Spark and connection, Those are the two words that keep coming to my mind as I reflect upon my teaching, My approach is not focused on grades or assessment, but on the spark of insight that happens in the classroom when I've done my job, and the sense of connection that I find so incredibly important with my students, It is why the completion of my student's thesis, when she first saw herself as a researcher was an important day in my career, It is why the fact that one of the most heartbreaking moments I have had happened this semester, when a student felt comfoftable enough to come to me to tell me that she wasn't able to make ends meet and was currently living without electricity. The spark and connection is everything to me as an instructor and mentor. It is magic,

Looking back, my path has always been leading me here. I distinctly remember being a young babysitter and seeing that spark when a few of the neighborhood children came to understand why 2 + 2 4, or how those squiggles on a page were words that had meaning. Little did I know at the time that a quest to chase this spark would form the basis of my choice of major in college, the research projects I completed, and even my career, And lucky for me, I connected with 2 faculty mentors in college that helped me — a firstgeneration college student, one who had never been on a plane or even knew what a PhD was — to realize my potential,

After getting my PhD, I knew two things, l) I had to chase the spark of insight in my research, and, 2) I wanted to connect with and transform the lives of my students, similar to the life-changing mentorship I experienced. I couldn't believe (and still can't believe) my luck when I read the ad for a faculty position at Penn State Brandywine. They were looking for someone with my research expertise and had an incredibly diverse study body, with a large proportion of first-generation students, Since becoming a faculty member, my research interests and teaching/mentorship passions have combined in ways I couldn't begin to imagine when I started. I've expanded my research to studying learning more generally, and these research insights form a guiding principle in my teaching. As I've argued in research publications, true education happens when humans are active ("minds-on") and engaged in personally meaningful and socially interactive contexts in which the teacher guides the discovery of new knowledge. In other words, I realize now, true education is spark and connection. Below are some of ways I've aspired to create lifelong learners:

Creating higher-level curricular change (BWX) — From 2015-2016, I was appointed by the Chancellor to chair a committee with the goal of creating a holistic curricular experience that would support students' development in academic, personal, professional, and civic domains. This curricular plan was passed in our Faculty Senate and I ran a pilot course for two academic years, Our early retention and academic success markers suggest that this program has been an overwhelming success, and was a core feature of a recent proposal invited by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Indeed, it is a central component of our campus Strategic Plan. Supporting the next level of scientists/scholars/practitioners. I remain a mentor to a number of students from my courses and my former laboratory researchers. I recently had the honor of seeing two former research students return to Brandywine as part-time instructors (a PhD in Educational Psych and an MSW), Two more are currently enrolled in PhD, programs in Human Development and Clinical Psychology, and a number of others have completed or are completing Master's degrees, I also am proud to support students who have gone into direct service careers and make a point of bringing them back to campus to share their experiences with our undergraduates.

Guiding student learning inside and outside of the classroom. Learning does not begin or end in the classroom, In my lab, I engage students in independent research projects investigating how children learn. I have mentored two Schreyer Honors students and worked with undergraduates at varying levels on research projects. I have led guided readings, collaborated with students in a partnership with a local children's museum, mentored students during completion of the developmental science option of the I-IDFS degree, and presented alongside students at regional and national conferences and the state capital. Further, I have worked with graduate-school bound students as teaching assistants, giving them a new lens through which to think about learning, and prepare them for this role in graduate school.

Using a wide array of pedagogical strategies to help students see meaning and be "minds on." Students need to feel engaged and minds-on, and to achieve this end, I strive to provide varied experiences in and out of the classroom. Even in my lower-level courses that involve some lecture, I also incorporate guided papers that require reading primary journal articles, out-of-class assignments helping them to see what they are learning out in the world (e.g. gender stereotypes in children's programming and advertising), and in-class activities (e.g. calculating nutritional content for children at different ages/stages/in different community contexts), My upperlevel courses involve no lecturing and are instead based on a community-of-scholars model where students lead discussions (with my support) and take responsibility for finding published empirical work to enhance their discussions, The projects in these courses marry research and application — with students finding primary journal articles to review a controversial topic in child development or analyzing an infant toy based on what science tells us is appropriate/beneficial.

Spark and connection continue to drive my work in the lab and the classroom. They also are the goals of my work — especially my work with students, I consider myself incredibly fortunate to be in a position where I can create spaces of magic-making for Penn State students, and I am honored to have been nominated for the University's highest teaching award,