
Teaching Philosophy

The constant development of my teaching style is as important to me as the subject matter of a course. In my fifteen years of college-level teaching, I have embraced a student-centered or liberatory model of teaching, which emphasizes critical thought and centers care as important to the development of motivated and socially proactive students. Central to my teaching is my belief that the classroom should be a space for encouraging open and thought-provoking discussion.

To possess critical literacy is a vital skill in this confusing era of conflicting mass media messages, advertisements, and information overload. The quality of classroom discussions and student papers often suggests, at first, that most students have not mastered the art of critical thought and do not have a firm grasp on how to critically consume information and media messages. An effective method of sharpening students' critical skills is to take students step by step through the construction of a basic critical analysis, using scholarly, peer-reviewed articles to write a substantial final paper. I carefully explain the process of conducting a critique, emphasizing that students explain both weaknesses and strengths of their chosen topic and avoid engaging in ad hominem attacks. I also highlight the importance of writing as scholarship, not just opinion, and ensure they engage with and evaluate scholarly sources as part of this process. Because I value formative feedback, the final paper is completed in sections throughout the semester so students can receive my guidance at every turn.

I also value teaching methods outside of the traditional lecture format, preferring instead a more hands-on approach to focus students' attention: I view my role in the classroom as a "guide on the side" instead of a "sage on the stage." I often incorporate small-group or student-led discussions into a given class session, and I enjoy using exercises in applying the course material to scenarios centered on policy creation and implementation. These student-centered methods allow me to interact with my students and not only discuss course concepts but build a rapport with them; when they are comfortable with the professor and one another, they can learn more effectively. For instance, when discussing Marxist theory in a sociological theory course, I ask students to design a successful model of a society based on Marx's social, economic, and political paradigms. I explain that while some of Marx's ideas have continued to be accepted by current scholars, others have not, and we discuss what Marx might think about 20th and 21st century communist countries based on their historical successes and failings. This gives students a picture of how modern scholars view Marxist thought while also engaging them in their own assessment of it. Then I divide students up into groups and task them with creating a successful society based on Marxist social, economic, and political principles. This activity always generates a wide array of responses and provides a great opportunity for students to bring their own ideas into our classroom discussion.

Furthermore, when students know their voices will be heard in the classroom, they are more likely to channel their excitement into their written work, as well.

Nel Noddings' (1992) "ethics of care" resonates with me, and I aim to make it a cornerstone of my teaching. Ethics of care focuses on the difference between caring because "one must" and caring because one "wants to." This is an important consideration in any college classroom, whether large or small. I find that through creating an interactive classroom environment that encourages students to ask questions, and then presenting them with interesting hands-on activities, I begin to know my students better and learn how to provide instruction that meets their learning needs, thus fostering the "want to care."

I regularly seek out instructional development opportunities to improve my teaching, and I speak with colleagues often to take note of new and innovative classroom activities and instructional techniques to keep my teaching fresh. It is important to me, too, to understand my students' cultural contexts, social positions, and experiences. Doing so allows me to build warm professional relationships with my students, which I often maintain after they have completed their degrees. I believe my genuine interest in students' learning process and well-being is directly linked to the ways they learn to care about society and current issues.