

# My Teaching Philosophy

---

**Corey Dressel**

I believe that learning is a voyage down a winding river, each of us traveling a unique path that changes around each corner. Sometimes the river is deep and the waters run calm and learning seems to fill us nearly effortlessly; while other times, the river twists in unexpected ways, revealing boulders and debris in our way as we plow head-long around obscure bends, doing everything we can just to keep afloat. Sometimes we drift in a misguided direction and are forced to portage over land to put our learning potential back on course. The teacher's role is to guide his or her students along this river of exploration, helping them to discover their own potential and opening students to the endless flow of possibilities. In developing the skills to navigate the river, my students discover their role as members of their community, thereby joining the on-going conversation.

By the end of the semester, my students are compelled—no longer by me—but by their own inner desire to discover, to learn, to grow. Throughout their journey of exploration, students are inspired by the learning process to engage more, using their learning as foundational building blocks, creating a solid platform of not just intellect and capability, but also interest and inquiry. My goal is to create an environment that encourages students to plumb the depths in the search for truth and meaning, to have the courage to put themselves out there in order to discover new ideas and knowledge, and develop academic skills alongside personal growth.

As students begin to take more and more responsibility to power their own journey they will unlock their own potential. Therefore, I take my position as their instructor as an opportunity to facilitate their self-discovery through research and investigation, intellectual curiosity and questioning, which can open up infinite possibilities and potential. Instead of assigning specific paper topics, I lead whole-class and small group discussions on their personally selected topics, wherein they are given the space and time to talk about their topics, discovering how they really feel about them and where their interests lie. Building their creation of ideas first upon the responses they get from peers and then upon outside research, students learn about the process of learning as much as they learn about their topic. All the while, I provide watchful guidance as to how to navigate the river of information on their own.

Along all parts of this journey, it is important that my students feel safe inside the classroom, knowing their ideas and opinions matter, knowing that they will not be judged, but also knowing that they need to reciprocate and provide that space of safety for their peers as well. Thus, learning becomes a communal effort as they develop the skills necessary to help each other and ask for help when they need it. It is most conducive to learning when there is a free

exchange of ideas and students have learned how to respectfully ask questions, enabling their peers—as well as themselves—an opportunity to clarify their thinking.

I believe that students should understand what will be expected of them no matter how difficult the challenge may be. To this end, I provide a carefully crafted and clearly structured syllabus, mapping their journey throughout the semester. I provide handouts that include outlines, examples, and resources, which help to clarify in-class and textual lessons and themes. In addition, I provide detailed rubrics for all written assignments that they complete.

Believing that there is more than one right way to navigate this river, I maintain a variety of examples that students are able to use as models. The diversity of the models presented to my students ensures that they will not fall into mechanized responses. Allowing their individual personalities to drive their learning encourages creativity and initiative. Versatility in employing teaching methodologies is imperative as I intend to reach all my students. I find an abundance of individualized comments on each student's work as well as personal conferences are the best ways to offer each student the greatest opportunity to hone their analysis and composition skills.

My students are encouraged to jump in with both feet. To encourage student-driven learning, I encourage risk taking, I lower the stakes on earlier assignments, and I give students opportunities for creative interpretation in assignments.

Instructors and students alike share the journey down this unpredictable, and yet, ever-changing and magnificent river. My role as teacher affords me an opportunity to share my navigational experience and my own quest for knowledge with those less experienced than I. The challenge of embarking on this journey, when taken on collectively, can be a driving force behind some of the most impassioned and inspired work of all time.