

How I Teach

As a teacher who is a practitioner, an art therapist and counselling psychotherapist, with no formal training in teaching, and as a teacher in subjects in which relationship is of the very essence, I place a high value on my relationships with my students.

This means I teach face-to-face and personally, and prefer not to use formulaic structures or teaching aids like powerpoint presentations. While I'm careful to follow the content of my subject's session plans, I also follow my intuition, my 'reading' of the class in the moment, moving with their energy and valuing spontaneity and improvisation in class activities. In my experience, this makes for a lively classroom - lively meaning 'alive' and 'real' - in which there may be moments of silence, or soulful teary depths, or may be filled with movement, fun and joyous laughter.

I had a teacher in secondary school who was energetically alive to his subject - mathematics - and to his students, and was filled with energy and enthusiasm. He treated his subject as if it was a constant source of fascination and treated his students as if they really mattered to him. This was an expansive experience, and he is my role-model as a teacher.

This means I prefer a small class, of say up to 12 students sitting in a circle, the form of which speaks to equality. Lecturing from behind a podium as if I am an 'expert' looking down on the class is 'not me'. Walking around the room engaging with students 'is me'. I want to know my students and know what my students think and how they are responding to whatever the class is engaging with. Connecting personally with my students is what I do naturally, so that while I may be engaging the whole group I am also moving around and focussing in, one-on-one.

I try to create an emotionally safe class-room space, in fact, consistent appreciative feedback from students tells me I manage to do this quite well. They tell me I care, and I know that I do. Caring has been a constant feature of my professional life, as a pharmacist working in drug and alcohol rehab, as a theatre director, as an art therapist and psychotherapist, and now as a teacher. It gives me great pleasure to see people grow and to be part of their process of growth. To this effect, my mastery is focussed in my interpersonal skills and capacity for love.

I believe I have never lost my sense of wonder at the world, my curiosity, my enthusiasm for life, creativity, and learning. I take that energy with me into the classroom, reading beyond my subject and bringing what I find to my students. All this is how my pedagogy intersects with the Ikon curriculum.

I read in every spare moment. I love the use of language, the sound of it in my mind, and often read aloud to hear the words. Speech is different to everyday talking, and as a theatre director, I spent a lot of time developing the capacity for speech in my untrained actors, encouraging them to 'let the light shine' through the spaces between their words. When I read, it is usually in psychology, science, sociology, evolutionary theory and philosophy. I also write, usually poetry, but have had a play I wrote performed in the 2014 Fringe Festival.

The important thinkers in my intellectual development are: Homer (The Odyssey), Steven Pinker, Darwin, Freud, Daniel Siegel, Marks-Tarlow, Ernest Becker, Anthony Giddons, Richard Dawkins, Adam Phillips, Daniel Dennett, Jessica Benjamin, Thomas Moore, Pat Ogden, Janina Fisher, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, James Hillman, James Hollis, Irvin Yalom, Robert Neimeyer, James Pennebaker, W. J. T. Mitchell, Norman Brown, Emmy Van Deurzen, Daniel Stern, Anais Nin, Borges, Mary Shelley, and Christopher Lasch.

David Champion