



Teaching Sparks for Passionate Teachers

Kate Chadbourne of The Bardic Academy

★ Be guided by your own excitement and learning.

What are you learning these days? What is at the heart of your own practice? It's exciting to think that as teachers, everything we learn or experience is fodder for our own teaching. We don't have to be experts, either: we only need to be able to create an experience of that learning for our students. It's powerful for our students to see us as learners who are excited about our own expansion.

An example: In my musical practice, I'm passionate about exercises that bring the left hand up to the same agility as the right hand. I've been talking about this goal with my students and creating exercises for them that promote manual dexterity which they can do right away, at their level, today.

★ Take up a new position.

Go outside. Go to a new part of the building. Go to a corner of the room. If there has been a trend of sitting, get up and dance. If you've been active, sit or lie or kneel for a moment. A change of location or movement style is refreshing and attention sharpens on the heels of a surprise.

An example: Teaching in classrooms is pretty much a sit-down and listen proposition. Research shows that we have about twenty minutes of focus in that

position before concentration fragments. Knowing that, I create ways for my students to get up, shift position, dance, act, collaborate, and write on the chalkboard. There's a great buzz of energy from moving, and then improved conversation when we sit down again.

★ Cross-pollinate.

Bring in something unexpected: a poem, a recipe, a piece of art, a song, an oracle card, an expert in another field, an inspiring video. Use that cross-pollination as a guiding spark for the class or session. Return to it again and again. Remember to give students a second or third chance to hear it or view it and to share their responses.

An example When I'm teaching classes about Irish folklore, we listen to songs, look at photographs of Irish houses, and hear stories told (rather than reading them). After each new "cross pollination," I ask my students to draw a line back to our main subject and to talk about the new perspective or questions it raises.

★ Play with a theme.

Some ideas: the seasons; emotions (happiness, wonder, curiosity); colors; times of day; times of life; dualities (inside/outside, male/female, night/day, active/stillness, full/empty, light/dark, open/closed). Once you choose a theme, look for patterns that you can repeat throughout your class. For instance, what is a "green" yoga pose, for instance? And don't forget that "green" can be a way of exploring many different ideas: freshness, openness, fertility, abundance, and much more!

An example Right now in The Bardic Academy, we are learning about a different goddess each week. I choose a theme that connects with that goddess and we explore it in writing, ritual, movement, storytelling, and discussion. It's a wonderful organizing principle – and very generative for us in creating material for classes.

★ Be inspired by a particular tool or resource.

In my own teaching, this might be a particular book, but it might also be: fountain pens and ink, the magnifying glass, Thai lokta paper, or a beautiful recording that launches us into a conversation and exploration. For you, it might be a particular prop, recording, or spiritual teaching. Let this tool, prop, or resource inspire a sequence of experiences you can share with your students.

An example: A few years ago, I bought a simple loom to satisfy my own curiosity and interest. Now, it serves as a focal point for my teaching. Students love to choose their favorite colors and weave purses for their magical supplies on the loom. We explore the mythic and metaphorical resonances of weaving in poetry, we consider what we are “weaving” in our own lives, and we look at ecology as a vital weaving of life. One resource opens up to many ideas, themes, and possibilities!

★ Be guided by your intuition.

What does your class need right now? A little more practice with a certain skill? A break from the usual routine? A sweet surprise? Some reassurance? A challenge? Open your heart and ask yourself this question. You will find that you always know the answer.

An example: I like to tune into the group energy from time to time and just receive a sense of how things are going and what might be helpful. I’ve been amazed at how effective this is. Sensing overwhelm, I recorded a special video message for my students who told me that it came at exactly the right time. Other times, I’ve felt that we needed more enchantment – and so we turned up the fairy dust!

★ Honor holidays, traditions, divinities, and birthdays.

There can never be enough celebration! Take any excuse to inject festivity into your teaching. Decorate, dress up, play a game, act out a short play (give out the parts and be prepared for fruitful zaniness!). Surprise your students by wearing a mask or costume, by bringing a basket of apples, or by singing to them. Food, ritual, lighting, and music are among the very best ways to connect with our

students and create intimacy and trust. My own rule of thumb? When in doubt, feed my students!

An example. In The Bardic Academy, we celebrate the Celtic holy days. We make masks to celebrate Samhain on the first of November, and we make flower mandalas to celebrate Bealtaine on the first of May. Birthdays are occasions for cake and singing. Midsummer is a time of fullness and celebration and Sun-love. If we can find a reason to celebrate (yes, even “Talk Like a Pirate Day”), we do it.

Kate’s Cardinal Points for JOYful Teaching

- If you want to refresh your teaching, refresh your learning.
- Make your delight a priority.
- Share the juiciest things you know.
- Be full of surprises.
- Create experiences and opportunities for your students.
- Learn names and use them often.
- Offer hospitality.
- Be collegial but be the captain of the ship.

Teacher, I hope these ideas have been helpful to you. Teaching and learning is endlessly fascinating, and one of the most hopeful and inspiring parts of being alive. May you teach with JOY and passion, awakening aliveness, knowledge, and love in yourself and in your students!

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