

Teaching Philosophy

My personal journey has strongly informed my core beliefs about teaching. My time as a Public Programmer at TELUS Spark was extremely formative for me. While I was at Spark, my role was to develop interactive activities so that visitors could explore science topics in an open-ended, inquiry-based way. Most of the programs I developed were aimed at adults, and I felt that my role was to inspire wonder and help people encounter new ideas, sparking their curiosity. That drive has shaped my approach to formal teaching, and shaped the values I bring to my work.

Inspired by my experience at Spark and as an informal educator in maker technology with Make Fashion and Canada Learning Code, the following teaching beliefs have crystalized for me: that students learn best with **autonomy**, **support**, **community**, and **activity**. Here I discuss each in brief, and expand on how I implement them in the *Teaching Strategies* section of this document.

By learning with **autonomy**, I mean that students learn best when they have authentic control over their learning experiences. Giving students the agency to make decisions about their own learning allows them to connect it to their life and align with their interests and goals. Alignment facilitates deeper engagement with the content, which promotes knowledge retention and keeps students motivated.

By **support**, I mean that students learn best when they have an encouraging environment, appropriate scaffolding of their knowledge and assessment that helps them grow. Support means offering students the tools with which they can effectively take on the challenges presented to them in a course, including the feeling that they can be successful, even if the content is challenging.

By **community**, I mean that students learn best when there are others with whom they can talk through their experience, and when interactions are respectful. Feeling a sense of belonging in a class and making connections with fellow members gives them better tools to address the challenges that come with learning, engaging them as whole people with unique and relevant perspectives.

By **activity**, I mean that students learn best when they can put the concepts they are learning to use, through hands-on application and openness to risk-taking. Being willing to try something, have it fail, and keep iterating is a key skill for success in any endeavor. The best way to build resilience is through practice in a friendly, caring environment where you can trust the people giving feedback.

I believe that these elements work best when they are strengthened in conjunction with one another. For example, risk-taking and action must be complemented by a supportive environment and assessment that does not punish mistakes, a community that celebrates the vulnerability students display, and the autonomy for students to decide when to take risks that are meaningful to them.

These four pillars of autonomy, support, community, and activity are parts of my teaching philosophy that have been informed by my experiences – as a learner, as an informal science educator (both at TELUS Spark and with other community organizations), and in formal post-secondary settings. They are the core of my philosophy because I believe their importance translates between these settings, and thus I can use them as guiding principles when approaching any teaching context. I believe they help students I work with to engage more deeply with the course content, and realize their goals for undertaking a particular learning challenge.

