

My Teaching Philosophy

I believe that the goal of good teaching is overall improvement of the student. For me, this takes place on three levels. First, it is important to expose students to new information that can potentially improve their life experience by expanding their way of thinking about the world and challenge them to think critically. I do this by teaching challenging courses both in psychology, focusing on personality and organizational psychology, and in issues of social justice. Second, I believe it is important to help students develop the skills necessary to learn. To do this I draw heavily on my research interests in the field of motivation and contingent self-worth. Specifically, I try to promote mastery and deep processing of the material as opposed to focusing on outperforming other students, to encourage students to value learning for its own sake and inherent value, and help students connect with how they can use their goals to positively influence the development of their own values and that of society as opposed to just trying to boost their egos by “making the grade”. Finally, it is important to help students develop general skills they will need for future employment and participation in society. These skills are often independent of the content of the course and include improvements in public speaking, writing, and teamwork.

One of my favorite methods of teaching is to act as a facilitator for group discussions. Through my experience with the Dialogues on Diversity program at the University of Michigan, I have learned to appreciate the value of creating safe space for people to come together and share ideas. By establishing ground rules for discussion, using creative icebreakers to create momentum, having a diverse set of “back-up” activities and being flexible enough to tailor the material to the unique needs of the class, students begin to reflect and question their beliefs about themselves and people they see as “others”. This method is especially appropriate when dealing

with social justice issues because many of our prejudices are rooted in our limited exposure to diverse perspectives. However, I enjoy using it in psychology courses as well and find that having activities such as role-playing Freudian slips help to add variety and liven up the mood from time to time!

Another important learning tool that I make use of is group work. In most of today's occupations it is important to know how to successfully interact with other people. Because of this I believe it is important to gain experience working with groups of many different kinds during the course of your education. In my courses this is accomplished through classroom group activities, the composition of which I try to vary as much as possible and major group projects, in which students can get to know and work with a group in depth over time. In my research, I aim to establish an atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration with my research assistants, which encourages ownership and responsibility for their work.

One last favorite method of mine that I would like to mention is the emphasis on public speaking. In many occupations it is important to be a good teacher. The ability to get your ideas across clearly, to get people excited about what you have to say, and to demonstrate competence in some area is essential in every field from private industry, to medicine, to politics, to academics and beyond. I therefore give students many opportunities to present their ideas in class, such as through informal debriefings after group activities to formal presentations of their group projects.

My major motivation to be an excellent teacher is twofold. First, I believe that the best way to learn is to teach. By teaching, one must learn the core material in great depth and be able to make it relevant to students' lives in today's society. In addition, one learns a great deal from one's colleagues and students during the process of teaching. Through these various avenues of

self-improvement, one becomes an active participant in today's complex, ever-evolving society. My second major motivation for excellent teaching is that I help people learn to improve themselves. I help people to see beyond what they are towards what they could be in the future, and what the benefits of that are for themselves, their friends, and their families. This, I believe, helps to improve society, albeit in a small way, through the cultivation of responsible, active citizens.