

**KYLA HARTUNIAN**  
**MA, MEd, PhD student/researcher**

## **TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

---

I value relevant, real-world literacy experiences as the foundation for lifelong learning. My passion to grow as an English Language Arts educator—to witness, facilitate, and collaborate—stems from a deeply personal love of literature and writing, yet I am always cognizant that my core beliefs and motivations are unique and as such, my worldview may differ significantly from those of my students. My role, then, as an educator, is to develop the self-awareness and professionalism necessary to commit to a lifelong process of growth and adaptation. In this way, education, to me, is both deeply personal and profoundly communal. My desire to educate as a social co-constructivist resonates with ideologies and methods inspired by Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bakhtin and others, but my desire to facilitate and engage in actionable, meaningful teaching is grounded in the philosophies of those like Freire, Hall, hooks, and Rose who emphasize the role of social justice and ethical humanism within and beyond traditional classrooms.

To this end, I utilize Universal Design for Learning (UDL) -inspired principles to customize the classroom culture I build with my students. I strive to honor each student (and the relationship we build together) by designing learning experiences that maximize participation, engagement, and agency—experiences that emphasize multimodal, project-based education, (such as creating multi-genre portfolios and interdisciplinary writing opportunities), as well as experiences that integrate personalized-learning methods (such as collaborating to develop student-designed rubrics and student-led literary circles). And yet, facilitating opportunities to engage with content alone is not enough to build a truly collaborative, co-constructed learning

experience. Importantly, I also include multiple and varied opportunities for integrating writing and socioemotional learning into my classroom. I prioritize these hybrid writing opportunities in order to foster a richly inclusive, accessible, compassionate learning environment that openly honors each student and the perspective(s) they bring into our classroom—to include their potential traumas and privileges. Moreover, these exercises offer me, the instructor, an opportunity to continue learning and growing as an empathetic co-participant in this culture. As a co-participant, I must also be mindful and respectful of the fact that I teach/participate/ collaborate from a place of privilege—and so, like my students, I utilize these writing exercises to reflect on my own identity and the way this impacts classroom connections on a moment-by-moment, project-by-project basis.

With this goal of forming a collaborative, highly customized culture in mind, I regularly shape and reshape my teaching methods to consider ways to make my writing assignments tangible, relevant, and meaningful to my students/learning community—knowing full well that creating and facilitating this type of environment rests primarily in building respectful relationships within my classroom. I am a scholar-teacher—learning from my students as I plan, carry out, and reflect on my lessons. I am a relationship-builder—carefully observing and reacting in the moment to craft a meaningful learning environment for my students/learning community. These are hallowed relationships that do not end with a unit test or a school year. My role in the learning process is less about being a content specialist and more about being an educational guide and advocate. I do not stop learning and reflecting because there is always another perspective, another potentiality to consider when engaging meaningfully with my students. I am a lifelong learner—always looking for ways to build connections.

To scaffold these career-guiding professional and personal development goals, I constantly question, reflect, and experiment within my classroom (and, indeed, throughout my real-life learning) to tinker with methods and strategies until a teachable moment resonates—within my students, within me. Luckily, I have had a variety of occasions and environments in which to conduct these experiments and reflections to help me finetune my efforts—and, of course, the work is on-going. I teach at both secondary and postsecondary levels. The diversity of content I am required to teach can sometimes be as overwhelming as it is invigorating. To remain committed to social learning that is steeped in compassion, dedicated to honoring diverse learning styles and backgrounds, and focused on UDL-inspired project-based learning, I focus on the target to “read often—write well—live literacy”, which provides a lynchpin for my pedagogy. For the sake of simplicity and precision in planning learning activities for so many different types of classes, I have found it incredibly useful to use composition and rhetoric as a universal anchor for all of my courses. Student-choice provides variety in what, when, and how a learner engages with content. But *writing about that content* is where I push my learners to think critically and problem-solve creatively.

Teachable moments centered on a critical literacy approach helps me meet my students where their strengths and interests converge. My job as an educator is to guide students to become better communicators. My goal for incorporating foundational writing is to help learners develop an appreciation for the complexity and depth of the English language—and hopefully, in the process, to spark a sense of agency in the learner as they consider the ways in which they can use their own words to create powerful, thought-provoking meanings. In short, a foundation of composition and rhetoric underscores the ways in which literature, real-world writing, and critical thinking can enhance everything we do.