

Michelle A. Payton

828-681-1728 | mamichellepayton@gmail.com

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: I do the best I can with the information that I have at the moment, so take risks, make mistakes, and this creates success sooner than later. In life, the more I experience, the more I grow. In writing, the more I put on paper, the better my work.

The authors in academia and educators I resonate with most are those who put theory into practice: Peter Elbow and his thoughts on how to create more content and writer confidence, John Dawkins who highlights how to rethink and create meaning-based punctuation, and educators 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 and time is precious, so students must measure opportunity costs and understand how courses serve their personal needs. My goal—pulling from my direct experience in the professional and academic worlds—is to share how critical thinking and writing fits in many situations. This also requires being authentic and available as an instructor, getting to know students on a personal yet professional level, collaborating with students one-on-one to understand their objectives, determining their optimal co-learning and co-teaching environments as audio, visual and kinesthetic learners, and co-building individualized experiences. This type of cooperation requires an administrator (me) to be clearly organized—providing what, when, and why expectations—to maintain interest and high-energy partnerships (strengths 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 and 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 academically focused students of all ages.

My overall position as a facilitator is “if one can speak or think then one can write.” Communication, however, is imperfect, so I do the best I can with the information that I 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 academic 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.