations/teaching opportunities. Individual intellectual activities including case study analysis, self-assessment opportunities, and reflective written development planning further enhance student ownership of the lessons. By offering students such a variety of means by which to learn, I am able to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to find meaning in, and connect to, the lesson topics in their own individual way.

Conclusion

My teaching philosophy promotes complete learner exploration of the subject matter. This method relies on students taking an active role in their learning. For this reason, I strive to provide an environment that fosters trust and in which students have the confidence to share their ideas without fear of reprisal or rejection. As course instructor, I will ideally act primarily as a facilitator, assisting students to achieve both the course learning objectives and their own individual learning goals.

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