"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."—William Butler Yeats. I agree with Yeats that teaching isn't just a process of delivering content or meeting curriculum goals, teaching lays the foundations for future conversations about a topic. As a teacher, I know the bulk of what students learn will take place outside of the confines of class periods, and will instead grow from student-directed reading, conversations, or curiosity. I see my role in this process to create an open and accessible environment where students are encouraged to embrace new concepts and topics, and challenged to reach their maximum potential.

One of the key strengths I bring to the classroom is my enthusiasm and excitement for historical and ongoing research in neuroscience and psychology. Whenever possible, I try to share this enthusiasm with my students, and point out how concepts and points discussed in class stem from a rich history of living and storied scientific research. When teaching students about the importance of the amygdala in processing emotions, I had them read and discuss a famous article about a patient with a rare disease giving her a focal lesion in this region, and consequently, unable to experience fear. I encouraged my students to discuss how being unable to experience fear might drastically change your life and outlook. I tried to make concrete how we can learn about the function of brain regions from the experiences of patients who have suffered focal brain damage, and how understanding the regions involved in a behavior can hopefully drive future methods of rehabilitation. I strongly believe encouraging students to read and discuss primary scientific literature whenever possible can help not only those students interested in a science career, but also help all my students gain a better understanding of how real science is conducted and communicated.

While it's easy to claim that lecture is an imperfect format for reaching students, the fact remains that the lecture format is the lingua franca for how science is shared with colleagues for pitching new study ideas, sharing results, or sparking discussion. Instead of dismissing the lecture format as ineffective, I think it is more reasonable to acknowledge that lectures (just like other teaching methods) present their own challenges for engaging students about the topic under consideration. Some of the best lectures I’ve experienced make the extra effort to break out of a one way stream of information and interact with the classroom, either through surveying the students, drawing figures interactively, or using humor to make the teacher and topic more accessible. I appreciate the extra effort this requires in terms of preparation and effort, and I feel it is time well spent.

Finally, it’s important to address how I look to measure my effectiveness as a teacher. I fully believe in the benefit of criterion-based grading to promote a collaborative rather than competitive learning environment. In terms of assessing my students, my aim is to ensure that my goals for learning in the course are being met. If students’ results don’t reflect that, then it’s my duty to try new strategies with that class, whether introducing more discussion elements, changing the readings, or examining what I am doing as an instructor. In terms of examining feedback from students my goal is to ensure I am challenging my students and teaching my courses in a manner that at encourages my students to keep an open mind and spark their interest in my topic, and hopefully fan the flames for future learning.