Between the Lines of Our Pedagogy

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Our teaching persona is expressed in how we go about shaping the learning environment. A purposeful integration of our teaching persona helps link students with content in subtle ways. This matters because we're after an expression of teaching persona that plays a constructive role in creating a learning environment where learners thrive and teachers flourish.

How teaching persona influences the learning environment becomes clear when we consider the goals we have for learners and learning. Among the many goals we have for students are some that transcend disciplines. We aim for students to

- value the study of the discipline,
- engage with the content,
- persist when the work gets difficult,
- grow from guidance and critique, and
- connect theory to application and practice.

This list looks linear on the page, but these goals are inextricably linked and related. If we aim for these attributes in our students, our willingness to exhibit the same qualities draws our teaching persona and authentic presence into the mix.

To illustrate, here are examples of where there can be reciprocity between our aims for students and who we are as teachers.

As we aim to have students value the study of the discipline we can make our experiences in the field visible.

- Explain the currency the discipline has in your life. For example, a geology professor talks about her buying land with a beautiful view, studying fault lines on the property before building a house, and realizing that in order to take advantage of the view the house would have to be built near that fault line. Her dilemma ignites discussion.
- Link your enthusiasm for the discipline to your learning: introduce students to an exciting new advancement in your field, or tell them about something in the field that you just recently learned.
- Describe how you came to the discipline, what values it holds for you, and what motivates you to continue with your work.

As we aim to have students engage with the content we can find ways to bring our enthusiasm, curiosity, wonder, and personal commitments into the course.

- Provide an example of how your curiosity evolved into to a question and the pursuit of an answer, describing how those connections were made and the excitement and rewards of doing so.
- Make your ongoing engagement with the field visible. For example, if you are making a poster presentation at a professional conference, why not give that same talk to your students?
- Participate in the inquiry by asking students a question you do not know the answer to.

As we aim to have students persist when the work gets difficult and to grow from guidance and critique, we

can take share our own vulnerability and growth.

- Offer an example of your own persistence. Illustrate this with a manuscript that has been returned by an editor, complete with mark-up and comments. Describe how you felt and responded to this feedback.
- Demonstrate not only a process but the thinking through the process. For example, project a problem on the board and talk aloud the process of solving it. Verbalize the weighing of alternatives so the patterns of thinking are illustrated on the way to the answer. In doing this, students get to eavesdrop on your thought process.

As we aim to have students connect theory to applications and practice we can integrate personal connections as resources.

- Describe a relevant personal example. Years ago, a colleague in the engineering department once opened the semester by distributing a list of building design questions that, by the end of the semester, students would need to answer. Then she pointed to a newly completed campus building and explained she needed to answer those same questions (and many others) as chief engineer on that building project.

The uniqueness of who we are in the classroom—what our teaching persona is—breathes between the lines of our pedagogy as we shape the learning environment. What we want to flourish in student learning we can choose to make visible in our teaching. Our persona is one avenue for this.

Related articles
This is the final article in a series that explored teaching persona—what it is and what influences its evolution. Review the previous articles:

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