

My Teaching Philosophy

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“Fruitful teaching necessitates that we see the world through the eyes of our students.”

The cornerstone of my teaching philosophy is recognizing that students are as important to the teaching process as I am. I lead with high expectations and teach with a conscious mind. My objective is therefore to create a learning environment that supports a variety of learning modalities while strategically dismantling barriers that exist between the student-teacher relationship.

Students bring to the classroom different levels of attitude, aptitude, and motivation sometimes accompanied by a tremendous fear of taking math. Over the years I’ve learned that talking directly to individual students in a math classroom sometimes created a certain level of anxiety. Certainly is the case if I randomly ask a student to answer a question. Students simply do not want to be embarrassed in front of their peers and are often fearful of being put on the spot.

An essential quality to my teaching style requires mutual interaction between teacher and student rather than a one way projection of information. Opening lines of communication is essential to my philosophical view as I find that teaching to learn and learning to teach are critical elements of student success. I’ve learned many things about myself as a teacher by carefully listening to my students and analyzing their work. On occasion I’ve even read my semester’s lecture notes captured through the eyes of my own students.

This exchange of information is not limited to the classroom environment. As a matter of fact, my most informative conversations with my students have occurred prior to the beginning of the semesters. Meetings of this nature allow me the opportunity to present myself more as a mentor rather than that mean math instructor that they see on the first day of class. This then sets up a semester of sincere exchanges of information that foster new ideas for presenting lecture material and secondly allows a clearer assessment of student need. Defined student issues such as fear, ability, family obligations, and time constraints placed on working students, are among many factors that have led me to extend my teaching philosophy beyond classroom walls. For this reason I took on the challenge of developing a technological delivery system that could potentially meet my students’ needs.

In this pedagogical mode, my approach is to capture the advantages of the online learning environment while being mindful to the student perception of the cold and mechanical nature of seeing mathematics on a computer screen. It is my vision that this strategy will create a bridge leading to an online environment that alleviates this negative student attitude. Therefore, providing learning resources in this environment requires both contextualization and humanization in an effort to re-create the social emotional experience similar to what exists in the traditional classroom setting. Mutual interaction between teacher and student is maintained as I portray myself as a student character named “Charlie” whose somewhat humorous personality commingles with the emotions of students in this virtual world. Portraits of faculty, classified staff, real students, and tutors add to the mix to reveal a humanistic side of mathematics. Soothing color tones are also used to promote a calm learning online environment.

To accommodate different learning modalities in an online environment, it was necessary to develop an array of online learning tools designed to function individually or collectively. This gives students full control of their learning experience and the opportunity to develop individualized learning schemes. Hand written lecture notes provide a natural less threatening portrayal of mathematics. Worksheets that mirror video presentations promote active learning. Video presentations that include both professor and student create a unique learning experience designed to maintain focus, alleviate anxiety, and draw students into the presentation. Homework sets with solutions provide extra practice. Online quizzes give students the opportunity to test their skills. Finally, online assessment quizzes that yield individualized reports allow students to check mastery skills of major topic areas.

These developed resources come together to form an online supplemental instruction tool array called *Algebra2go*.¹ It is a virtual complement to my teaching philosophy resulting from my approach to better myself as a teacher. It continues to evolve in an organic development process using student feedback as the mechanism of design. Spending time working with my pre-algebra students to develop these resources has made these last few years the most exciting of my career. By challenging myself to look at math through my students’ eyes, developing the *Algebra2go* project has provided me with the means to connect with those students in my role as a teacher.

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¹ <http://www.saddleback.edu/faculty/Lperez/Algebra2go>