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Teaching Philosophy

My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the mind of people – that is the role of an intellectual.” – Michel Foucault

Teaching allows me to share my knowledge and experience with students while providing an arena for my own self-development and personal fulfillment. If both, students and facilitators are invested, then we can build a relationship that fosters critical thinking and allows us to take risks in a comfortable environment. Too often, classrooms have a power hierarchy set up with the instructor as the ‘expert’ who pours the knowledge into the student, ‘receptical.’ However, I attempt to dismantle this type of power dynamic and provide students the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences as part of the learning process.

While training college educators, practitioners, and administrators for the future, it is necessary to develop curriculums that allow for critical debate of current practices and assumptions. By empowering students to collectively generate questions and answers around contemporary educational practice in a safe and empowering environment, I can foster new ideas within students who are poised to change our educational system to meet current and future demands. As an educator I seek to challenge assumptions by supporting student passions. Doing so allows the diversity of students in the classroom to mirror the diversity of workplaces in which they currently and will later reside, thus fostering real-world learning that students can take with them to their next destination. Education, then, is not just about course content but about developing skills to articulate, defend, and negotiate multiple perspectives of those with whom we engage while simultaneously working toward the similar goal of creating stellar educational environments.

A good deal of my teaching philosophy is derived from the tenants of critical pedagogues. Using the classroom to teach about cultural diversity, social inequality, social justice and variation in goals within the educational arena allows me to actively participate in a commitment to social justice based on issues around cultural background, economic class, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, race, religion, ability, age, and other socially salient categories while teaching the subject matter at hand.

I believe in using a combination of lectures, class discussions, guest speakers, media presentations, experience-based activities, and group collaboration, and technology driven interactions to present multiple perspectives and guide students as they conduct the processes of self-exploration, paradigmatic deconstruction, and critical reflection. Though I do not expect my students to share my passion, perspective, values, or those of other students in the class, I do ask that students:

1. Respect each other and try to hear what each other is saying.

2. Attempt to dismantle power relationships in the classroom so that everyone has the opportunity to be heard and contribute to the process of learning.
3. Create a safe and comfortable environment and keep class discussion in the classroom when appropriate.
4. Share responsibility for the process and products of the class.
5. Not to blame others or ourselves for the inaccurate information we have learned in the past but to accept responsibility for not repeating it.
6. Not blame victims for the conditions of their lives but seek ways to support equitable growth through the tenants of challenge and support.
7. Combat myths and stereotypes.

Using these tenants, I spend a great deal of time and energy in discussion, inviting students to explore and critique the social structures and practices in contemporary society and educational/institutional practices. I use processing skills, activities, community-based engagements, and reflective assignments that are explicitly designed to empower students to apply their learning and think in alternative ways. I have found that students appreciate this kind of environment. Inside the classroom I am ultimately responsible for the presentation of the content in an entertaining, interesting manner that attempts to intrigue, engage, and challenge the student in a variety of ways. Outside the classroom, I believe in maintaining office hours and an open access policy, providing a context for students' continued interrogation of ideas and for their expressions of concern. I provide a connection between classroom theory and real world practice through a variety of service-based engagements with the field. I serve as an advocate for the student's best interests in the department, the university, and the larger community.

I am committed to fostering a community of scholars where individual and collaborative research agendas are integrated with curricular initiatives. By not just teaching research skills and methodologies but engaging in scholarly practice with students, practitioners, and colleagues, I can empower students to be a part of this tradition of the academy. As a researcher, I value creative study design and representations of findings. My goal in educating students about research is to share this enthusiasm and introduce them to the accessibility of research, as well as encourage their abilities to be a part of the scholarly dialogue by producing scholarship important to them. I achieve this by not only my classroom teaching and service on student research committees but by inviting students with similar research agendas to work with me on projects as a form of mentorship and a way to be transparent about the research process; dismantling the mystery that often shrouds scholarly endeavors.

Finally, I hope to ignite passion for issues that matter to my students, fashioning reflective practitioners, engaged educators, and invested citizens through a combination of teaching, research, mentorship, and service.