
Teaching Philosophy
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Being a university professor is a privileged position: Instructors are able to shape impressionable minds and provide means for intellectual and professional success to a community of emerging young professionals. Thus, the classroom setting is one of the most critical places in which professors can facilitate socialization for students' future careers. I know that just one class can influence students in profound ways. I believe that as a teacher, I am responsible for the intellectual and professional growth of my students. Thus, for every class that I teach, I have three overarching goals that help guide how I approach any course. First, I will be successful as a teacher if I provide to my students the necessary tools to be proficient in the knowledge of the discipline. Second, I aim to provide the tools necessary to make my students life-long learners. Finally, I must craft the course in such a way to mold students to be productive members of organizations as well as productive members in society. Collectively, these three goals create my teaching philosophy.

Providing Tools to Students

In order to foster intellectual growth, I must provide my students the tools necessary to be proficient in the knowledge of the discipline. This particular goal is the most challenging. As a young scholar, I self-engage in various disciplines. My scholarship crosses the borders of many disciplines, most notably sociology, demography, economics, public health, psychology, cultural studies and family studies. When I approach a course (particularly a survey course such as an introductory course), I rely on my interdisciplinary eye to shape the material that is presented. Even though I use various disciplines in my instruction, I still would like students to be proficient in the language and terminology that is used in the general area of *social sciences*. Thus, the challenging aspect to this goal is providing the balance between a general understanding of social science and a more varied exposure to various disciplines within the social sciences.

I overcome this challenge by relying on materials that showcase uniformity within social science disciplines. I find that most textbooks are generally successful at underscoring important themes and knowledge within a particular discipline, but only a few textbooks truly integrate disciplines in a manner that makes knowledge accessible to students. However, where a textbook lacks in integration, I supplement with other mediums that highlight how disciplines are related to each other. For instance, a tie between spatial demography, cultural studies and economics could be a newspaper article that discusses predatory lending and its effect on residential choice for racial and ethnic minorities. Such an article has been used in my courses to highlight the interconnectedness between these disciplines.

Grooming Students to be Lifelong Learners

While information is critical to success in my courses, I gauge student success by the extent to which students can take information to actively learn. Thus, when a student leaves my course, he/she should be entrenched in a life-long process of learning, a second goal for my courses. At the start of a course, I highlight that students are not just *taking* a class, that is, the information that is presented to students is not solely for the purpose of passing the course. Rather, each class provides building blocks for higher-order levels of learning. In practice, when they leave the university for post-graduate work, or to enter into the workforce, they are constantly exposed to new and more complex materials to learn. Thus, higher-order levels of learning are necessary to ensure that the information learned is understood, applied, synthesized and evaluated (Marzano and Kendal 2007).

Thus, for my courses, memorization will only get a student so far in the course. I am more concerned about argument-creation and establishing one's voice. To get students thinking, I use various mediums to disseminate information outside of a textbook. The utilization of the Internet is necessary in this age of technology. Thus, online resources such as the U.S. Census Bureau webpage, articles in various newspapers, streaming videos (notably on YouTube) and web-based experiments such as the ones highlighted in a recent New York Times Op-Ed piece (Kristof 2008) are used to challenge students to integrate and apply abstract concepts (e.g., stratification) to a sociologically-informed argument (e.g., why poverty disproportionately impacts one group versus another). Assignments geared toward the extraction of important information and creating a viewpoint on the material used help aid the student in engaging in higher-level learning.

In addition, I attempt to minimize personal bias and present information that offers differing points of view and I present real-world applicability to information disseminated in course. This tactic allows for students to be personally engaged in the material (by, for instance, showcasing their viewpoint or presenting exactly what is to be gained from the material). Students should have a grasp of why an instructor has assigned a particular reading or a particular written assignment. One way to give students a handle of "why" is by outlining how a particular assignment fits within the course and how it fits within a more varied viewpoint of the world. My assignments, illustrate why a particular assignment is important for the course, but it also charges students to assess how the assignment can be utilized to understand real-world phenomena, thus engaging students in critical thinking. An example of a higher-level learning assignment is displayed later in the teaching portfolio.

