

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY Laura Epperson

I love to teach because I love to learn. Whether in an undergraduate course, a professional learning workshop, or an elementary dual-language classroom, I walk away from every class I lead with a deeper understanding of something I thought I knew, ready to explore a question I never thought to ask. Regardless of the context, I think of myself as a co-learning guide who provides provocations and structures while asking participants to co-construct intentions and meaning. In this way, I have developed the following core beliefs about teaching and learning.

I believe in care and connection. Inspired by feminist theory and critical pedagogy, I approach learning as a social process in which interdependent co-learners discover ways of understanding and being in the world. Current brain science research further articulates that a sense of belonging is necessary in order for a learner to access their full capacity to grow and thrive. In all classes, I prioritize collective investment, accountability, and support through collaborative group agreements, daily check-ins, and regular ensemble exercises. Across projects and topics, learners and I make connections to our lives and each other as we build a community of practice that centers collective care and commitment.

I believe in play and performance. As a teaching artist, I view creative experimentation and embodied expression as powerful tools in developing curiosity, connection, and growth. No matter the context, I use multi-disciplinary arts-based strategies to explore content. By positioning learners as collaborative artists I invite them to practice presence, empathy, and resilience while co-constructing meaning and understanding. Through games and strategies that activate the mind-body-heart connection, learners and I practice how to engage with each other and the world as our full selves.

I believe in relevancy and rigor. Guided by the wisdom of culturally responsive pedagogues, I work to create learning environments in which diverse individuals are valued, supported, and challenged. In curating content, I seek to offer learners windows through which they engage with experiences different from their own, as well as mirrors in which they see themselves reflected and affirmed. When designing assignments and assessments, I balance high expectations with high support by collaborating with learners to identify and measure mutually desired outcomes.

I believe in curiosity and creativity. In every class and workshop, I embrace inquiry-based learning design while centering flexibility and choice. By structuring exploration around guiding questions, I encourage learners to pursue their own interests and ideas as they critically engage with material. I recognize that in both art-making and learning, there is freedom within structure, so I provide specific elements and clear steps for practical projects. Through these methods, learners cultivate their authentic curiosity and creative impulses.

I believe in reflection and reciprocity. Employing a constructivist approach, I invite learners and myself to engage as both student and teacher as we build new understanding through experience and exchange. In this way, each person's prior knowledge and unique viewpoint shapes how we make meaning together. Through ongoing reflective exercises, learners and I pose questions, make personal connections, and consider multiple perspectives. Together we build an interconnected learning culture in which we approach moments of difference and disagreement as opportunities to deepen understanding and growth.