

Jessica Aviva, Ph.D.

Creative leader, collaborative co-conspirator, and catalytic changemaker
working toward a more vibrant, loving, and healthy world for all

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

WHAT I TEACH

I teach the artistry of feminist leadership, progressive social change, and nonprofit management. Currently, I design and facilitate online courses through The Fruition Academy. I was an adjunct lecturer at DeSales University for 11 years and taught entrepreneurship as a volunteer instructor in the Pan African Studies Community Education Program at Temple University for three years. In addition, I have led workshops in a variety of community-based and online settings and have shared what I have learned through both research and practice at local, regional, and international conferences.

TEACHING GOALS

My goals as a teacher are to:

- create educational experiences that inspire curiosity and dialogue, provoke critical thought, bridge gaps in understanding, reveal interconnectedness, and prepare students to take effective, sustainable action in their work
- expand students' repertoire of knowledge, ideas, and techniques
- enhance students' self-efficacy and fluency with multiple approaches to understanding and practicing leadership and activism
- create opportunities for students to immerse themselves in beautiful, inspiring ideas that fortify their commitment to creating flourishing organizations and communities
- provoke possibilities to create space for students to reimagine the world – and their roles within it
- support students as they design and articulate their unique purpose and vision
- help students carve out realistic pathways to realize their brilliance
- create active learning communities by facilitating relationships grounded in trust, respect, and reciprocity
- continually learn and challenge myself to expand and strengthen my ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and ability to effectively facilitate the learning process

I create safe, nurturing, creative spaces for students to:

- ask exploratory questions
- open up to possibilities
- experience resistance and take creative and intellectual risks
- unlearn and critically analyze normative and intellectual assumptions
- liberate themselves from attachment to ideas, thoughts, and behaviors
- activate, listen to, and trust their intuition
- become free to become more of who they truly are
- share ideas with others

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After taking a class with me, I hope my students will:

- give themselves permission to be playful and to experiment with ideas, approaches, and techniques
- articulate the ideas they have learned using their own language and context
- integrate what they have learned with their prior knowledge and experience
- take meaningful action grounded in what they have learned
- be more prepared to navigate and fully engage in complex situations while remaining connected to their values and vision
- mobilize a variety of resources (intellectual, relational, material) that support putting their new knowledge into action
- critique with compassion and create with confidence

I promise my students that I will:

- appreciate your wholeness, vulnerability, and uniqueness
- meet you where you are in your journey
- listen to your ideas, concerns, and suggestions
- answer your questions to the best of my ability
- strive to consistently do my best and to improve my skills as a teacher and facilitator
- acknowledge my mistakes and gaps in understanding
- hold you accountable to your educational and professional goals
- hold myself accountable to the ideals of this teaching philosophy

TEACHING METHODS

As a teacher, I draw from multiple disciplines including sociology, leadership, political science, economics, psychology, education, and the physical sciences. I integrate my broad interests, which include the arts and culture, spiritual ecology, and Latinx and French philosophy, into what and how I teach.

To ensure that each student feels better prepared to achieve their goals, I assess students' prior knowledge and learning goals before each course begins. I help students draw connections to their experience, organizational context, and goals so that the learning experience is meaningful to them. I invite students to apply what they have learned and practice to create new habits and rituals.

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I create opportunities for students to participate by asking questions and sharing their experience both during live classes and, for asynchronous courses, when it is convenient to them. Whenever possible, I create opportunities for students to connect with each other for resource and idea sharing, support, and accountability. While I encourage participation with me and other students, I recognize that some students prefer to quietly reflect as a means of engagement.

Because students have different ways of knowing, learning, and being, I use a range of modalities that include video, audio, texts, workbooks, reflection questions, discussion, and resources. I sequence learning so that students access concepts that are digestible and build on prior content. I provide students with the space, time, and support they need to understand ideas that are new to them—and to make them their own. Texts are designed to be easy to use and to help students translate what they have learned into new habits, rituals, processes, and other forms of meaningful, impactful action.

