

## Teaching Philosophy

I see teaching first as intellectual work. This, to me, means that my teaching needs to be grounded in an intellectual home, my discipline. Disciplinary knowledge is crucial to any theorizing of teaching; were it not so, teaching would become mere technique, a repertoire of tricks that would have no meaning. Ideally, a pedagogical practice will arise from and draw energy and liveliness from disciplinary knowledge, in a dialectical relationship. Practically, this suggests that as I know and come to know within my discipline, ways of teaching will develop from that knowledge; as I teach, new ways of knowing will develop from that teaching. Another consequence of the idea of teaching as intellectual work is that I will always be making new knowledge. I believe that the best teachers are always deeply involved in the making of new knowledge. Here is where teaching and learning are so closely intertwined: the province of knowledge-making is the province of learning. Ultimately, the role of teacher and learner become ontologically less and less distinct.

I see teaching as an act of response. This idea is perhaps a consequence of my discipline, since writing is always called for, elicited, and responded to. I have, in learning about the nature of discourse, spent a lot of time and thought inventing and reinventing ways of responding to the writing that students bring to class in response to the assignments I write. But the act of giving feedback, responding to drafts or inventions or portfolios or poems or stories, is in many ways a metaphor for the multiple kinds of responding that go on in classrooms. Everything we do—students or teachers—in our classrooms is a discourse, a language. My task as a teacher, as a person trying to be as fully present as possible in those classrooms, is to attend thoughtfully and conscientiously to the discourse of my students: their attentions and inattentions, remarks and failures to remark, their readings and failures to read—their discursive selves. As I respond, as I read them, I make continual meaning; from class, I learn how to learn from my students.

I see teaching as invention. Again, this idea stems from my discipline: invention was one of the ancient rhetorical canons taught by Aristotle, the means of putting together arguments and evidences. A word I often use with my students as part of their growing rhetorical vocabulary is *heuristic*: from the Greek *heuriskein*, to discover. An heuristic is a tool for discovery, a means for thinking through a problem in writing or reading in order to develop answers, ideas, new knowledge. Teaching is an act of discovery, a continual transformation of itself—when it's good. The worst kind of teaching, the kind I dread, particularly when I find myself doing it, is teaching things doggedly, the same again and again. Teaching is work, but it is not the work of factories. Teaching is liveliest and best when it shows me something new as I am engaged in its good labor: helping someone else see something