

Teaching Statement

Joe Champion

Approach to Teaching and Learning

Teaching is my professional passion. I view teaching as a developmental journey informed by experiences in and out of the classroom and supported by an optimistic approach to new pedagogical methods as well as creativity, flexibility, and curiosity. I earnestly embrace the challenges and responsibilities of facilitating learning because teaching is profoundly personally enriching.

I hold a humanistic belief that the basic purpose of education is to facilitate individual growth and promote self-actualization, which encompass more than academic knowledge and skills. I am especially attentive to processes supporting academic motivation, especially the social cognitive mechanisms of self-efficacy, which posit that evaluative judgments of one's ability to accomplish tasks in specific contexts have profound effects on educational choices and subsequent performance. By reflecting on successes and challenges, students can develop personal strategies to exercise control over their learning, which in turn supports the development realistic confidence in academic abilities and persistence in the face of obstacles.

Flexible Approach to Instruction

I am comfortable in many teaching roles, including designer of direct lecture-based instruction and facilitator of guided student inquiry. Promoting a safe, fun, and high-energy classroom atmosphere is my primary classroom goal and I commonly use a variety of pedagogical techniques to achieve this goal—including interactive lecture, whole-class discussion, small group activities, semester-long cooperative and collaborative projects, presentations, and learning portfolios. My instruction blends theory and application, classic and non-traditional content, and traditional and reform-based pedagogy.

The goals I have for student learning extend beyond procedural fluency to include rich conceptual understanding and self-regulatory strategies to select, use, and evaluate the results of mathematical strategies. I often develop specialized handouts and activities to present students with well-structured challenges that invite scaffolded problem-solving, communication, representation, and logical reasoning processes. Activities often inspire students to learn new content, to explore non-traditional topics, and to apply theory in practical contexts. Consequently, students can gain the kind of experiential memories that cognitive science research heralds for long-term retention and the teacher can gain valuable opportunities for real-time formative assessment.

Valuing Students' Differences

Despite some persistent attempts early in my career, I do not believe a teacher can directly transmit knowledge to students. Instead, I work to set conditions for learning and choose activities that provide students' engaging challenges. I view my students as actively co-constructing understanding in both personally and socially meaningful ways. Technology can be a valuable tool for facilitating this process, and I consistently integrate technologies such as graphing calculators, web-based manipulatives, spreadsheets, and computer algebra systems in all my courses, from content courses to courses aimed at building the specialized knowledge needed for teaching elementary or secondary mathematics.

I enjoy the quest for knowledge, and my education has been personally rewarding on many levels. However, I welcome students' diverse approaches to and purposes for education, and I embrace the experiences and expectations of my students. This means making efforts to learn about what each student brings to the classroom and adjusting to the rich mixture formed by students' mathematical understandings, trepidations, curiosities, cultural identifications, purposes and life experiences.