

Teaching Philosophy

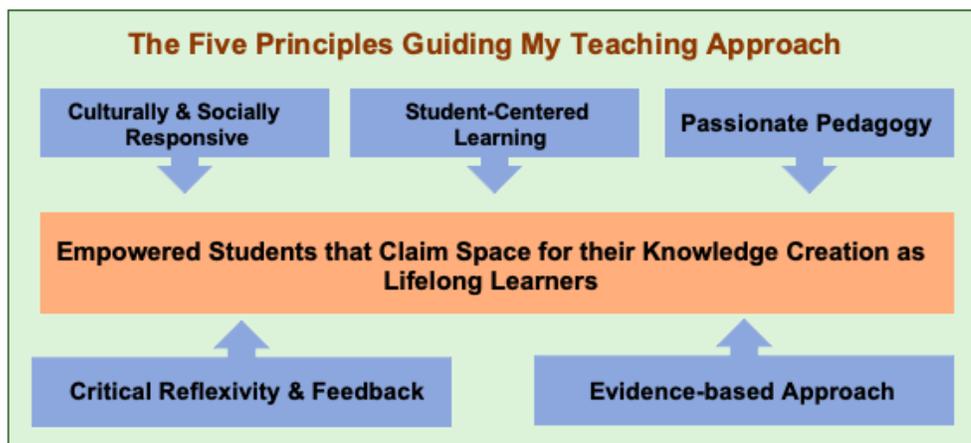
I am because you are
—Ubuntu Proverb

The platform I have been given and the voice I use in the classroom have been afforded to me through the sacrifice and contributions of many who stood before me. Who I am as a teacher is because of the connection and care of community, which has molded my experiences and guides my approach to student learning. My purpose for teaching is centered on the emancipation of marginalized voices—honouring those who came before me and those who are yet to come.

Prior to entering the field of education, my academic journey began in business. During the 11 years I have spent as a post-secondary student I have met several interdisciplinary educators who employed a variety of teaching approaches. Some educators were transformative leaders, some exuded empathy and empowered students to succeed, while some only met the course requirements. Some had great public speaking skills and some displayed great subject matter expertise. However, out of all my educators, only two recognized the significant role that my visible identity as a Black woman played in informing my academic experiences and the social norms that regulated their classroom. By tailoring their course outlines and providing individualized learning experiences, those two educators unknowingly taught me how to disrupt the status quo while being an effective teacher.

The philosophy that guides my teaching approach is rooted in 5 key principles which enable me to expand students' learning experiences outside of the confinements of a classroom and challenge them to push past the barriers that define success. As a teacher I believe that:

1. Teaching has to be culturally-and-socially responsive
2. Teaching must be committed to community and fostering relationships
3. Teaching must be student-centered and driven by passionate pedagogy
4. Teachers should use an evidence-based approach
5. Teachers must engage in critical reflexivity and value feedback



My approach to designing a course entails an iterative process whereby consultation from students is factored into the individualized strategies of each students' learning needs. Although each principle plays a distinct role in informing my teaching approach, it is necessary that the principles are enacted in a collaborative manner to ensure students receive the necessary tools to fuel their life-long learning journey.

Teaching Has to be Culturally and Socially Responsive

Students' intersectional identities and their lived experiences shape the conversations and knowledge that is created within the four walls of a classroom. Acknowledging the complexities of these experiences and the implications of how they complement the program and course level objectives is a tedious feat that requires patience and careful thought. I believe that teaching should be culturally and socially responsive to the distinct positions of each student, the location in which the post-secondary institution is situated, and to the larger society. I believe compassion is the foundation that roadmaps the interactions that both teachers and students have with others. Teaching must situate knowledge in the socio-cultural context in which it is created and problematize the very notion of which identities have authority to create knowledge. Whether utilizing a constructivist, reflective, inquiry based, integrative, or collaborative approach to teaching, teachers must make meaningful connections to the historical, political, and social histories that inform scholarship and equip students with the tools to unpack their worldview.

Teaching Must be Committed to Community and Fostering Relationships

Establishing a commitment to community and the fostering of relationships begins with trust. Not only should teachers develop trust with their students, but students should establish trust with one another. A sense of community within the classroom is rooted in transparency and communication that builds on the trust established. It is within this space that purposeful and rich relationships can be formed. I believe that teaching must be committed to the classroom and institutional community through the development of interdisciplinary learning environments. Students should be challenged to think outside of the box and question the implications of their actions to the broader society in which they make decisions. By inviting interdisciplinary educators into the classroom, students learn how to create relationships with others in academia and integrate concepts from different disciplines to inform their thinking. When appropriate, teaching should highlight the significance of social connection with the equity-deserving groups and communities, specifically the Indigenous communities neighbouring their post-secondary institution. By placing value on shared experiences, students can be empowered to find commonality and respect for other humans during a time where division drives the narrative for individual success.

Teaching Must be Student-Centered and Driven by Passionate Pedagogy

Creating an engaging learning environment for students to apply course content to their future careers and personal lives is paramount. Teaching must centre narratives in the classroom on the perspectives in which students experience the world. I believe that teachers must intentionally create safe learning environments that allow students to make mistakes and encourage them to ask questions. Students should be given the tools to direct conversations and make meaningful connections with course content that strengthens their critical thinking abilities.

I believe that teachers should convey infectious enthusiasm for their field of study, the course they are teaching, and the students they are guiding. Pedagogy used in the classroom should highlight a passion that is constantly growing and developing. Tailoring this teaching approach to the individualized needs of students requires the enactment of different instructional methods as well as active engagement. Engagement that ignites curiosity, connects with prior knowledge, and sharpens students' discernment in knowing what works best for them. Passionate pedagogy should be tangible, evident, and develop rich connections in the teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships.

Teachers Should use an Evidence-based Approach

During a time when information is readily available, teachers should ensure that content delivered to students is timely, relevant, and evidence-based. Scholarship selected in course syllabi should be reflective of ongoing discussions that are rigorous. Notably, teachers should have conviction to challenge Eurocentric views on teaching and learning by acknowledging diverse ways of knowing as part of their evidence-based approach.

Evidence-based approaches can and should be extended towards the instructional activities that are deployed in a classroom. Teachers should remain updated on the pedagogical developments in both their field of study and in the area of teaching. When the principle of student-centred and passionate pedagogy is combined with evidence-based approaches, opportunities for developing quality learning experiences are created.

Teachers Must Engage in Critical Reflexivity and Value Feedback

Learning is an ongoing process that begins before students enter a post-secondary classroom and continues long after they leave. Empowering students to exercise critical reflexivity in the classroom provides them with the ability to make well-informed decisions on how to grow as students and further develop in their profession. Critical reflexivity combined with tools that promote resilience and well-being are key drivers for letting students recognize their autonomy and potential to succeed.

In addition to engaging in critical reflexivity, teachers must value feedback. Feedback provides both teachers and learners with the opportunity to celebrate the areas in which they are succeeding and create strategies for the areas that need improvement. Given the constant pressures to meet organizational, personal, and professional goals, providing timely and accurate feedback can equip students with the resources necessary to meet their learning objectives. Teachers learn alongside students. Receiving feedback from students is essential for growing as a teacher and developing as a learner. Diversifying instructional activities to cater to the needs of students entails careful consideration for understanding how the selected activities impact students. When applied appropriately, this understanding can be beneficial for informing the design of future courses and enhancing students' classroom experience.