Teaching Philosophy

My goal as an instructor in the virtual or physical classroom is to build on the students’ existing knowledge and enhance their abilities to critically analyze. This requires drawing from a theoretical framework, creating an environment of mutual respect, and actively engaging students in the learning process.

While sociology and social work have a number of theoretical foundations from which to draw, Structural Social Work is one lens that I employ. It calls for an investigation into the structural barriers and imbedded practices that clients and oppressed groups face. From research to interpersonal interactions with clients, power, in its many forms, is always a focus of analysis in my courses. This theoretical foundation is in line with the Council for Social Work Education as noted in their educational policies, “Social workers recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power” (CSWE, 2008, p. 5).

Additionally, I draw from humanistic framework. While not all of the tenets from a humanistic philosophy can be translated to the classroom, I do work to create a non-judgmental environment for students to explore their potential biases and those that permeate our many cultures. Without an open and safe environment, this can only occur on a superficial level. Therefore, I work diligently to create an environment where students’ various perspectives can be expressed openly and honestly and their beliefs can also be respectfully challenged. This environment of interaction has been helpful to empower students to chart their own educational journey.

Technology has also proven beneficial in the interactive process of learning. I have used eInstruction’s CPS student response systems (i.e. Clickers). When using Clickers, each student has her/his own remote key pad in order to log in an answer to the electronically or verbally posed question. Clickers can be used to begin dialogues on controversial topics. For instance, individuals may be hesitant to express their views when they are not politically correct or popularly accepted. Once the class has answered the question, the aggregate results can be displayed for the class to see and open a discussion. Clickers can also gauge the level of comprehension for the current topic. When discussing cognitive behavioral therapy, a three question ‘quiz’ can alert me if I need to revisit the concept or if the class is ready to move on.

I have found this mix of theory, inclusive engagement, and technology to be ideal for online interactions with students. The online format allows students to break down some of the geographic barriers and opportunity constrictions which have impeded many from continuing their educations. I see it as my responsibility to communicate my genuine care and concern for students’ learning and to communicate an openness to the spectrum of ideas and opinions. This can enable a rapport to be built, engaging and retaining students. Finally, technology enables the entire opportunity to be possible.

I am passionate about education. Working with students only continues to ignite this passion. I listen to students’ ideas and questions, and I challenge students to push themselves into less comfortable places with new concepts and skills. I present information in a clear manner and work to remain contagiously passionate about the topic at hand. I am grateful to be able to see students’ growth as they expand their critical thinking skills and explore the many dimensions of the world we live and work in.

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