

**Philosophy of Teaching I: Why I Teach Philosophy**

Since the Socratic method, Philosophy has been cast with the stigma of being a potent instructional catalyst for the loftiest thoughts of the human mind – with virtually no applicability to practical life. This perception remains even today, perpetuated by the declarations of influential public leaders that humanities graduates “have little hope of contributing to society in a meaningful way.” I believe, though, that Philosophy has a place in every life, and that the genuine value of Philosophy is achieved only when it becomes part of a person’s daily life.

I teach Philosophy because I think Philosophy is important; it is something worth teaching, and something which should play a greater role in the lives of most people. Philosophy *is* a potent instructional catalyst for the loftiest thoughts of the human mind and this is intrinsically applicable to practical life.

It is important that people reflect on their own lives, their own environment, their own culture, their own values and their own practices. People who do not engage in this practice go through life unconsciously and the unreflective life is not worth living. It is important that people be able to identify tangible and immediate problems. People lacking this skill will lack focus and be unable to prioritize. It is important that people think, and think critically, when reaching informed decisions and forming educated opinions. People who do not have these skills cannot be trusted to make reliable and sound judgements. It is important that people be able to work together, organising their thoughts, communicating their views, articulating and, if necessary, speaking to their reasons for those views. People who do not possess these abilities will be unable to influence others and effect real change in the world. It is important that people be able to cultivate novelty in meaningful circumstances. People without this talent will stagnate.

Yet, just as we can only express, but not impart, our enthusiasm and love for a subject, so too novelty, creativity in thought, and inspiration, *cannot* be taught. Neither can they be mechanized or systematized. Rather, having set the ground in understanding, we can only hope to provide a structured, fertile, learning-rich environment in which it can emerge, develop and flourish. Creativity coupled with understanding – when practised successfully, this is the attainment of a philosophical ability.

It becomes our task, as educators, to answer the unique challenge of imparting these abilities while providing a basis in Philosophy. As teachers of Philosophy, it is our task to help our students understand not only the relevance of those quintessentially philosophical skills within a contemporary, corporatist culture, but also to appreciate the relevance of Philosophy as a practice in and of itself to their own lives.

**Philosophy of Teaching II: How I Teach Philosophy**

*I teach Philosophy for students.* I conceive of learning as the result of a situated, interactive and developmental process. Effectiveness in teaching, then, depends on an understanding of that process at an individual level. Thus, when planning a course, I set course-learning goals with view to the educational goals and learning styles of a diverse group of students, envisioning how course-skills and course-content will affect students in their other courses and after degree completion.

*I teach Philosophy with inspiration.* Typically, students who turn to Philosophy bring inspiration with them – a curiosity characterized by openness and creativity. In teaching Philosophy, I challenge this inspiration with learning-problems in a classroom environment where problems are faced together, and solutions are inclusive and require co-operation.

*I teach Philosophy with reason.* We live in a world of diversity – of culture and values, practices and identities. Often, students react to diversity with a relativism (or subjectivism) which neither engenders genuine tolerance nor provokes a sincere critical examination of their own views. Building on the diversity of the classroom community, I teach a tolerance of reason founded on sensitivity, understanding, reflection, communication and openness to change.

*I teach Philosophy with application.* Often, the subject matter of Philosophy does not fit with the expectations of today's students. To meet this challenge, I teach Philosophy by distinguishing its method from its content. Content becomes clear as method is understood, and method is understood through its application. Genuine understanding occurs when one can recognize the relevance, meaning, application and significance of knowledge to a situation.

*I teach Philosophy with relevance.* We live in a society that perpetually relies on the ingenuity and inventiveness of humanity. Yet, understanding is the foundation of originality, for creativity loosed from the world is frivolity. By teaching students to apply philosophical methods to the familiar, I seek not only to make the subject matter of Philosophy more approachable to them, but to promote their realization of its inherent relevance in the business of daily life.

*I teach Philosophy with reflection.* Finally, since I believe that learning how to teach effectively is an ongoing process, I feel that it is crucial to actively maintain a reflective and progressive attitude towards my own teaching. Ultimately methods, attitudes, practices and goals must be re-evaluated in the light of experience. Working both from student feedback and from my own reflections, I continually compare, re-evaluate and revise my own teaching methods and techniques. I revise my practices in light of my philosophy and my philosophy of teaching in light of the results of my practice.