

**MARIA ELIZA HAMILTON ABEGUNDE**  
**TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

---

**TEACHING: LIVING (A) PROCESS.** It is important to me that students “feel” and “know” people and events of the past and present, to enter history not with the idea that it is a series of irrelevant repetitions but enter it instead as a living process, filled with members of their families and communities – themselves even - to which and to whom they are connected. It is also important to me that my learning community is safe, challenging, transformative, student-centered, text and media rich, and organically responsive to the daily learning of my students. I believe each student *can and does* learn. It is my life purpose to discover the key that unlocks an amazing mind and heart and train both to breathe and live fully without fear.

**CREATING A LEARNING COMMUNITY.** To facilitate this type of collaborative embodied knowledge and learning, I create a learning community based on the needs and interests of my students and my course objectives. Each assignment and activity is an opportunity for us to delve critically and with awe into our selves and new worlds. It is necessary to provide students with flexible structures and clear guidelines for reading and writing at the beginning of the semester to ensure that each student starts on similar ground despite his or her previous education. It is also necessary to provide students with constructive feedback throughout the semester to allow us to map their growth. It is my practice for the first two papers to meet with students and offer them detailed suggestions for revision of content and ideas, and to redirect their thinking through specific references to the class texts and supporting materials. In this way, students learn how to critically engage a text word for word, idea by idea, and to situate themselves in it. For final projects, I provide step-by-step project management from the beginning of the class. In this way, students learn how to plan and structure a larger paper or presentation.

**ENTERING HISTORY.** For many of my students, it may be the first time they encounter the texts I teach in African American and African Diaspora Studies. While there are many joyful and artful subjects and histories in our discipline, there are just as many sad and horrible. It is my responsibility to help students enter those spaces and to ensure that they exit them whole – even though they will be forever changed and transformed. It is always my intent to be transparent about my own experiences when discussing subjects such as slavery because I believe it allows students to understand that history is *peopled* and can, therefore, be emotional and subjective. When teaching about slavery, for example, I show excerpts from Gerima’s *Sankofa*. The first time I did this, I was emotionally overwhelmed, said so, and cried. Remarkably, one of my students wrote to make sure I was okay and to share that this movie also made him sad. It was this moment, however, that allowed us to really begin the conversation about what it means to be human, what we are willing to live for, and what we are willing to die for.

**USING TECHNOLOGY.** Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century students expect and need 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching methods and strategies. I make a point to use the available media and student recommendations so that a diverse set of learning styles are addressed and introduced. This ranges from online forums/chats/blogs and in-class research to music videos and movie clips or to SKYPE conferences with guests. I have also found Poll Everywhere helpful for in-class feedback on readings and topics. A student who is a visual learner excels in conversation and writing when he or she can “see”. Similarly, a student who is a text-based learner excels in deconstructing a text, writing about it, and “breaking it down” for others to understand.

**TEACHING: LEARNING.** Using these strategies (and others not mentioned here), I move very subtly from teacher to facilitator, and by the end of the semester my learning community has become as self-teaching, self-monitoring empowered knowledge force.