

Bradley E. Cox
Philosophy of Teaching

My understanding of how people learn, as well as my approach to teaching, continues to evolve as I undertake new instructional roles within distinct instructional environments. However, in all situations, I try to model the intellectual curiosity and reflective behavior I hope to develop in my students. Regardless of the course content or method of delivery, I strive to create a classroom environment that reflects my broader approach to education: critical and respectful, intense and enjoyable, and intellectually rigorous and unmistakably practical.

Critical and Respectful. Reflecting the sentiment of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, I believe that effective teaching facilitates students' inclination toward, and fruitful participation in, critical inquiry and reasoned judgment. Both in classroom discussions and in written assignments, I encourage students to ask difficult questions, examine underlying assumptions, challenge unsupported arguments, and draw conclusions based on the weight of the evidence instead of on the manner of presentation. Indeed, I have had perhaps no more satisfying a class session than when a student outwardly challenges their *own* thinking (or that of the instructor). Of course, presentation *does* matter. Cognizant of the role that emotion plays in learning, I am careful to challenge students in a manner that is respectful of the cultural, historical, and personal differences that influence students' perspectives. Although specific paradigms (or laws or formulas) clearly dominate some disciplines, I believe knowledge is evolutionary in nature yet pluralistic in application. Accordingly, I attempt (and ask my students also) to affirm the potential for every person and every idea to contribute to learning.

Intense and Enjoyable. While not fully in control of student attitudes or actions, as an instructor I can shape the classroom environment, materials, activities, and assignments in a manner that encourages students to "look below the surface" and deeply engage with the material. To do so, I establish high expectations for students, articulate clear goals for each course, and use varied assignments that provide an opportunity for students to both demonstrate their competence and develop their confidence. By inviting students to share their own experiences, I offer students the chance to develop personal connections to the material – and to each other. Similarly, I often share my own stories with students to find (or create) a reason to laugh during every course session.

Intellectually Rigorous and Unmistakably Practical. Many critics of education research lament the apparent disconnect between research and policy, between theory and practice. While I hope that my own research is relevant to both policy and practice, as an instructor I am uniquely positioned to ensure that the next generation of educators see research, policy, and practice as complementary components of an integrated system of education. Although some students may become captivated by the intellectual complexity inherent in a critical discussion of theoretical or philosophical topics, I regularly prod my students to give equal consideration to the "so-what" question. In doing so, I remind students that their greatest contributions will come not by saying something impressive but by doing something important.