

**The Click of the Door: My Teaching Philosophy**

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Imagine the click of an opening door as a student steps into a new classroom. A mix of butterflies, wariness, excitement, relief, confidence or overwhelm may arise as they carefully choose a seat and set eyes upon the instructor for the first time. As I put down my student backpack and prepare to step into the classroom as an instructor, I am challenged to examine my reasoning for crossing the threshold from student to teacher. In the pages to follow, I will share the cornerstone philosophies that will guide that transition to ensure a successful and meaningful experience for both the students and myself from the first time the classroom door clicks opens to the last.

A guiding quote that I have framed on my office wall from the extraordinary author, actress, poet, civil rights activist, and professor Maya Angelou states, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” I believe this sentiment will be a north star, my “why” in creating a classroom environment rooted in trust, open communication, and kindness. I believe students learn best when they feel welcomed, comfortable, supported, and safe. Curating this type of classroom while holding high standards requires intentional implementation of a clear teaching philosophy. In her book *Teaching Communication and Media Studies*, Jan Fernback (2015) states that a teaching philosophy is an important first step in articulating a vision for what can be accomplished in the classroom and in the curriculum. My teaching philosophy aligns most closely with an Ignatian pedagogical approach, best outlined by the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm.

Ignatian pedagogy encourages the education of the whole student, also described as “cura personalis” or the inclusion of the body, mind, and spirit. The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm

focuses on the need to educate “the whole person, head and heart, intellect and feelings” resulting in “a person who exhibits precision of thought, eloquence of speech, moral excellence, and social responsibility” (Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy, n.d). This pedagogical approach, coupled with the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm components of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation, is an extension of the practice of an examen that I have adopted as part of my daily prayer routine.

In my current career as the Director of Public Affairs for a large law enforcement agency, I instruct a 40-hour course on Effective Communication for Law Enforcement. We start the course by telling the students, comprised of law enforcement officers from every rank within the Department, that this is a safe environment and learning is not a linear activity that demands perfection. We then tell the students that mistakes will be a stepping stone to learn and do better at the next opportunity. Stating this expectation from the outset encourages a classroom environment where learning is occurring and students are motivated to improve throughout the course. I plan to carry that same sentiment into a college classroom, through the utilization of a variety of learning outcomes and reflective activities.

Fernback (2015) outlines John Dewey’s pedagogical initiative of active learning, wherein learning is an active activity, not a “stand and deliver” method of teaching. This initiative helps students learn by participating in learning activities rather than merely receiving information (p. 11). Active learning through learning activities will be developed based on what knowledge and abilities I want the students to walk away from the class with at the end of the semester. Professor Kim Bissell at the College of Communication at the University of Alabama says it best- “I try to think about where I want my students to end up at the end of the semester and then back it up from there” (Fernback, 2015, p. 72).

Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive activities provides the framework for instructional scaffolding, which seeks to support a learner through progression of cognitive development that enables problem solving with tools or processes or strategies (Fernback, 2015, p. 59-60). I love the visual of instructional scaffolding, imagining my instructor role as mentoring the student to build a scaffolding to support their experiences and provide the tools needed for the student to dynamically construct knowledge. Then, as the student takes what they have learned, the scaffolding is pulled away to reveal a clearer and brighter version of what was there before, an improved structure to uphold their personal beliefs and experiences. This will include the need for students to challenge their own viewpoints through collaborative sharing of ideas among students in the classroom.

I see my instructor role as a mentor and facilitator of the sharing of ideas and experiences between myself and the students, and between the students themselves. Fernback (2015) astutely describes knowledge creation as "a process that evolves from experience" (p. 58). I want to provide the opportunity for students to learn from my experience, and also learn from one another's experience and through analyzing their own experience. Then, after experience is shared and reflected on through writing prompts, students will be moved to action through creating. This approach is supported by the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm's emphasis on the continuous cycle of learning which urges students to move beyond knowledge to action (Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy, n.d).

Obstacles in the classroom are inevitable, and as a professor I will have the opportunity to shape how obstacles are viewed and overcome. Personally, I view obstacles as growth opportunities for learning to occur. This mindset will be shared with students through personal examples provided throughout the teaching material. Anticipated obstacles with material or assignments will also be shared with students during the course, along with a recommended

course of action. This will bring real-time opportunities to practice the Jesuit concept of “cura personalis” or educating the whole person body, mind and spirit.

The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm’s final step is evaluation. I see this as both the instructor’s evaluation of the student through grading, and the student’s evaluation of the course and the instructor. Beyond simple reflection, the Ignatian approach prescribes opportunities for students to reflect on “what they did well and what they should do differently; but additionally, they need to evaluate WHY things worked or did not work as planned” (Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy, n.d.). As the instructor, grading rubrics will be provided for students as assignments are introduced. As Fernback (2015) eloquently states, teachers do not assign grades; students earn grades (p. 92). Grading rubrics will clearly communicate to students what is expected and how they can earn a particular grade through their effort. I also believe that instructor feedback on discussion boards and writing assignments throughout the entirety of the course is essential, and I will provide thoughtful and constructive feedback starting from the first assignment through the last.

Diversity and inclusion are an important part of the classroom environment. I will strive to be an inclusive educator and highlight that differences exist and should be celebrated, not tolerated. This will be accomplished by bringing in a variety of material from theorists and authors with wide-ranging backgrounds and philosophies, and asking students to think critically about how their own experiences shape their view of the material and the world around them. Outside of the classroom, I plan to build connections and cultivate diversity through affiliation with organizations that serve historically under-represented communities.

Creating a safe space inside and outside of the classroom hinges heavily on awareness and kindness. As a professor, I intend to promote these cornerstones as the basis for learning. By

becoming more aware of ourselves, others, and the world around us and approaching differences with kindness, we will become life-long learners. This does not mean that students will always agree with me or with one another. We will practice how to agree and disagree with kindness by focusing on facts, using “I” statements, and finding the good in the other person’s point of view. Building awareness and kindness is an endeavor that will never cease. It is a muscle that we will flex frequently in the hopes that in the future, the strength of awareness and kindness will be easier to access when needed most.

When the door clicks closed on the last day of class, it is my hope and intention that communications students who pass through will leave feeling confident in their improved communications skills and experience, connected to myself and their fellow students, and pride both in the grade they have earned and the lessons they have learned.

## References

- Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy. (n.d.). *What is Ignatian Pedagogy?* Loyola University Chicago. Retrieved January 20, 2022, from <https://www.luc.edu/fcip/ignatianpedagogy/whatisignatianpedagogy/>
- Fernback, J. (2015). *Teaching communication and media studies: Pedagogy and practice*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.