

Teaching Philosophy Statement

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Love. This single word is a paragon of my teaching philosophy. My philosophy of teaching is that students learn the best in environments, both in-person and virtually, that foster comfortability and heartfelt acceptance –what I call *a pedagogy of love*¹. My students remind me that there is so much power in stories and how the principle of love as pedagogy leads to the best work. As for my own story as a Greek-American female scholar, I came to realize this philosophy through my personal experiences in the classroom as a student with a physical and mental disability. I was diagnosed with a stutter when I was in elementary school. And when I was fourteen, I was in an accident that resulted in the partial loss of my right pinkie finger. I was bullied for a huge part of my young adult life leading to my struggles with anxiety and depression. Such experiences have shaped how I approach my own contemplative pedagogy to be one of open acceptance, compassion, and genuine love. In the words of Ijeoma Oluo, “Talk. Please talk and talk and talk some more[.] We have to learn and fight at the same time.”² In my writing and literature courses, I aim to promote a seminar-based format where my teaching strategy is simple: *talking*. Everyone has a voice in my classroom, but “talking” can also be done in non-verbal ways like quick writes, shared documents, and discussion forums. My metaphor for teaching embodies one person handing their heart to another. Such an act requires a means of vulnerability, resilience, and an openness to emerging knowledge no matter how uncomfortable it may be. Students will read and write about topics that are socially, culturally, politically, and institutionally relevant to them. Censorship is ineffective and outdated praxis. At the heart of my teaching lies an equitable and sincere devotion to curating a student-focused and heuristic pedagogy that offers academic and emotional support, both in-person and virtually. An avowed goal of mine, both personally and professionally, is to be a willing learner, observer, and a deep listener in and outside of the classroom. In bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress*, she says, “Professors rarely speak of the place of eros [...] in our classrooms.”³ By placing love and self-love at the center of my pedagogy, I aspire to break the colonial cycle of epistemological assumptions and facilitate a learning environment of productive struggle.

In my future Writing and Literature courses, I craft my syllabi to assist students in working through and embracing their personal, social, and cultural experiences through active sense-making. I find it important to create a syllabus with a transparent and accessible design that uses relational language by using the first and second person points of view over the third, one that employs inviting and communal rhetoric over authoritative and policy-driven structures, and one that shares additional campus resources centered around student success and emotional support like writing centers, queer resource centers, offices for disability services, campus security services, Title IX protocols, and counseling services for mental health awareness.

When it comes to classroom activities, I show my students the importance of prewriting, writing, and rewriting. I create a decolonized, interactive, and participatory classroom climate by providing engaging lectures and workshops with technology integration for improving student engagement and learning. For example, my lectures incorporate formative checks for

¹ Darder, Antonia. *Reinventing Paulo Freire : A Pedagogy of Love*. Second edition, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

² Oluo, Ijeoma. *So You Want to Talk About Race*. Reprint edition, Seal Press, 2019.

³ hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge, 1994, <https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-to-Transgress-Education-as-the-Practice-of-Freedom/hooks/p/book/9780415908085>. WorldCat.org.

understanding like pausing for reflection questions where students break into small pair-share groups for further inquiry and collaboration. Such questions are formulated in a way that allows students to bring in their lived experiences and cultures to connect with early modern topics. I also integrate various aspects of technology where students can work and communicate with multiple modalities and forms of expression. I like to use polling so students can express opinions or an interest in further content development in a discreet way. Depending on student need, I provide opportunities outside of class to host workshops on writing-oriented topics like thesis formation, quote integration, and researching with integrity. I provide equal opportunities for verbal and written engagement based on student comfortability and learning preferences, which is how polling serves as another form of engagement. I set aside time for peer review essay sessions equipped with guided handouts and self-evaluation questions to assist students in their transition from process to product while fostering a sense of community and support. I facilitate students' talents in a way that allows them to trust their own rhetorical choices and build confidence in their skillset.

With this in mind, my approach to grading is non-punitive. I aim to create a circular, transdisciplinary, and all-encompassing pedagogy that is productive over destructive. I view grammar as a lower-level concern, but it is a skill I will support my students in mastering. I provide ample constructive feedback on papers that is meaningful to the learner by using analytic rubrics focused on development, competent performance, and future mastery. Analytic rubrics make way to give feedback on various stages of performance where students might be in different developmental phases. Thus, I am devoted to seeking out efficient tools to teach writing and literature in a way that moves beyond single stories, homogeneity, and the coloniality of language rooted in difference.

