Teaching Philosophy of Stephen Brown

University students are adults, not children. Teaching assistants are colleagues and partners, not underlings.

Understand where your course fits into the curriculum, e.g., relative to other courses in the program and to the knowledge, skills and abilities of students at that level.

Familiarize students with the mindset, the methods, and the vocabulary of the discipline. Rather than being the expert who “gives” knowledge to students, engage students as fellow scholars.

Plan ahead. Be organized. Communicate expectations clearly. On the first day of class provide a schedule that shows dates of all assignments, exams, etc. Give clear criteria for, and samples of, assignments.

Define the classroom as a safe place: orderly and businesslike, but informal. Encourage diversity, respect, and kindness. You can learn and have fun!

Be flexible. Have a plan, but if you get talking about something interesting and relevant in class, or if it’s taking longer to explain something than anticipated, go with that rather than sticking rigidly to the plan.

More is not better. Learning is more related to the amount of active involvement with the material than to the amount of material to which people are exposed.

Show enthusiasm for the course material. Provide anecdotes as examples. Use your whole body to communicate. For example, to illustrate exercises for low-back pain, lie face down on the table at the front of the room and demonstrate.

Provide opportunities to apply the material. For example, in one of my classes I give each student a notebook at the beginning of the semester. Each class we do several activities – sometimes solo, sometimes with others – and students write about this in their notebooks. They hand in the notebooks at the end of class. My teaching assistant and I each read half of the notebooks, and write comments in them.

Listen. Seek feedback. For example, at the end of week three I give each student a blank cue card and ask them to write about, anonymously, “How is the class going for you?” I summarize these findings and share them at the next class.

Consider the “deliverables.” When writing letters of reference for former students, I want to be able to say more than “she did well on the quizzes and exams.” I want to say, “she wrote an excellent case study report on a bank teller’s wrist injury” or “his DVD on the physical demands of nurses’ aides was well filmed and narrated” or “her oral presentation to the class on hand washing was given at just the right level.”