

# Why We Teach

## Designing for Personal Sustainability



by Owen Guthrie

As we emerge from the caverns of winter and slip from the madness of March into bright, warm April and true spring, maybe it is safe to take a moment and ask ourselves why we do it. Given our current budget challenges, it is perhaps even essential we ask the question. What is our source of inspiration? What is the real reason we teach?

At this point in the semester, most of us are bolting for the barn. The end is in sight. Summer is nearly here, if we can just keep up the pace for a few more weeks. But right now, in the midst of overwhelming everything, it might be worth taking a moment to pause and consider the “why”. The question and the inevitable personal inventory process required for answering may provide an opportunity for realignment that is helpful in our teaching today, tomorrow, and into the future. In addition, our answer may provide resiliency in the face of coming challenges. At the least, revisiting why we are here will hopefully yield some energy for powering through the remaining weeks of spring.

Of course everyone’s reason for teaching is uniquely their own, but most of us teach, in part, because we’re passionate about something and we want to share. It is rewarding to facilitate a student’s joy of discovery, especially when it relates to topics of our own passion. Our inner child yearns to exclaim, “I know — isn’t that amazing!” The reward is even more addictive when we design and plan for that moment of epiphany. We feel satisfied when all our labors come to fruition and students arrive at our objectives amazed, awestruck, inspired, and transformed. Of course achieving complete success with our learning experience design is incredibly addictive, and just as incredibly elusive.

Is this you? Do you seek to build transformative learning experiences for your students? Are you out to share, inspire and illuminate?



Some of us also enjoy the performance aspects. Holding court before a class of 20 or a lecture hall of 200 is challenging, and facilitating a learning community isn’t easy. Doing either well is thrilling and satisfying on its own. Some of us are storytellers, while others enjoy being regarded as an authority. There are also more humanitarian motivations, such as simply helping others better themselves and thereby society.

For many, the reasons why we teach are complicated and multiple, including both self-serving and altruistic motivations. What is important, is that we begin to find the sources of our own inspiration and feed them.

While contemplating the source of your motivation, consider taking a moment to identify what is working for you in your course right now. What is satisfying? Also, be honest with yourself about what isn’t working. What could be better? Take those points of dissatisfaction and reflect on how you might do things differently. How can you bring them into alignment with your own inspiration? Reach out for ideas from friends, colleagues, Internet resources, and UAF eLearning’s Instructional Design Team. Consider some new strategies guided by your inspiration. Identifying what you’d like to change and planning improvements is a powerful expression of agency, and there is resiliency in finding fuel for your own satisfaction. Design for personal sustainability.

**For another perspective on why we teach:**

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teacher-appreciation-why-we-teach-margaret-regan>



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