Teaching Philosophy

MY CONTEXT	MY VISION	MY IMPACT	MY TOOLS
Working with 'at-risk' students participating in the Haskayne Academic Turnaround Program	Cultivating learners resilience, curiosity and imagination	Promoting student wellbeing and success through the Academic Turnaround Program	Dialogue Relevancy Ownership Reflection and Feedback

My daily interaction with students addresses what are known as 'Wicked Problems'. A Wicked Problem is "complex, rather than just complicated, it is often intractable, there is no unilinear solution, moreover, there is no 'stopping' point, it is novel . . . there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, but there are better or worse alternatives." My students - almost all of whom are faced with the requirement to withdraw from university and belong to the bottom five percent in terms of their academic performance - poignantly illustrate their version of a Wicked Problem with the common refrain: "I am lost, and I have no clue what to do about it."

As an educator working with 'at-risk' students, I believe that my role is to help students find their own path to success by *asking the right questions* rather than by *giving them the right answers.* To do so, I must separate their poor academic performance from their ability to learn. In my experience, 'at-risk' students do not lack the cognitive powers required to be successful students. They are, however, struggling to make sense of their complex realities, be it unfortunate personal life circumstances, difficulties with transitioning from high school to university, lack of passion for business studies (or parental pressure to stay in business), fragile mental health, or a combination of some or all the above. Unfortunately, with the way that universities are currently set up, the process of trial and error can be both costly and personally risky.

I firmly believe that **resiliency, curiosity, and imagination are essential to learning.**

The capacity to creatively and imaginatively engage with course materials, peers and school spirit not only promotes diversity of opinions and modes of expressions, but improves the general well-being of students. By creating a framework of resiliency I help my students build their protective shields and better cope in times of hardship. I draw on my experience as a university instructor, student advocate and researcher to inspire my education practice and to help my students find solid ground. The students' mindset, however, is often not one of appreciative enquiry but rather of uncertainty and anxiety. To overcome their angst and disquiet, I support my students in four ways:

> Naor, I wanted to reach out and thank you for all of your help and support this past year. Because of it, I was able to take my stress and failure and turn it around to be successful. What you taught me about resilience is something that will be useful to me for my entire life. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning from you - from psychology to academics, and I look forward to working with you again this year.
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> -Recipient of the Chancellor's Club Scholarship

1. **My default mode is dialogue rather than dissemination.** Whereas dissemination is one-way communication, dialogue is a method of joint discovery and analysis. I believe that the best way to inspire student engagement and cultivate growth is through building personal and meaningful relationships. One-on-one conversation is my main 'method of action'. Stories are strong relational forces, so inviting students to tell their stories creates a more open line of communication that allows me to understand the student, and for them to trust me. In line with the Campus Mental Health goal of "creating and sustaining a supportive campus environment", my office is an accessible and safe place for students to unload their compendium of concerns.

2. **I make content and strategies relevant to my students' unique challenges.** I teach self-regulation skills and strategies by contextualizing the solutions with the student's challenges, abilities, and personal style. While rooted in extensive research, I like to approach this content through practical examples and encourage active implementation of strategies. In my experience, meaning and understanding are best built through the lens of our interactions with others, rather than by absorbing 'objective' Information and facts.

> *I liked that in the seminars we went through specific scenarios that were applicable to students like us when discussing different tactics and approaches to our academic challenges.*
> *-ATP student, Fall 2017*
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> *Thank you Dr Cohen for telling me about outlook on my phone as it is very helpful for me to keep track of school events and informative emails!*
> *-ATP student, Fall 2017*

3. **I use an Accountability-Ownership Continuum to inspire change in my students.** 'At risk' students often exhibit external locus of control and low self-efficacy which can impede their ability to persevere in the face of their challenges. I tell my students two things when they are admitted to the Haskayne Academic Turnaround Program: I will be their strongest advocate and help them find their path to success, however, I expect them to be fully accountable for their choices, actions and reactions. My goal is to help students move from being accountable to *me*, to doing what needs to be done due to their intrinsic sense of accountability to *themselves*.

Finally, **I strive to improve my teaching through reflection, feedback and deliberative development.** I enjoy testing my ideas and practices by inviting feedback from my students and by participating in collaborative teaching and learning communities. Since non-academic staff are not evaluated by USRI's, I created my own quantitative and qualitative assessments to receive student feedback. For example, I completely modified a technical lecture on the benefits of using academic databases over Google searches into a class activity where students 'compete' against each other using various research methods and databases. I also found that regularly attending teaching workshops and professional advising conferences is instrumental in continuing to enhance my educational practices.

Working with 'at-risk' students can be emotionally draining, and often feels like an uphill battle. Ultimately, harder struggles also mean sweeter victories. When my students realize they are stronger and more resilient than they thought, and move on from the program, no longer in need of my help… Well, that's a sweet victory.