

Teaching Philosophy

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In every class I teach, regardless of the specific learning objectives for a particular course, I strive to develop a classroom environment where students are able to find their voices, speak their minds and learn to listen closely and openly to each other. A classroom where students are able to speak and listen effectively matters to me as a teacher because it creates a setting where learning becomes collaborative, generous, and generative. This is a setting where it's possible to take risks and learn, even when (especially when!) the risks fail. This is also a setting where students take ownership of their education and hold each other accountable for what happens in the classroom. When students are able to speak and listen effectively, the classroom becomes a place that is both welcoming and challenging.

Over the twenty-five years that I have been teaching, I have learned that speaking and listening skills take time for students to develop. This development time influences how I approach specific course objectives, expectations and assignments. For example, on the first day of the Effective Speech (CAS 100) courses I teach, I have students working in groups to identify questions about the syllabus including the objectives, assignments, evaluation and policies. Student spend the first half of that class session sharing their thoughts and concerns about the course with each other; in the second half, together, they share their thoughts and concerns with me. They learn that they are not the only ones who have some anxiety about a speech course. They learn that as a group they can ask questions they might hesitate to ask on their own. They learn that one person's question can generate others. They begin, in other words, to talk, to listen and to learn from each other.

When I teach an upper level course like Communication and Conflict Resolution (CAS 404), I can expect students to have experiences as college students that will shape the way they speak and listen in class. As such, on the first day, students are working together to develop policies that they will abide by throughout the term. Impassioned discussions about these policies occur during the first week of the semester—discussions that begin to establish the class climate and norms. Students who at first do not convey much interest in the discussion often become vocal advocates as the policies get established.

Effective speaking and listening help to create a collaborative approach to learning, which is why fostering these skills serve as the cornerstones to my philosophy of teaching.