Teaching Philosophy of Dr. Jo Ann Jankoski

My philosophy of education has changed since I stepped into the classroom. Initially, I believed that lecturing was "teaching"; after all, that was the method used in many of my university classes. Through self-reflection, interaction with colleagues in and outside the Penn State system, and feedback from students, my philosophy has changed and will continue to change to meet the challenges of a constantly evolving profession in which I and my students will work. As an educator, I practice self-reflection and help my students to be reflective learners. That being said, my current philosophy of education is the one I present below.

Although I incorporate a variety of theories and strategies, the relationships I have with my students is at the center of my philosophy. Teaching goes beyond the bricks and mortar. I am not a conduit whereby their heads are filled with facts; rather it is my responsibility to inspire, encourage, challenge, and bring real-world experiences into the classroom while moving the learning experience beyond the walls of my institution.

I utilize the Theory of Constructivism, where my students and I are partners in a collaborative environment in which we construct knowledge through personal experiences. I also practice Progressivism, whereby I and my students promote improving ourselves and society through self-discovery and creativity as I guide and challenge them to engage in problem-solving, self-reflection, critical thinking, increased competency, and the practice of social justice and diversity in our field and their personal lives. To accomplish this, I seek opportunities for students to engage with our community. They have participated in the Point-in-Time count each January in which we locate and identify homeless individuals. The students also engage with our local Human Trafficking Taskforce to educate our community regarding modern day slavery, and they work with at-risk youth with histories of abuse. I develop my classes with a focus on teaching my students those skills necessary to be successful within the human service profession, to always participate in the process of self-discovery, and to enhance their interpersonal relationships with the aim of improving themselves and society.

My students will touch and be touched by individuals who are homeless, victims of abuse, near the end of life, have special needs, or are juvenile delinquents, members of the LGBTQ community, suicidal, and so much more. We journey together to enhance our social consciousness and change this weary world. I teach with passion, a passion I have for my subject area, my students, and the clients we all serve. As Aristotle once said, "Educating the mind without educating one's heart is no education at all."

I believe in a skill-based assessment in which I evaluate both myself and my students. Evaluation is a recursive process whereby I constantly examine my methods—Am I reaching everyone? Do I explain skills correctly? Do I believe in what I am teaching? —and the learned skills of my students—Can they demonstrate learned skills required for entry-level positions? Are they able to identify and synthesize information?

Believing that students learn best when there is a concrete objective to be met, I have been a co-researcher with my students. In one study, they conducted qualitative interviews to determine the social conditions of Fayette County. Additionally, I bring actual case studies to my students, invite individuals from the human service field, have students interact with individuals diagnosed with a mental illness, and discuss the importance of recovery. I have my students both audio- and videotape themselves in various scenarios so they can learn about themselves and the gifts they bring to the field of Human Services. By reviewing these tapes, they can learn from their experiences.

I am accountable to my students as they will be accountable to their clients. I constantly assess my teaching and my students' performances and make changes accordingly.