

Kathleen Bolter: Teaching Statement

To learn is a joyful experience, it is something we are born to do, reflexive in nature and instinctual by heritage. From the first moment we are born we develop the process of learning about our environment. As humans we are thinking, reasoning creatures. It is what gives us our sentience and our freedom. Each learning encounter, therefore, becomes an opportunity to expand ourselves in a multitude of dimensions. As an instructor, I try to be salient of this. The time that I have with students is time to help them to grow and develop as people. Therefore, I believe that there are several key features to helping students perform their best in the classroom. These include helping students relate their own experiences to the material, explore new ideas, and face their limitations.

Our ability to think, to reason, to imagine and to intuit enhances our ability to learn. We develop our learning potential by giving ourselves the freedom to think, as well as to consider what we think. Learning is a process of transferring knowledge from one area of experience to another. The individual is able to utilize the similarities which exist between experiences in order to gain insight to that which is novel in reality or actualized from imagination. Each experience teaches the individual how to incorporate what is evidenced through the senses into their construction of the reality of their world. Tapping into this experience is fundamental in helping students to relate to the material which is why I design exercises and assignments that help them personally see how what they are learning affects them. From looking at policies impact on their day to day lives to seeing the interconnections between all aspects of the global ecosystem, relating why the material is important to students is fundamental in furthering their understanding of what they are learning.

Taking what is known and applying it to what is unknown gives humanity the special ability to fill the gestalt with leaps of intuition, trial and error experience and transcendent knowing. It furnishes the liberty which allows each individual to engage in their own spontaneous manifestations (Montessori, 1912). When given the chance to explore that which is not known it is like being given the greatest gift on earth. My first impulse is to know – to pull it apart, to envision its use, to see it in the clarity of the big picture and to discover a multitude of uses for what is unknown. I believe given the opportunity most people relish the chance to explore new frontiers and seek out solutions they didn't even know they were capable of coming up with. In each of my classes I give students the opportunity to find solutions to real-world problems. These have been rewarding and eye-opening exercises as they leave the classroom with the confidence to implement real change in the world.

Many of us perceive our limitations more easily than we perceive our strengths and yet we become entrenched in the idea that our limitations define who or what we are. Facing that which we think limits us, allows for the continual development of self, much as a sense of accomplishment and achievement is allowed to flourish and grow. I believe many of us, if we make the attempt to do what frightens us the most will be successful and if not we will at least take a perspective from the experience that we may not have had before which will lead to a unique sense of who we are. That is why I believe that the classroom is an ideal environment for pushing people forward. An environment for confronting the walls that people put in front of themselves and tearing them down by teaching them the skills to do so. Whether it's public speaking, teaming up with exchange students to learn about their culture, or simply developing the ability to accept constructive criticism, I use my classroom as a conduit for helping students to learn to overcome their perceived limitations.

We learn that which we need to learn, when we need to learn it. Once learned it becomes a very real part of our being. Our minds never know too much, they want to be stretched to experience the infinite, another word for which is spirit; it yearns to be always new, to be young, to be learning, to be alive. Minds, all minds, have a right and desire to be stretched and to know wisdom itself. Sometimes, people just need a gentle push to get there.