

## **Rawa Alammari-Teaching Philosophy Statement**

My greatest joy back when I was an undergraduate was breaking down information, simplifying it, and then explaining it to my classmates. I used to form study groups, create notes, summaries, and tables that I would share with the whole class. I always believed that nothing is too hard to understand if it was broken down to its basic elements. This has opened my eyes to the love of teaching that was hidden deep inside.

I come from a background of a rigid educational system, students believe that teachers should know it all, and teachers feed into that belief by displaying the alleged ultimate knowledge. Students expect that a teacher must have an answer to every question they had; “don’t know” or “not sure” or “not aware of a piece of information” was out of question. If a student was thinking “outside the box”, the student was told to follow the book. It was a system of spoon-feeding that did not give much room for creativity.

I moved to the United States in 2011 to start my residency program in operative dentistry. This was a turning point in my life, personally and professionally. To my surprise, it was the total opposite to what I knew as a norm in terms of teaching. I was blessed with the most devoted mentors, positive atmosphere, and a system that focuses on bringing out the best of every student. I was able to see that mentors are not meant to know it all, they could say “not know” and walk the student through the steps of acquiring knowledge. It is alright for the student to think outside the box and come up with ideas and questions that were never asked before. There is no such thing as a stupid question, on the contrary, this allows for an active learning environment where a student is encouraged to search and look for the information rather than relying on the teacher to deliver it.

I was introduced to the evidence-based approach to learning, I came to the realization that as in many fields, the dental field knowledge is always updated. New things are discovered everyday; new evidence, studies and research. In fact, often books can be pretty outdated and the journey to discover the truth could lie beyond a book. No one knows it all, one should always be in the search for the latest and most updated evidence.

During my residency one of the legends of the fields was the ex chairman of the department who has been teaching for 46 years. He was still heavily involved with the graduate students. This teacher became a role model of what a teacher is supposed to be. He was very well respected in the field with so many achievements but yet so humble that we would forget his status and viewed him as a father. I remember one thing that he said that I would never forget and probably be my goal with my own students. He said: “my goal is for you guys to be better than I ever was”.

Being an a clinical and laboratory instructor, I found out that as a teacher you learn a great deal from the teaching process. As a teacher you are in a continuous learning process, and always should strive to learn new methods and ways to deliver the information in the most simple and efficient manner and not necessarily the traditional manner. Most importantly, from a personal experience, I think the positive learning environment and allowing the students to think and share their ideas openly, can build personalities rather than break them. I want to implement methods that enforce concepts that learning is a step-by-step path, and that you learn from your mistakes. A trial and error approach. I want my students to find me approachable and understand that they will not be judged if they question the knowledge presented to them but will be encouraged to search for the answers they seek in an ocean of science.

Dental education system is highly complex, with many interrelated elements and factors. Moreover, it is an intensely interpersonal enterprise involving the students, teachers, patients, dental team personnel. Therefore, training expands way beyond dental knowledge, to mastering a large set of skills. It is a discipline that has a strong emphasis on the application of knowledge (Applied). Laboratory and clinical settings are important to integrate and implement the various domains of learning: cognitive (thinking), affective (emotion/feeling), and psychomotor (physical/kinesthetic).

Being involved in teaching the undergraduate students taught me a great deal about the teaching process. However, understanding theories behind teaching and learning provides me with the tools to reflect on my teaching methods and have the means to improve it. I strive to grow and improve as a teacher, because when I teach, I genuinely want my students to benefit. Pratt notes that *“if teachers are to improve, they must reflect on what they do, why they do it, and on what grounds those actions and intentions are justified”* [15]. This kind of reflection will help me identify, articulate, and, if necessary, justify my approach to teaching [1].

In the future I know when I will be involved in directing or designing a course, these aspects will be of huge importance, they should be enforced for co-instructors and teaching assistants in the course. Because we can still deliver the knowledge we are intended to deliver, but most importantly empower our students to achieve a better learning outcome, carry this knowledge and make it their own and build on it. A teacher highlights this point by saying *“teaching is not about what I know but what I enable others to do”* [2]. Investing in strategies to improve the teaching and learning environment by emphasis on applications of pedagogical content knowledge can have a huge merit for individual students, the institution and on the discipline overall.

## References:

1. Pratt, D.D., *Good teaching: One size fits all?* New directions for adult and continuing education, 2002. 2002(93): p. 5-16.
2. Weimer, M., *Learner-centered teaching: Roots and origins*. Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013: p. 3-27.