In order to create an inclusive learning environment, I want my students to see that I prioritize content over prejudice when it comes to my assessment methods. With this in mind, it is my strategy that my students turn all of their essays in with their names omitted from the first page to ensure complete anonymity. This is my way of showing my students that we can fight and dismantle oppression in all its forms. This is my way of showing my students that I am devoted to teaching with integrity and teaching with an equitable appreciation to every student's uniqueness and contributions. Another way I promote inclusion in my classroom is through assembling a diverse reading list from BIPOC male and female forms of scholarship in the twenty-first century. When I teach authors like John Bunyan, William Shakespeare, John Milton, or Edmund Spenser, I accompany the discussion with a plurality of perspectives. For example, if I were to teach one of Shakespeare's early tragedies like *Titus Andronicus* with themes of female trauma, rape, disability, and racism, I would assign scholar David Sterling Brown who analyzes the play through a lens of CRT and Black Lives Matter⁴, and compliment it with a scholar like Francesca T. Royster who argues that "whiteness" is instead the "alien" race in the play⁵. By doing so, we work towards escaping the single-story model of education by exhibiting that there is not just one way of thinking, being, and knowing. This simple, yet transformative approach to reimagining education allows us to dismantle binary thinking by setting a liberatory precedent that all perspectives and identities are welcome and honored to foster multicultural edification.

As an early modern scholar, I extend my research to the world of feminine psychology, which was coined by psychoanalyst Karen Horney who saw a need to give women a voice and perspective in a time of Freud's male-dominated psychology. Similar to Horney, I aim to use my

⁴ Brown, David Sterling. "Is Black So Base a Hue?": Black Life Matters in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*." *Early Modern Black Studies*, forthcoming.

⁵ Royster, Francesca T. "White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4, [Folger Shakespeare Library, The Shakespeare Association of America, Inc., Johns Hopkins University Press, George Washington University], 2000, pp. 432-55, doi:10.2307/2902338. JSTOR.

research to deconstruct the overt one-sidedness of the white male perspective in the early modern canon. In the same way that Horney says, “Like all sciences and all valuations, the psychology of women has hitherto been considered only from the point of view of men,”⁶ I believe that early modern literature faces a similar plight upon being overtly white male oriented. My exploration of the early modern canon with intersections of feminism and psychology sets a precedent in my teaching that no insight is too small, and no subject is too exhausted for further inquiry.

My interest in psychology has also introduced me to Abraham Maslow’s theory of self-actualization and its application as a learning science in the classroom. Such a concept further adheres to my teaching philosophy of love (and self-love) in higher educational classrooms: “self-actualizing persons live their lives more efficiently [in] that they tend to be problem-centered rather than ego-centered.”⁷ As the instructor, subscribing to a problem-centered model of pedagogy moves away from legacy education’s punitive, egoist, and hierarchal approach.

As a scholar and teacher, I am committed to growing and improving upon my methods of instruction by being open to student feedback. At the half-way point of my courses and at their conclusion, I ask my students to anonymously fill out check-in surveys regarding their honest assessments of the course organization and content, what strategies and assignments they enjoyed, and what can overall be improved upon. When it comes to what I hope for my students, I want to create a growth-centered environment that allows them to work toward “the discovery of self”⁸ and furthering their “self-improvement, and self-searching.”⁹ By moving away from the banking model of education into the problem-posing model, I am showing my students that their agency and voice matter; self-actualization is integral to my philosophy of love because it is a movement of awareness of human potential, growth, belonging, and communal affirmation. It is Parker Palmer that asks, “Who is the self that teaches?”¹⁰ but I expand such a question to ask *who is the student that learns* with an effort to encourage future-oriented learning.

Simply, “Love heals.”¹¹ To me, love and literacy both allow for a deeper sense of connection and honesty. Love and literacy are social practices that can instigate creative modes of expression if we have the courage to open our hands and hearts to emerging knowledge. As a literature academic and ethical educator, it is my ongoing quest to continue my education surrounding the myriad of identities that inform a student’s experience in the classroom, and I will continue to encourage my students to write about what feels right. bell hooks said it best: “Love in action is always about service.”¹² *Love* is a therapeutic verb. The teaching philosophy of love I live by disrupts legacy methods that no longer fit our present moment. My combination of commitment and compassion allows me to serve my students academically and emotionally in loving ways that wields a transformative balance of autonomy, community, and self-discovery in the classroom and its borders beyond.

⁶ Horney, Karen. “The Flight from Womanhood.” *Feminine Psychology*, edited by Harold Kelman, Norton, 1993.

⁷ Maslow, Abraham H. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. 3rd ed., J. Wiley & Sons, 1998, <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/onix02/98003766.html>. WorldCat.org.

⁸ Maslow, Abraham H. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. 3rd ed., J. Wiley & Sons, 1998, <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/onix02/98003766.html>. WorldCat.org.

⁹ Maslow, Abraham H. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. 3rd ed., J. Wiley & Sons, 1998, <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/onix02/98003766.html>. WorldCat.org.

¹⁰ Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*. 10th anniversary ed, Jossey-Bass, 2007.

¹¹ hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. First Perennial edition, Harper Perennial, 2001.

¹² hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. First Perennial edition, Harper Perennial, 2001.