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Teaching Philosophy: Co-creating Meaningful Academic Experiences

My father didn't finish high school and my mother completed less than one year of college. I grew up in poverty and getting an education was my way to break that cycle. What has shaped me as a facilitator is the same philosophy that has shaped me in life: you do the best you can with the information that you have at the moment, so take risks, make mistakes, and this creates success sooner than later. In life, the more you experience, the more you grow. In writing, the more you put on paper, the better your work.

The authors and professors who I resonate with and influenced me most in Graduate school were: Peter Elbow and his thoughts on how to create more content and writer confidence; John Dawkins who highlights rethinking and creating meaning-based punctuation; those who include low to high-stakes writing methods and value natural language as well as academic speak. I appreciate these scholars because they understand theory must be put into practice to be truly useful to all students.

Cost of living and education are expensive, time is precious, and technologically-advanced students measuring opportunity costs want to know how courses will serve their personal needs. My goal—pulling from my direct experience in the professional and academic worlds—is to share how writing fits in many situations and includes: collaborating with students one-on-one to understand their objectives, exploring how our co-facilitation benefits them through low-stakes writing, determining their optimal co-learning and co-teaching environments as audio, visual and kinesthetic learners, co-building individualized experiences that include understanding learning styles. This type of cooperation requires an administrator (me) to be clearly organized—providing when, what, why, and expectations—to maintain interest and high-energy partnerships (a strength found in my professional, civic activities, and academic work).

Before becoming an academic, I began my writing and communication work in the corporate world. I returned to academia to become a better mediator for independent writing students outside of academia (ages 30 plus), but my aha moments were revealed as my two oldest children attended undergraduate programs while I went to Graduate school. Our conversations became more academically thought-provoking; their 18 to 20-something friends began asking for mentoring. The more I experienced this age group personally and professionally, the fonder I became of the idea of co-learning with these savvy students.

My overall position as a facilitator is “if you can speak or think then you can write.” Communication, however, is imperfect, so you do the best you can with the information that you have at the moment. The more risks and mistakes, the more successes are experienced. Natural language and low-stakes writing open the gate to building confidence. Easing into additional styles of high-stakes communication and writing—like Standard Written English and professional voice—requires patience to further shape the foundation of speaking and writing more fluidly than when students walked through the door the first day. Co-creating meaningful academic experiences with clearly organized lesson plans and syllabi that fulfill individual

needs, manifests opportunities for all involved. These types of co-facilitation experiences become part of a whole, meaningful and empowering life resume, not just an academic portfolio.