

Holly Jordan

Teaching Philosophy

It took me until part of the way through graduate school to realize that there were different types of *learners* in every classroom. I think on some level, we think the way *we* learn is indicative of the way *everybody* learns. Since this realization, I have tried to change my own teaching to include aural, visual, kinesthetic, and oral components.

As I have become more aware of learner-centered teaching philosophies, I have integrated them into my own style. Learners in my classes break into small groups; they do independent readings and then present them to their peers; they lead full-class discussions. This does not mean that I am merely an observer in their self-guided learning. I step in to push conversations forward, lecture when necessary, and even ask them to close their laptops sometimes.

My best teachers and professors allowed us to explore material and present it in our own way. I think this is vital for any learning environment. Learners in my classes *teach* as often as they *learn*. By the end of the semester, I hope that every student has been taught by and learned from their peers.

Because of this belief, I have instituted several types of group projects. When teaching Judaism, I have learners sign up for holidays in pairs and work on a presentation together, complete with food. Through the project, the class experiences the entire Jewish holiday cycle in 75 minutes. These sorts of projects fit with my personal research, as I am very interested in religious practices within community settings. I am able to integrate my research into my presentations with students, and in turn, this work with students provides me the opportunity to continue learning new things about my research area.

Similarly, in my introduction to political theory course, rather than have students read six or more Socratic dialogues, I break learners up into groups (size varies depending on the content of the dialogue) to perform one dialogue. Grades are based on learners' ability to draw out the main points of the dialogue and on their ability to present the material in their own voice. We end the days' presentations by discussing Socrates as a character and philosopher, and students seem to gain a breadth of knowledge not present in simply reading the dialogues. With these and other projects, learners in my classes have created projects ranging from puppet shows to skits to short films.

In conclusion, my teaching style is grounded in my belief that learners thrive in an environment where they have a measure of control. Learners also are more engaged when they realize that their teacher is actually excited and invested into the course material. My goal, through current event assignments and integrating my own research into the classroom, is to have students become enthusiastic about learning that they can see is practical for the rest of their lives.