Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”
Benjamin Franklin

Franklin’s quote embodies the core tenants of my teaching philosophy I have developed during my time as a Teaching Fellow at Colorado State University. First, I aim to teach students how to think, rather than what to think. Second, I emphasize the application of psychology to our everyday lives. Last, I continuously strive towards fostering student engagement with course material. It is my hope that I will involve students in a meaningful way so they can develop an appreciation for psychology and truly learn. In the proceeding sections, I will highlight the tenants of my teaching philosophy while providing examples from my classrooms.

How to Think, Rather Than What to Think
One of my primary goals as an instructor is to guide students in developing critical and evaluative skills, rather than lead students to memorize definitions and facts. To this end, I strive to teach my students to “think like a psychologist”. For example, students in my General Psychology course are asked to evaluate a sensational claim made about psychological research from a popular press article through multiple scaffolded writings assignments. Students are asked to move beyond an unconditional acceptance of popular press claims and become critical consumers using their knowledge of research methods. I also ask to students to consider multiple determinants when evaluating a behavior, rather than focusing on a single explanation. For example, I present psychological disorders in my class as stemming from biological, psychological, and social factors; class discussions then center around these potential contributing factors. When students view disorders through this lens, they are able to appreciate the complexity of behavior and develop their critical thinking skills. Ultimately, students are involved in the process of “thinking like a psychologist” and they can learn skills that have lasting benefits both inside and outside of our classroom.

The Application of Psychology
Next, I highlight the application of course material to everyday life in each and every class I teach to foster students’ curiosity in psychology. My students are diverse – some non-majors who are fulfilling requirements and some upper-level psychology majors – and I structure my classes to be research-based yet accessible to the diversity of students. For instance, students in my Social Psychology course are asked to evaluate a print advertisement using concepts learned while covering social influence and persuasion. In this assignment, I encourage students to apply course concepts in an applied way to dissect an advertising attempt. Students have told me that this assignment opened their eyes to the many persuasion attempts bombarding them daily and helped them become informed consumers. In my General Psychology course, I structure a lecture on the biology of the brain from the perspective of a student on a date. Then, I push students to think about how each brain region might be activated while on this date. I elicit ideas from students during class and I am continually surprised at the creativity in this application of psychology to everyday life. Through these application examples, students become involved with psychology on a personal level and lasting learning can occur.

Student Engagement
Finally, students who are engaged in class are more academically successful than disengaged students. Through a variety of strategies, I strive to promote student engagement in
order to spark student excitement, dedication, and motivation to excel. At the beginning of every semester, students vote for the “Student’s Choice Lecture”; students decide on the topic for a lecture. Student take an active role in directing their education and students are very engaged during these lectures as seen by energetic class discussions and thoughtful questions. I also find that incorporating experiential and hands-on activities can spark students’ engagement. While learning about memory in General Psychology, I have a confederate (a colleague) “steal” a notebook of mine from the front of class while I am lecturing. Later, I ask students to recall details of this “crime” as well as identify this “criminal” from a line-up I have created. This activity elicits much excitement from students as they struggle with recall and an interesting discussion on memory malleability ensues. In addition, I frequently engage students with video clips from popular media, small group discussions, short in-class reflection writings, and student polling during class on hot topics. An engaged student is an involved student, which can lead to lasting learning.

I also apply my teaching philosophy more broadly when managing and mentoring large teams of graduate teaching assistants (TAs), undergraduate TAs, and undergraduate research assistants. My teaching philosophy is my guide in these mentoring relationships. For example, I encourage TAs to become engaged with the course as I invite TAs to give guest presentations in class, elicit TA input in the creation of exams, and ask TAs to host exam review sessions. I also encourage TAs to think like an instructor. For instance, TAs are given autonomy in the structure of the exam review sessions they lead; however, we work closely to brainstorm strategies to best facilitate student learning and many TAs see review sessions as their own classroom. I also work to convey the application of skills gained. TAs can apply the interpersonal skills developed while working with students, the presentation skills gained while guest lecturing, and the pedagogical skills cultivated while developing course content to a variety of settings and careers.

In sum, I have a strong commitment to undergraduate education. I actively seek out numerous opportunities to develop as an instructor and I am working towards the CSU Institute for Learning and Teaching Graduate Teaching Certificate. I also teach concurrently at a large university and a small community college. While each setting has unique challenges, the common threads of my overarching philosophy remain constant: teaching how to think, applying psychology, and engaging students. I look forward to the opportunity to continue to develop as an educator, discover new ways to promote the success of my students, and involve students at every chance.