I believe that information, research, experience, ideas, intuition, wisdom, dreams, and action are interconnected. I intentionally integrate these as I prepare for courses, facilitate learning, and offer support to students. I use theories, models, and frameworks to facilitate understanding and open up conversation that advances living knowledge—never to present a fixed model of a concept.

I honor the work of other teachers and practitioners by curating exciting and useful ideas from scholarly and practitioner literature as well as my personal experience as a leader and activist. After interpreting and integrating these ideas and examples through the lenses of research, practice, and my own unique experience and intuitive perspective, I craft and share inspiring and transformative resources with students to provoke discussion, reflection, and thoughtful action.

With more than 20 years of formal teaching experience, I am still learning and growing as an educator. I work hard to be the kind of teacher I want to be. I'm not always perfect and I make mistakes, but I am also very self-aware and conscientious. I can be impatient, have difficulty explaining things without preparation, and sometimes jump ahead without realizing that others feel left behind. I acknowledge these tendencies and follow-up with students as needed to ensure they have sufficient support and information. I also hope that students feel comfortable asking for clarification or additional information and support as needed.

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LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I view my classroom as a sanctuary, a sacred space where people come together to reconnect with their values, purpose, and vision in a dynamic and loving relationship with a community of curious learners. It is a space where students can play, imagine, and have fun. Relationships among everyone in the classroom are central to the learning experience.

I value the intellectual, emotional, and physical safety of my students which allows for both me and students to be open and vulnerable with each other as we learn and co-create. I create an environment that elevates mutual trust and respect. I take care not to enact or be complicit with oppressive power dynamics in any educational space. I remain open to learning from and with my students with humility and grace. I enter the classroom—whether in-person or online—fully present and aware of students' needs as well as how my own needs might impact my ability to teach and transform.

I expect students to be fully present and to respectfully engage with me, other students, and the ideas we explore together. I encourage students to share their experiences, insight, and wisdom with each other. I also expect students to be open to new ideas, ask questions, and take responsibility for their personal and professional growth by applying what they have learned.

I create an inclusive learning environment where all students have the ability to fully participate. Whenever possible, I collaborate with others or use technology to accommodate the various learning styles, abilities, and languages of students. Students are welcome to ask questions or request assistance before, during, or after classes and I will respond to the best of my ability. I always provide transcripts and/or captioning for video and audio.

UNDERLYING BELIEFS

I believe that the purpose of education is to help us:

- understand and articulate our unique purpose and vision;
- open up the world and reveal new possibilities;
- become more insightful, thoughtful, and intentional;
- create a more meaningful and impactful life;
- engage in more valuable relationships; and
- actively co-create a more vibrant, loving, and healthy world for all.

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Too often, people approach the learning process as an opportunity to gather evidence for what they already know (or believe to be true). Learning must also include the intentional process of unlearning and letting go of harmful, outmoded, and unhelpful concepts. Defensiveness and resistance with openness and vulnerability can lead to change.

Education emerges through both openings (gaps in understanding) and conflict—ideas that do not connect that compel us to solve the mystery in a personally meaningful way. Students enter my classroom with their own unique perceptions, worldview, and ideology. I view differences as opportunities to learn and deepen understanding of concepts. I lovingly challenge students' assumptions to equip them with a more expansive and fluid repertoire of leadership practices.

The education process is both formal and informal. Learning occurs as students interpret, reflect upon, and apply what they have learned. Students should have the opportunity to integrate what they learn with their unique experience and circumstances to generate new knowledge both on their own and in with others during and after classes.

I believe that defining and ordering concepts can facilitate understanding, but that is where learning should begin rather than end. Information can suffocate the imagination – and the imagination is key to transformation. Education that attempts to indoctrinate students is harmful. I never profess to have all of the answers, even in my fields of expertise. Truth is something vast and mysterious that in our human capacity we can only hope to approximate and maybe catch glimpses of from time to time.



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