

This I Believe: About Teaching and Learning

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I believe that teaching and learning can be fun. But I also believe that it can be fun only if both parties work hard at it, day in, day out. *That sounds contradictory but it is not.* “When is it fun to work hard?” Of course, it is only through effort that learning happens. The feeling of mastering a subject can be tremendous fun for the student. Teaching students who are working hard is tremendous fun for me.

I believe that students deserve clear instructions and answers to their questions about what is expected of them. But the students who only want the “answers” are not engaged in true learning. *That sounds contradictory but it is not.* Students deserve to reasonably rely on the course syllabus, and the instructions for assignments and grading. But they also must understand that there are some things I am teaching them that do not have specific “answers.” I am asking them to stretch, try things, and learn iteratively - making the best possible decisions they are capable of making. This is sometimes a difficult process, but it too can be fun, particularly as my students gain confidence that they can do this on their own.

I believe students deserve the teacher’s respect, and vice-versa. But they both must earn that respect, every day. *That sounds contradictory but it is not.* I have a tremendous amount of respect for my students, but when they violate that respect (however rarely), we both know it, and the teaching relationship is bruised. I require the respect of my students, but I also know that I must earn that respect every day.

I believe that technology should be used in the classroom. But I do not think students should use their laptops to text their friends or check email or browse social media during class. *That sounds contradictory but it is not.* Technology is a part of our lives and using it wisely and carefully in the practice of law is something I need to help my students to learn. While I respect that some students are good at multi-tasking, I believe that multi-tasking often limits the teaching opportunities for both the student and the teacher in the classroom environment. I know when my students are partially engaged in something outside of class, and I have learned from experience that this can erode the respect between teacher and student and be distracting to classmates. Worse, in the practice of law, it can be unprofessional and lead to mistakes.

I believe that classes should start on time and end on time. **I believe** that classes should be as interesting as possible. **I believe** that it is appropriate to use different teaching methods to address the different learning styles of my students.

I believe that Henry Adams was right when he said: “A teacher affects eternity. He never knows where his influence ends.” For this reason, and many others, teaching is a sacred trust. It is also fun.