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Teaching Philosophy

Poet Alexander Pope warned that, “dullness is ever apt to magnify.” My growth as an educator has coincided with a sharpening sense of when to mix methods, introduce novelty, and facilitate rather than direct. Knowing what, why, and how to change is a most insightful position, and, in my six years in higher education, I have fervently assessed and gathered data on my programs to make significant curriculum improvements. As a result, both have become better at preparing students. Likewise, in my courses, students encounter instructional variety, engage with emerging topics, apply best practices, and complete creative and critical assignments. As a result, in 2016, I received a dean’s award for teaching at Northwest Missouri State and art educator of the year for the higher education division of the Missouri Art Education Association.

In addition to innovation in the classroom, the awards also recognized my drive to collaborate and build connections. For my methods courses, I have successfully organized six-week field experiences at local schools. Students observe and assist before planning, implementing, and completing performance assessments on original lessons. Cooperating teachers and I provide feedback at each step, model practices, and impart professional advice. Furthermore, my approach to teaching features an experiential pedagogy in which learning and practice are intimately tied. Students in my elementary art class practice art criticism by leading classmates on a tour at the Southern Utah Museum of Art (SUMA). Furthermore, my art education students run an after-school art program, and, most remarkably, students in my museum studies course complete projects linked to the needs of local organizations. My students have cataloged a 70-piece art collection for the public library; created interactive installations and interpretive materials for SUMA; and written a grant for a theater company. In each case, I challenge my students to apply new skills and knowledge.

In graduate school, I worked alongside an inspiring Native American peer who studied the concept of “giving back” and its pull on college-educated natives in the professional class – those who had the means to leave but decided to either work, live, or volunteer back on reservation lands. Her work gave a name to a formless feeling within me. In my homeland of Appalachia, the most palpable impulse is “getting out,” but as a museum educator, K-12 teacher, and professor, I have built an identity around “giving back” – through teaching, research, and service. Teaching is the art of not only innovation, collaboration, and facilitation, but also humanness. In my courses, I promote meaningful, focused work and emphasize self-care and social responsibility. As a result, I have watched my students convert to active learners, deep thinkers, creative problem solvers, *and* caring individuals. That is what I want for and expect from my students, and art, with its poetic and pensive qualities, is a superb subject to engage minds, inspire introspection, and transform individuals and communities.