Teaching Statement

Teaching is an art, one that creates an independent student who can think and function on his/her own. It is a dance, one that flawlessly weaves rigorous, relevant, and relational steps into a strong and beautiful performance. It is a calling, one that should bring out the best in both the student and the educator. Teaching is one of the most difficult of professions, but it is one that offers far-reaching rewards.

The ultimate goal of teaching is the students’ independence, so to that end, one of the most important aspects of their success is their right to fail. Because much can be learned from failure, the best teachers build that possibility into the syllabus, allowing the students the freedom to experiment, perhaps even go beyond the bounds of the prescribed curriculum. Fortunate is the teacher whose students ask, “What if I try this?” Maybe the “this” is something even the teacher has not yet considered, opening new possibilities for a topic which may have seemed “old hat.” Even if the finished work falls short of the student’s expectation, their creative thought or approach has merit and should be applauded. Grades should not be based entirely on outcome; one poor assignment should not a final C make.

To assist students in gaining independence, strong teachers create clear learning goals, achievable through rigorous and relevant assignments which not only challenge and intrigue students, but also take into consideration the diversity in students’ background, interests, and ability. No assignment should be mindless or rote; an A should require a fair amount of effort, but not be limited to the top percentage on a bell curve; all students do not need to work on the exact same assignments at the exact same time. Allowing students to pursue individual paths to the same goal creates an interesting and dynamic classroom.

Perhaps the most aspect of successful teaching is the relationship between the student and the teacher. The best teachers know their students well, recognizing that they are educating the whole person and realizing that no two students and no two classrooms are exactly alike. The best teachers care about their students and what happens to them outside of the classroom. These teachers listen and share their lives, knowing that the trust built is crucial to the students’ acceptance of constructive criticism and their ultimate success.

Teaching is not for the faint of heart. It is an art that requires “heart and nerve and sinew/ to serve your turn long after they are gone,” but it produces work that continues its own creation in the life of each student.