NJ/NY Computer Science Teaching Award
Award Acceptance Speech
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When I received the email from my department chair about winning this award, I was so excited. Without finishing reading the email, I told my 12-yr old son who was sitting next to me "Hey! I received a teaching award!" My son was excited too and said "Congratulations! Good Job! Mom." As I continued reading the email, I said "Oh. The awards event is on June 6th. But I have a class and office hours that day. I cannot attend the event then." I was kind of talking to myself at that moment. But my son immediately responded "That's why you received a teaching award – you **always** think about your classes and your students first." … I guess this is what teaching is about – **students are first**.

I was asked to talk about what I think great teaching is like. As a computer science professor, I would say great teaching is encouraging critical thinking and inspiring students to become lifelong learners.

When I taught Java programming, I told students Java had not been invented yet when I was in college. Some students opened their eyes big and were staring at me. I was not sure what they were thinking. They might be thinking "the teacher is old" or "she did not even learn Java in college, then how can she teach us?" Then, I continued saying, "I learned other programming languages in college that helped me to learn Java by myself. At school, we not only learn knowledges but also learn how to learn. We need keep learning in our lives, especially in computer science field. New technologies keep coming up quickly." Students started nodding their heads.

I always tell students that computer science is not just about coding, but more about problem solving. In order to solve a problem, we need understand the problem (what is the problem? why do we want to solve the problem?) and then think about solutions (how to solve it?). Or, maybe there is already a solution, then can we find a better solution? I ask lots of these What-Why-How questions in class to increase students' curiosity that drives their own thinking and learning.

When I introduced Data Structures and Algorithms to students, I asked students "how to search a number from a set of numbers?". They all agreed that we could compare the number to each number in the set one by one to see if there is a match. I told them "That is the right answer. But if there are one billion numbers to search from, how many comparisons do we need to do? If we have a web search engine that takes 20 mins to generate the result, but Google's search engine can give the result immediately, will anybody use ours? That is why we need to learn how to organize data and access data quickly. That is why we always look for better solutions."

I am given 5 minutes to talk. In the last minute, please allow me to express my gratitude for receiving this award. I am deeply honored to be a recipient of this teaching award. It means a big deal to me. It encourages me to do a better job. I would like to thank my Department Chair Dr. Jim Maccariella for nominating me; and thank the Committee for selecting me. I would also like to extend my gratitude to all my colleagues in my school, Mercer County Community College, for their support; especially to my Division Dean Dr. Farah Bennani, Department Chair Dr. Jim Maccariella and my mentor Prof. Don Reichman for their encouragement. I would like to thank my students who motivate me every day to be a better teacher. As a working mom of two children, I appreciate my family's support and understanding. Finally, thank all of you for your time and attention. Hope you have a wonderful day!