

Teaching Philosophy

of Casey D. Allen

My overarching goal in higher education is teaching. Teaching is the reason I chose to earn a master of education degree rather than a master of arts or science in a specific discipline. I often wondered what separated the "cream of the crop" teachers from the mediocre, and while earning my master's degree, the reason became clear: the mediocre lacked training in pedagogical techniques. Along the pedagogical path, I intertwine my love of geography with the basic, transferable skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. As an educator, I work hard to provide students with the necessary skills to be active participants in the processes that shape our world. This ability—or at least, potential—is obtained by thinking spatially (a main tenet of geography), and requires students to be critical and creative thinkers.

Because I emphasize writing in my courses, students receive detailed, written feedback on each assignment so they will be able to perform better in the future. I also strive to develop a clear understanding of each student's perspective. The more I understand students' views, the better I can ask questions that will provoke critical and creative thought, or direct them to other research they may find interesting. Students will only articulate their own views if they are consistently shown that those views will be respected. In my classes, students quickly become aware of the unthreatening atmosphere, and find that integrating their views and perceptions into the learning environment, via student-instructor collaboration, enhance learning potential. I use clearly outlined course objectives and grading rubrics for each assignment, allowing students to play an active role in their own success. I take my relationships with students very seriously and have high expectations for them. And I stand ready to help them succeed in any way possible.

Helping students develop their own well-grounded and scholarly perspectives on world topics (both physical and cultural) is also part of my pedagogy, and I strive to balance the presentation of knowledge with teaching techniques that call for student engagement. To accomplish this, I may use interactive PowerPoint slideshows, interactive websites, current media, in-class discussions, and field observations. This brings geography alive and keeps students interested and motivated about learning—active learning. Geography knows no bounds as a pedagogy, and this point is emphasized in all of my classes.

My introductory classes give students a broad base of knowledge they can then apply to more advanced classes, regardless of discipline; more advanced classes give students a chance to "put into practice" the concepts, ideas, and theories they have (hopefully) learned in previous classes. For me, geography in education parallels the thoughts of Immanuel Kant when he said, "I treat [Geography] not with the completeness and philosophical exactitude in each part...but with the rational curiosity of a traveler who collates his collection of observations, and reflects on its design." More to the point, I see "that typical geographic exercise" (i.e., field trip), as the most essential part of geography. Through experiences in the field, the World becomes a geographical pedagogy, exposing students to phenomena beyond "the four walls" of education, helping classrooms come alive with intriguing thoughts and discussions! Indeed, incorporating field trips into my classes—whether via the Internet, a slide show, or in situ—is one of my greatest joys and strengths, for my own ideals, thoughts, and beliefs have often been molded by the artistry found in fieldwork.

Utilization of this teaching philosophy has led to students creating profound ranges of visions and ideas capable of changing the World and powerfully-enriching any community. It also helps us remember, and sometimes realize, that at one time or another we are all asked to face the implications one person's perspective may have for the rest of us, and those perspectives always includes a dynamic array of geography.