TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Learning certainly has intrinsic value, as the desire to learn is inherent in so many of the students I teach. At the same time, learning is among the most powerful forces in service of transformative social justice. I am committed to teaching that promotes social justice through bridge-building across disciplines and between students and off-campus communities. Likewise, my approach to teaching is that learning is a collaboration between my students and me. As a collaborator, I serve as a guide for student navigation of new information, ideas, perspectives, and the institution itself. My teaching is also reactive, responding to the needs of my students as they arise. I echo what many educators have said before, that I learn a great deal from my students. I center this reciprocal learning-teaching relationship on four core values: holistic learning, interdisciplinarity, creativity, and classroom community-building.

Holistic Learning

Learning is a personal, embodied, creative process. When students enter a classroom, they do not shed their identities, values, backgrounds, and experiences; therefore, I ask students to draw from their positions and critically reflect on their privileges. This reflection translates to when students encounter new writers, I ask them to consider the factors that may influence the writer as a holistic person. With questions like "who benefits from this text if what it is saying is true?" and "what are some possible ramifications of this text for various communities, non-human animals, environments, governments and so on?" I push students to get comfortable with uncertainty. Philosophical inquiry does not guarantee answers, so one must be willing to accept uncertainty even when arguments appear irrefutable.

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity does not just mean presenting students with different disciplinary perspectives, it emphasizes the connection points, working in the overlapping spaces. I teach my students to be weavers, pulling from the threads of their identities and other disciplines in order to create textured, nuanced understandings of class topics. I hope that the textiles we make are directly useful to students' lives and to projects of social justice. One means by which I concretely bring interdisciplinarity into the classroom is through Digital Humanities methods. Digital Humanities (DH) is, by definition, an interdisciplinary field that encourages synthesis of ideas across areas of study. I ask students to connect technologies to traditional discourses as a means for either revealing new questions, or for developing innovative ways for presenting ideas.

I have had success with a particular assignment, Weekly Logs, when I taught Introduction to Digital Humanities. The logs serve several purposes: I am able to gauge comprehension and adjust classes based on recurring questions or misunderstandings. Students develop concise summarizing skills. I am able to maintain an ongoing conversation with students as part of my effort to build relationships. And students curate a toolkit of ideas, information, and texts that preserve what they learned in class.

Creativity

Along similar lines, I value creativity both in terms of my pedagogy and in what I ask of my students. I employ a variety of teaching methods to engage a diverse body of learners, including group close-readings, class discussion, artistic creation, writing workshops, mini lectures, and multimedia presentations. I nurture creativity in my students' writing, argumentation, projects, and problem-solving. Replication does not lead to the radical change we need to secure social justice and liberation. We need new imaginative, creative solutions. Therefore, I privilege creativity in all aspects of my teaching.

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DH methodologies have consistently useful for fostering creativity. For example, my students have co-created an interactive timeline with Knightlab's Timeline JS that traces the evolution of ethical theories and intentionally expands on the traditional Western canon. I encourage final projects of many forms, including short documentaries, podcasts digital maps, websites, and artistic performances, as long as the philosophical focus is clear.

Valuing creativity means making space for students to explore, make mistakes, and "fail." Therefore, I often to privilege the *process* over the final product when I grade larger assignments. I ask students to reflect throughout the process of their final projects and drafts, and I build in benchmarks to keep students accountable, giving them credit for the work as they go along.

Classroom Community-Building

Students should feel safe, respected, and valued in classrooms, and I take responsibility for building this environment. I do not tolerate disrespect and I make clear that students are to avoid language that demeans or assumes gender, race, ethnicity, experience, ability etc. Individuals' backgrounds and experiences are to be respected but not carelessly compared. I encourage students to share about themselves as they are comfortable and seek commonalities with each other while deliberately acknowledging differences that make a difference and are not to be ignored, erased, or oversimplified.

Philosophy has a tendency to be divisive, defensive, and competitive. I aim to foster a community of learners who may differ on issues but who care more about the well-being of others than "being right." I believe one path toward building this trusting, caring community is through modeling care, respect, openness, and humility when I teach. I firmly believe that education is not a transaction of knowledge from instructor to student but instead a relational collaboration. Thus, I intentionally build relationships with my students by being open about myself, and by treating assignments as an ongoing dialogue in which students share their understandings and reveal possible shortcomings in comprehension, and I share feedback and what I have learned from their work.

For each class I teach, I have my students create a classroom community pact. I ask them to consider what they liked and disliked about previous class experiences. Then, as a collective, they discuss the norms and behaviors they want to establish. I try to be as hands-off as possible in this discussion, but I do require that they uphold my "Three Rs": Respect, Reciprocity, and Reflection. The community pact is a living document that they can revisit at any point in the semester.

While teaching recitation sections for IAH 207 Literature, Cultures, and Identities: Ideas of Race and Identity, I frequently had students work in pairs or groups to share their ideas and teach each other about the day's content. Additionally I conducted peer-review writing workshops in which I provided scaffolding for how to charitably and effectively give feedback. For future upper-level philosophy courses I would establish weekly correspondences in which students develop semester-long relationships with a peer through reflecting on class topics.

CONCLUSION

In the future I would like to incorporate more community organization relationships and international collaborations into my classroom. Philosophy can get trapped in theoretical, abstract spaces that lose sight of theories' material effects. I want to build pathways for philosophical application for life within and beyond academia. Developing relationships with local organizations, international scholars, activists, and students is my primary method for this goal.

I sincerely hope that by teaching my students skills that can directly support their own personal and professional commitments, by encouraging holistic learning, interdisciplinarity, creativity, and community, and by nudging them toward social justice, I might empower students to make the changes we need to establish justice and liberation for everyone.