

# Teaching Philosophy

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Over my years of teaching in many different settings, I have come to understand that effective teaching combines a balance between nurturing and challenging learners. As a teacher, I strive to create an environment that simultaneously expects excellence and conveys understanding of the barriers that many learners work to overcome. I believe in encouraging students to reach beyond their comfort zones into new areas of knowledge and skills and to take pride in setting high standards for themselves. At the same time, I work to help students build increasing comfort and confidence by acknowledging and making conscious the abilities they bring to and develop in the academic and clinical settings. I also believe that working in a professional school involves supporting students to learn to find a balance between their work lives and their family and personal lives, especially regarding the on call demands of midwifery. My goal is to prepare students with not just the clinical skills and knowledge they need but also with life skills for a lengthy and rewarding career as midwives.

Teaching and learning is strongly rooted in relationship. I have a long term view of my role as an educator. I have learned as a teacher not to over value short term popularity among students. I value much more highly when a student writes to me a term or a year or more later telling me that one of the “tips” about midwifery practice which I shared with them really helped out in a challenging clinical situation. I value when our grads return from inter-professional or international practice and tell me that they received feedback about how well prepared they were. I value when former students who are now clinical teachers or new academic teachers come to deeper and deeper understandings of the teaching and learning process.

Underlying my love of teaching is my love of my profession. My desire to share the many rewards of working both clinically and in the area education and health care policy means that I work to inspire students to see the important roles they will take on as the midwives of the future. Students often tell me that my ongoing enthusiasm for midwifery inspires them to meet the many challenges of midwifery education. I strongly support the philosophy of our program that academic teachers continue to be active practitioners. The integration of clinical and academic learning is as aspect of our program that I highly value. I love to teach students to think clinically, to use critical analysis skills and to be strong clinical decision makers. However, in my approach to practice and teaching the social and the clinical are always intertwined. I push students to try to consider the bigger picture of the health system and of the diversity of Canadian society. My education philosophy is informed by but not limited to teaching about midwifery. In my past life as a high school teacher, I was guided by many of the same principles – that the most important learnings are about how to learn, how to think analytically and ethically, how to be reflective and learn from mistakes and missteps, how to be open to new understandings of the world, to understanding social (in)justice and to strive to apply these understandings across social difference.

As much as I value taking on these broadly meaningful aspects of learning and teaching, I believe learning should be just plain fun whenever possible. I love to create “hands on” and interactive activities, games and tools for simulation that allow students to develop confidence and comfort and to learn to enjoy their work. Midwifery in the clinical setting is generally centred on the pregnant woman and family and care is therefore not usually centred on the student’s learning needs. In my view this places even more emphasis on the academic faculty creating student centred learning opportunities. For this reason, I am a strong advocate for curriculum change to allow more opportunities for students for simulated learning with the academic faculty. I also strongly support the MEP’s approach to using the actual clinical situations students face week to week as important reflective learning opportunities in the classroom. I am committed to developing the skills of MEP teachers in covering the curriculum through student-led analysis of their clinical experiences.

I see my role as academic teacher as not just about teaching students but also teaching teachers. In our small profession most midwives become clinical teachers. Since the beginning of the program I have been a strong advocate for and active participant in preceptor development. In the last few years my focus has increasingly widened and I have prioritized the integration of new tutors, the development of policies and orientation materials to assist new tutors and sharing my approaches to effective teaching. I have also come to understand the important role of working with TAs and RAs as a part of the wider university learning environment and sharing skills and knowledge through collaboration in teaching and research.

I am strongly motivated by a belief in the importance of inter-professional education and am involved in an ongoing way in development and teaching in interdisciplinary courses such as ALARM and ALSO. My philosophy is that midwives are important teachers for other maternity care providers and that we should prepare our graduates to play an increasing role in family practice, nursing and obstetric education.

Throughout my life, learning and teaching have been intertwined. I see these processes as mutually beneficial to teacher and learner, often very meaningful and potentially transformative. I have learned to acknowledge that perhaps because of its meaning, education can be deeply challenging, and I believe that part of the role of the teacher is to understand and put some of these challenges in perspective. I have come to see that encouraging and modeling grace, self-esteem and belief in the process in the face of learning through “mistakes and missteps” is one of my most important roles. If the teacher loves learning and teaching and values both the learners and the process the feeling is often contagious!