

As a teacher, I am first of all a learner. Therefore, over time, my teaching philosophy changes and grows, though certain traits take prominence. In addition to the combination of predictability and creativity in the classroom, I believe that knowledge grows through interacting with others (community is vital for effective learning).

While I pursued my doctorate in Applied Mathematics at Michigan State, I also taught most of the six years I was there. Although I had the label of an assistant, in practice I was fully responsible for all aspects of the classroom as an instructor. I prepared and presented all lectures, held office hours, prepared and graded assignments, quizzes, and exams. I assigned final course grades as well. Some of this work was done in collaborative teams with supervisors and fellow instructors to ensure consistency across sections of the same course, while some of it I performed entirely on my own. During the six years at Michigan State, I also tutored a full range of undergraduate mathematics classes, from developmental courses on up to junior and senior level courses.

At Michigan State, I attended a few teaching workshops on my own initiative and asked questions of colleagues in education. At the first workshop, I learned much, including one truth that has become the most pivotal part of my understanding and practice of pedagogy. Teaching, the workshop leader informed us, is not presenting information to your students. Rather, it is a conversation with your students. This one lesson transformed my teaching. I did not need to pass all the information into the students like robots. Rather I needed to talk *with* them about mathematics as clearly as possible: we were a team and community, not machines.

As I progressed in teaching, I branched out from simply lecturing to include group work and student presentations. Meanwhile, I attended another teaching workshop on group discussion and evaluation. I discovered the importance of evaluating my students' presentations and providing them with a rubric in advance, and this importance was confirmed as I saw my students improve in confidence and presentation content. I also discovered how occasionally breaking the class into smaller groups allowed the students to learn from each other and approach me with questions more willingly. Finally, outside of workshops, I learned much from a colleague in education who researched how students learn calculus. She sought research subjects among my students, we discussed difficulties and successes that our students had, and I provided feedback on her research papers and presentations. I simultaneously understood more effective ways of explaining certain concepts and the importance of the teacher's vocabulary on students' learning. While I did not consciously seek to incorporate her research results into my classroom, I found that exposing myself to these ideas caused me to teach and tutor more effectively and attentively.

After completing my doctorate in mathematics, I wished to combine my interest in mathematics with Russian language, so I explored foreign language translation of scientific texts. Somehow I always ended up in a teaching role, where I continued to learn more about effective teaching and realized that I thrive when I interact with people. First, I taught Russian language at Kent State University for a year. There I also took a course

---

on college teaching of foreign languages. I learned more creative ways of facilitating student learning, such as addressing multiple intelligences. While I enjoyed the freedom and creativity of teaching a language, I missed teaching mathematics, and I contemplated how I might incorporate some of these creative techniques in a mathematics course, since mathematics is much more fluid and creative than many people realize.

Subsequently, I served through AmeriCorps as a recreational coordinator for individuals with developmental disabilities. I learned how to interact with and organize recreational events for individuals with differing levels of mental and physical function. The work was similar to preparing lectures, except I considered a broader range of needs, and the events were always unpredictable. Even educational events such as nutrition classes or science nights were far from boring. Additionally, all of the work was team-based, with anywhere from three to 20 colleagues working together on each event. I learned the effectiveness and contagiousness of being comfortably silly but still in charge of a situation. I learned flexibility, creativity, and spontaneity, yet perhaps the most salient lesson that I learned was about the capabilities of the individuals we served. I soon recognized that most of these individuals were far more intelligent than anyone gave them credit for. With patience, kindness, and a good dose of stubbornness, I could often persuade them to accomplish tasks that they and others were not certain they were capable of performing. I believe that this observation holds true for any of us, especially in mathematics, where much of the challenge lies in overcoming the initial paralyzing assumption about mathematics' difficulty.

Currently, at Stark State, I mesh the ideas that I have learned from other jobs and fields to teach more excellently within mathematics, my field of expertise. On the first day of class, my students and I introduce ourselves, including one talent at which we excel, in order to begin fostering that sense of community and to remind students who feel intimidated by math that they are skilled individuals. I do my best to learn everyone's names within the first two weeks of class. On review days, my students do a group assignment during class together. I carefully organize groups of students with complementary strengths and who might not normally work together in order to facilitate both diverse relationships and exposure to different ways of understanding mathematics. While most of my lectures are predictable (important for the students' sense of security) and follow guided notes that I provide the students to fill in during class, I occasionally incorporate more creative methods. Sometimes I use blocks, songs, and silly ideas (such as pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, to my students' great mortification!) to illustrate mathematical concepts and introduce creativity into the classroom. Both adult learners and high school CCP learners equally enjoy these tidbits. I am not by nature a glamorous entertainer, but I value moments of fun in the midst of hard work.

Every technique I employ as a teacher has grown from learning small (and sometimes hidden) steps that add up over time. Most of all, I aim for consistency in my presentations and grading, clear expectations for students, introducing changes gradually both for my own sake and the students', learning about not only teaching strategies but also my students' lives, connecting students with each other and college resources, and keeping a sense of humor. I look forward to continuing to do what I love: interact with and help other people to succeed, especially in the area of mathematics.