Philosophy of Teaching

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

- William Arthur Ward

As a teacher, I want to tell, explain, demonstrate, and inspire. Every student is different and may not require as much or as little as another. Simply telling a student something might be sufficient for that student, while another may need me to demonstrate. When I think about being a computers teacher, I realize the work my students will demand of me. I will have to understand their diverse needs. My future students will require different teaching styles, positive reinforcement, and a comfortable classroom atmosphere. I will constantly be learning new topics just to keep up with the changing computers world. I look forward to these challenges on a daily basis.

How do I think learning occurs?

It is my belief that learning is most effective when it can be made personal. A student learns better when the approach most closely matches her learning style. Astudent more readily assumes responsibility for his learning when he is involved in doing something personally meaningful. A student's effort increases when she sees the personal benefits that come from her hard work. I am also firmly convinced that active construction of some artifact, be it physical or virtual, is a necessary part of making the learning personal. Too often students are asked to learn in chunks that have only tenuous links to one another. Engaging in the construction of an artifact allows students to observe the relationships in the knowledge that they are gaining and it allows them to freely structure that knowledge in ways that are most appropriate for them.

How can I facilitate this process?

My experience has been that one of the least productive ways to foster learning and knowledge construction is to lecture to students. I feel that the role of a teacher is to help students connect with the material by whatever means the students have chosen. While this is made more difficult as class sizes increase, it is far from impossible. My role as a teacher is to provide my students with the resources and the support they need to most effectively take advantage of those resources. By engaging students in discussions and by guiding their reflection on the process, I can move away from the role of *sage* and move into the role of *collaborator*.

What goals do I have for my students?

I want my students to learn what it means to be members and practitioners of the professional discipline of Computer Science. I want them to be able to view the subjects they are taking as part of a coherent whole and to be able to apply what they have learned in new situations. I want them to know where the discipline has come from and where it is going. I want them to understand their responsibility to society for the technologies that they create. I want them to understand the role that Computer Science plays in other academic disciplines and in the daily lives of people. I want them to respect and value the opinions and ideas of others. I want them to experience aha! moments as often as possible. I want them to leave classes wondering where the time

went. I want them to be able to articulate their knowledge and fill the teacher role when called upon.

What goals do I set for myself as a teacher?

I strive to understand the needs and goals of each of my students and to tailor my teaching to them. I strive to treat my students with respect, to be generous when acknowledging their accomplishments, and gentle when they fall short. I strive to have empathy for my students and to understand the difficulties that they are having. I strive to avoid complacency by challenging my own opinions and beliefs. I strive to put forth my best effort on behalf of my students.

What do I do to implement this philosophy?

I try to infuse my teaching with the genuine fascination and enthusiasm that I have for Computer Science. I try to keep the atmosphere in my classrooms warm and light, even when the material is difficult. I encourage discussions and the debate of new ideas. I expect students to contribute material from their own experiences. I prefer to use term length projects as a vehicle for knowledge construction and assessment rather than disconnected assignments and exams. I try to lecture only when the amount and type of material that needs to be covered dictates it. I encourage students to come to office hours to discuss difficulties that they might be having, to express concerns or offer suggestions about the material or methods, or just to talk. And most of all, I continue to learn about the discipline, about teaching, and about the students.