

## Teaching Philosophy Kristina Drumheller, Ph.D.

In the book, the *Four Agreements: A Toltec Wisdom Book*, author Don Miguel Ruiz explains that the Toltec were “women and men of knowledge.” Over time, they were forced to conceal their wisdom because of the “rampant misuse of personal power.” Knowledge was to be kept from those who would abuse and misuse it. As time passed, the Toltec teachings were allowed to be passed on, which is where Ruiz comes in. Among the great lessons of this book is the proper use of knowledge and a time to teach.

I am a believer in exploring the gifts and talents of each person and discerning their place in time: different gifts and talents for different moments in our lives. There is a time to teach and to serve. Albert Schweitzer once said: “The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” While I believe one of my gifts to be teaching, I learned a valuable lesson about time from an undergraduate public relations professor. She not only brought her knowledge and wisdom to the class, but also her life experiences. She did not simply teach us the text; she brought it to life. She told us what we would face in the job market, the trials of job hunting, and the challenges of the public relations field. If I learned nothing else, I learned that to teach, I had to experience. I spent the next five years experiencing life outside academia, taking in the intricacies of business and communication. This led me to the place I am now. In my years of teaching, the greatest lesson has been how much I have to learn, especially from my students. If, as teachers, we listen, students will help us become better teachers. They tell us what works in the classroom and what does not. They tell us the connections they need to make between the subject matter and life. Most importantly, they remind us there is life outside the classroom.

The following is an excerpt from Ann Weems in *Reaching for Rainbows*. It is a statement of faith that I believe can be extended to the classroom: “We believe in the poetry within each of us. We believe in dreams and visions. We believe in old people running and children leading. We believe in the Kingdom of God within us. We believe in love.” We should encourage the dreams and visions of our students, teach them to lead, and help them find the poetry within. Few authors on today’s culture have remarkable things to say about the shape of society. Richard M. Merleman in *Making Something of Ourselves* describes our culture as *loose boundedness*, which is “lacking definition in society.” In one excerpt he says, “Television portrays education as useless and deep thought as a waste of time.” Knowing television’s pervasiveness in society, teachers have the grand opportunity to elevate the importance of education and help students find the knowledge within themselves. Robert Fulgham once played a game with children telling them they must decide now if they are a “Giant, Wizard, or Dwarf.” One little girl replied, “Where do the Mermaids stand?” He replied, “There are no such things as Mermaids.” To which she replied, “Oh, yes, I am one.” She knew exactly who she was. As teachers, we can either pigeonhole our students, or help them become who they are meant to be. In the various courses of communication, students must be encouraged to share their ideas. In sharing ideas, students can find their own identity.

One of the *Four Agreements* is to “always do your best.” Ruiz explains that while our “best” may change at any given moment, we must do the best we can at that moment. For example, our best when we are sick is different than our best when we are healthy. When I walk into the classroom, the agreement I have with myself and with my students is to always do my best and to stand with the Mermaids.