Transforming Students to be Productive Members of Society

Understanding how to apply meaning to material outside of the course can promote life-long learning but it also can mold students to be productive members of organizations and in society, the third goal of teaching. Information and higher levels of learning gives individuals knowledge to perform certain tasks, but there is more to the education system than just the knowledge presented by the instructor. From my classroom, I also aim to give students knowledge that would help them in a work-place or organizational environment. I value intellectual diversity and cooperative learning because in any setting, individuals will have different viewpoints and thoughts but to complete a task or meet a goal, one must work with other individuals. Thus, I integrate both values in my teaching.

One way that I integrate intellectual diversity and cooperative learning is to engage in *cooperative learning* (Johnson and Johnson 1998). I use this kind of learning environment to showcase differing points of view. In addition, I utilize cooperative learning to illustrate how teamwork and interdependence are necessary in creating a group dynamic. For instance, I assign students in groups and have them have an unstructured discussion of race. Each person must contribute a unique viewpoint and personal experience, but groups must write an essay that integrates the shared knowledge/experiences discussed with the material discussed in class. Thus, students must value intellectual diversity and work together to create a product.

I also mold students to be productive members of organizations and in society by underscoring the importance of the syllabus. I generate the syllabus weeks before the start of the course and I distribute the syllabus to my enrolled students. On the first day of class, I inform students that the syllabus is a contract that outlines expectations of both the student and the instructor. As a personal preference, I feel that students should have some say in the course content. Thus, for the first day, I ask if there are any topics not covered on the syllabus that should be discussed. Essentially, I disclose to my students that the syllabus is a way to engage in collective responsibility (Parkes and Harris 2002). If I do my job well and students perform their obligations, then both parties should be compensated in a manner suitable to the deal. Thus, if students perform their obligations, they should receive a fair grade. If I do my job well, I should expect no grievances regarding my teaching style. Thus, from the start, the course is set up to motivate students to perform well in a fair situation, which then could translate to work in other courses and (in general) in the workforce.

Areas for Instructor Growth

For every class that I teach, I use these three goals as markers for assessing both student and instructor success. However, since I am a novice instructor, I acknowledge that I am also constantly learning how to become a more effective teacher. I firmly believe that in order to advance myself as a better instructor, I will need to have the same goals for myself as I have for my students. First, I will need to successfully utilize new ways to disseminate material to my students. I use varied innovative and traditional methods of learning in the course such as *Small Group Scored Discussion* (Young 2007), technoculture (Nicolosi 2004) as well as PowerPoint presentations and traditional lectures. Students learn differently and respond to mediums differently. The ultimate purpose of incorporating various methods is to give my students a wide exposure to how information can be diffused so that they can absorb knowledge using an array of tools. However, as technology becomes more advanced and as student-centered learning types become more diverse, I must constantly engage in strategies to effectively and efficiently incorporate technology in learning.

Second, I will need to be a life-long learner as well. Disseminating new and exciting phenomena is essential to student learning. Thus, in tandem with integrating technology in learning, I must also continually update myself on the discipline and scholarship pertinent to the courses that I instruct. This statement is axiomatic in teaching pedagogy: as emerging research becomes mainstream, teaching materials will need to accommodate, by inclusion (e.g., the inclusion of a new chapter in a textbook) and/or through expansion (e.g., integrating new research in an established chapter in a textbook). Thus, my self-improvement as a teacher first stems from knowing the latest trends in knowledge in order to disseminate it to students.

Lastly, like my students, I must be molded to be a productive teacher in society. I believe that a productive teacher continually self-reflects and self-evaluates his/her teaching philosophy and teaching pedagogy. In addition, being productive means that as I become more masterful in teaching, that I disseminate innovative teaching strategies through, for instance, presentations at professional conferences or by publishing in teaching journals (such as *Teaching Sociology*). Thus, in my view, instructing students proves to be beneficial to students, to myself and to a larger community of instructors who are invested in being both effective and efficient teachers in their field.

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