

# Structure and Philosophy in the Classroom Makes You a Better Teacher

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Are you prepared for class is a note that I posted prominently in office when I started teaching college classes. However, that note means more than just having a general lesson plan or outline of what I plan for class that day. It means having a plan to integrate my extensive industry experience into the hotel, restaurant management or culinary classes I am teaching. Most importantly preparation means being able to articulate my experiences into an understandable philosophical structure a student will find useful as a foundation to build their careers.

I am a Chef who taught apprentices for almost 30 years before I completed my doctoral degree. I still teach a few laboratory cooking classes, research culinary arts and even do a demonstration of two at culinary conferences. I knew I had the knowledge and experience to teach the culinary arts when I decided to change my career. I was a Certified Executive Chef with numerous awards and I would simply bless my students with my wealth of knowledge. I was given templates with a syllabus and course outlines by the directors of the programs when I first started teaching. I did not really understand the why or what of it and just acted out the role of chef instructor and improvised as I thought was needed. Sometimes it went well, but often times the directors would inform me that there was too much of me in my classroom and that was not what I being paid for. They knew my experience and reputation were important to the students but they wanted me to teach the students the competencies as they were listed, not come in and play it by ear.

It took me some time to understand this because I thought I was an awesome teacher. The students told me how wonderful I was. I was a chef and had won so many awards that all I had to do was show up to teach. It took my students not doing well in other classes or failing mandated tests for me to begin to question my worth. I discovered my need to be liked by the students often was often counterproductive to good teaching. They loved to hear my stories about my days in industry and I loved to entertain them. I was an easy A and they did not have to work because I was so wrapped up in my celebrated self. My

entertainment did not teach them the core competencies they needed to know. It was humbling, but I forced myself to structure classes as if I were following a recipe in the kitchen and running a business. Every class was part of the recipe for success for my students. The class needed all the ingredients of the recipe to allow them to move on to the next level and most importantly pass a certification test.

Pedagogical structure is important, but it is also important to communicate your personal philosophies of life and food that are so intertwined. Throughout my career, I absorbed these philosophical lessons from chefs and industry professionals. As I became a better teacher, I began to incorporate these lessons into each competency. Teaching students to understand food is essential if you are in the business preparing food. Sometimes this understanding is not in a lesson or in a book. If you really do not understand food, no matter how clear a recipe it is, the end result might taste terrible, make people sick or not provide any nutritional food value. Integrating your philosophy of food into the generally experiential approaches to culinary education provides added value to the education you are providing.

For example, the wannabe chef must be taught to develop a relationship with food. They need to learn that one does not just prepare food. One must be able to understand it, nurture it and make it into what it can be. But first one must understand what the food is. One must receive it nicely, provide a great place for it to live, wash and clean it properly, groom it properly and then prepare it for its future. Treat it poorly by ignoring any part of this and it will get even. It is a great responsibility one assumes when one becomes a chef. What a great honor it is to be the person responsible for providing the nutrients that keep others alive while at the same time providing those consuming joy. It is truly a great leap of faith to have the confidence to cook. So that is why I believe structure in the classroom coupled with dose of philosophy of culinary education is the recipe for success to make you a better teacher.

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**Received** January 23, 2012; **Accepted** January 28, 2012; **Published** January 31, 2012

**Citation:** Mandabach KH (2012) Structure and Philosophy in the Classroom Makes you a Better Teacher. J Tourism Hospit 1:e108. doi:[10.4172/2167-0269.1000e108](https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-0269.1000e108)

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