

My Pedagogical Creed

by Martine Courant Rife, JD, PhD 2008

I believe that education and learning are ways of living, not bounded by the time frame of a semester.

I believe that learning takes place at both the individual and the group level, and that learning happens as the learner goes beyond their level of actual competency, into the zone of proximal development.

I believe that human learning presupposes a communal process and nature by which learners grow into the intellectual life around them. Learning takes place whether the teacher intends it to or not, and therefore the role of the teacher is to facilitate a certain kind of directed learning.

I believe that “student” is an artificial category especially with respect to writing in digital environments, and that my teaching is improved by the knowledge that “students” have complicated lives, navigate multiple identities, and are doing a great deal of writing in places and spaces other than my classroom or virtual course space.

I believe that whatever I spend time on in the course of a semester should be useful to learners in their everyday lives; I believe, therefore, that part of my skill, experience, and wisdom as a teacher should enable me to anticipate futures and possibilities that learners have yet to see. This ability to anticipate provides me with the opportunity to facilitate directed learning. A portion of this ability comes from staying in contact with learners who are no longer in my courses.

I believe that learning to learn by way of locating places for inquiry and places for research, is key to education.

I believe, therefore, that one of the most important things I teach is rhetorical invention. To invent, learners need spaces and time to play, imagine, problem solve, and reflect. In these inventional spaces, chaos, messiness, even temporary uneasiness, should be expected.

I believe that reflective writing is a crucial method that helps learners learn, and provides a means for me to assess whether learning has taken place in the way I had hoped. I also believe that reflective teachers are the best kind.

I believe that as a teacher, I have a certain calling, and through that calling I have dual responsibilities to the community and the individual learner. As a reflective teacher, I believe it important to be aware of this, and to always balance those two duties in a way that is responsible.

I believe because of the two duties to community and to individual learner, part of my job as a writing teacher is to facilitate the good citizenry of my learners. Good citizens are accountable, and I therefore believe evaluation of learners’ performances is a necessary component of their educational experience. I also expect my own performances as a teacher to be evaluated.

I believe that as a writing and rhetoric teacher, I should help learners become aware of the importance of audience, as well as the performative nature of writing. Because of this, learners need many opportunities to perform in multi-mediums, including oral, written, and multimedia.

I believe that every learner should be a participatory member in the intellectual life of the classroom-community, and I should facilitate those opportunities. The conversations, exchanges, and sharing that take place in the classroom, should be shaped by all the members, not just the teacher.