

Teaching Philosophy

"The classroom, with its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom."

-bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, p. 207

As a teacher, I strive to realize this vision of education "as the practice of freedom": to see education as the process through which we learn about the world and imagine how it might be changed for the better. It is vital for me as an educator to have faith in and to dedicate my labours to this vision. In this spirit, I have organized my teaching philosophy around four main principles: teaching must be socially responsible and committed to community; teaching requires a commitment to students and student learning; teaching must be accompanied by ongoing learning; and teaching requires passionate pedagogy. Interwoven throughout these four principles is the core concept of relationships; relationality is an Indigenous principle and a way of understanding that guides my professional and scholarly practice. These are the principles that shape my approaches to teaching, both in the classroom and in online environments.

My beliefs about teaching and learning are grounded in my own experiences of education as a young person-Metis, urban, poor, queer, female, gifted, and socially awkward. While I was always academically successful, my schooling experiences did not prevent me from feeling fragmentation, shame, and loss when it came to my cultural identity. My school journey has been a long and rich one. In my work now, I want to contribute to an educational landscape that enables students from diverse backgrounds to have positive and empowering experiences in formal schooling-that will enable them to value their identities, cultures, histories, and communities. In addressing my own educational background, I have learned the importance of confronting racism, colonialism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressive systems, but also of working with respect and care to nurture and shift relationships between diverse peoples.

TEACHING MUST BE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE AND COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY

I believe that education is potentially transformative: it can enable teachers and learners to work toward better futures and to open up possibilities for social justice. In the context of studies in education, I believe it is vital for students to consider the social significance of their professional practice and their scholarship, as well as the impacts that they will have on learners, families, and communities. Given that much of my teaching is in the field of Indigenous education, I must be responsible to the ongoing struggles of Indigenous communities to resist colonial violence, to heal in the wake of colonial histories, and to revitalize pedagogies, knowledges, cultures, and lifeways. In my role as an Indigenous educator, I see my task as working to nourish Indigenous communities and knowledge systems, while challenging racism and colonialism, alongside fostering open and reciprocal relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. This task calls for patience, openness, empathy, courage, integrity, critical thinking, and a good dose of humour. I place a great deal of significance on the spirit in which learning occurs, not only on what is learned.

TEACHING REQUIRES A COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS AND STUDENT LEARNING

This principle speaks to my relationships with my students. I believe that, in order to teach effectively, I must connect with students and be committed to their learning. Learners come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse learning needs and styles. Teaching can call educators to make connections across cultures, languages, and ways of knowing. Each new student brings this invitation to connect. I believe it is important to be mindful of the diversity of the learning communities I work with and to reach out to them with respect. Remaining committed to students entails a consciousness of equity in my classroom, as well as self-reflexivity in curricula and pedagogy, to ensure that students' learning needs, and whole selves, are being addressed.

TEACHING MUST BE STRENGTHENED THROUGH ONGOING LEARNING

This principle speaks to my relationship with my own knowledge and growth: in the subjects or topics that I teach and in the academic disciplines that inform that practice. Ongoing learning also relates to the technical skills and knowledge that enable me to teach in a variety of environments, including online, using a range of digital technologies. I believe it is vital for me to have a strong base of knowledge in the fields from which I teach, and for that knowledge not to be static. Maintaining a commitment to ongoing learning means engaging with current and relevant scholarship, as well as with the foundations and histories of the academic areas under study. It also entails seeking out further learning and professional development opportunities.

Further, this commitment draws me to remain open to the learning opportunities that arise within teaching itself, as knowledge and understanding are shared and generated between students and teachers. In order to teach students to think critically, to engage respectfully with diverse knowledges, and to engage meaningfully in their own teaching and learning, I feel I also need to model being a learner. Ensuring that the three streams of my professorial work--teaching, service, scholarship--function symbiotically as part of a larger whole is vital to enacting this principle.

TEACHING REQUIRES PASSIONATE PEDAGOGY

This principle speaks to my relationship with teaching itself. It is important to me that my enthusiasm for teaching and learning be evident, tangible, infectious. I believe that my best practice is fueled by my deep-seated passion for teaching, by a genuine desire to engage with learners in the complex processes of shifting understandings, building knowledge, and developing relationships with others. If my teaching is to be challenging and motivating, I think I need to be committed to my pedagogical craft and to the ongoing process of accruing wisdom and experience over time. In order to challenge my students, I must challenge myself in my own learning and teaching by continually striving for innovation, growth, knowledge, skills, and possibility. Remaining firmly rooted in my commitment to Indigenous communities, and to the social transformation required to see diverse peoples treat each other with mutual respect, ensures that my approaches to teaching and learning are characterized by enthusiasm as well as integrity.