

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is grounded in self-reflection, diversity and self-efficacy. Specifically, I believe that my role as a teacher is to help students explore their place in the world, embrace their own diversity as well as that of their peers and promote self-efficacy. I try to achieve these goals by creating an engaging learning environment, using diversity as a teaching tool and by providing my students with guidance. These goals are important to how I conceptualize teaching because I view learning as a process that should include personal as well as intellectual growth. Below, using examples from my own teaching I explain in greater detail how I try to achieve these teaching goals.

Creating an Engaging Atmosphere

Student success in a course is tied to the degree to which students feel engaged in course material. Therefore I actively try to promote an engaging learning environment when I teach. One of the ways I achieve this is by showing my enthusiasm for the course material. Educators cannot expect students to be interested in course material if we do not convey our own enthusiasm. I let students know at the outset of a course that I find social psychology appealing because I get to study social issues that are important to me. It allows me to get students engaged in the course material by encouraging them to study issues that are important to them whenever possible. I have found this to be effective in my classes, particularly for Introduction to Research Methods where students spend the semester designing, conducting and writing up their own studies. When students choose topics that they are interested in not only do I find that their projects are of higher quality, but they are also more engaged in class, because it is easier for them to reflect on methods and statistics that are pertinent to their own research.

Using Diversity as a Teaching Tool

Psychology classes attract students from different academic and cultural backgrounds. Being part Black Canadian and Native Canadian and having lived in two of the most culturally diverse cities in the world (Vancouver and Toronto), respecting diversity has always been important to me. But even in the most diverse settings there is the potential for individuals who are members of minority groups to feel isolated. Therefore it is important for teachers to be cognizant of diversity in their classrooms and find opportunities to use it to facilitate learning. When it comes to managing students academic backgrounds, the challenge is to start out at a level that does not require much prior knowledge while at the same time not alienating people who already know a lot. I accomplish this by getting to know students' academic backgrounds at the beginning of class, and often ask students with a strong background in a particular area to provide their opinions on topics when appropriate. I call upon a variety of people and ask for their expertise so that everyone feels included and valued. I also use diversity to promote experiential learning. For example, as a course instructor for Intergroup Relations I had students write a paper about their experiences as a member of a disadvantaged group. When students asked me for direction on their papers, I told them to take the assignment as an opportunity to reflect on their experiences as a member of a disadvantaged group that is not highly politicized, but might be very important to them (e.g., being an ESL student). I also encouraged them to reflect on their experiences as a member of an advantaged social group to better understand how one's position in a social hierarchy can lead to different life outcomes.

Providing Guidance

I spend a lot of time providing guidance with student's writing. I do this because students often underestimate the amount of writing involved in psychology. Also the "technical" writing required in the field differs immensely from other social science disciplines. The discrepancy between student's expectations for writing in psychology courses and reality can be a source of anxiety for some. As a result my comments on student's writing are often directed at helping students transfer their ideas into writing. In this feedback I always try to highlight what students do well, while imparting constructive advice and ideas for improvement. Additionally, the guidance I provide students goes beyond helping them learn course material. I often use my office hours to advise students on their career goals. I have also provided students with feedback on their personal statements and written them letters of recommendation. I benefited from mentorship when I was an undergraduate student, so I try to emulate those who helped me.

Teaching Experience

Course Instructor/Lecturer for Intergroup Relations

This third-year undergraduate course has an enrollment of 150 students and consists of 3-hour lectures. The course examines some of the causes and consequences of intergroup inequality, and explores ways in which the social psychological study of intergroup relations can inform attempts at social change. Some of the lecture topics include heterosexism, ableism, sexism, multiculturalism and environmental sustainability. While some of the course content focuses on intergroup relations in a North American context, I have tried as much as possible to incorporate material that examines intergroup relations in societies from across the globe. Assessment in this course is comprised of two papers, a midterm and a final exam. For their papers students have been encouraged to draw on their personal experiences, their social identities, intergroup histories and current events to situate their papers. Discussions during the lectures are encouraged and challenge students to engage in a critical analysis of the topics covered in the course. Ratings for the course are scored on a 5-point, 0-4 scale. My evaluations are exceptionally strong. For example, my students have found the lectures to be informative (3.75) and felt that my teaching ability (3.66) is of a very high caliber. Ratings of overall student satisfaction with this course are also very high (3.55).

Teaching Assistant & Tutor/Marker

From 2006 to 2012 I worked as a teaching assistant for Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Research Methods and Critical Issues in Psychology. I also served as a tutor/marker for Social Psychology and Intergroup Relations during that time. As a teaching assistant and tutor/marker, I designed and delivered 2-hour tutorials with 15 to 20 students/tutorial and marked course work. Students were extremely pleased with my teaching ability as a teaching assistant, giving me ratings of 3.64 out of 4.00 on average.

Professional Development

To continue improving my teaching skills and techniques, I taken part in an Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) through SFU's Teaching and Learning Centre. During this intensive workshop I developed and delivered lectures on social psychological concepts and received constructive feedback on my performance and techniques. I have also taken a senate-approved Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (CUTL) program at SFU. The approximately 120 hour course instructs teachers on different teaching approaches, encourages self-reflection on their own experiences and gives people the opportunity to revise their teaching (e.g., planning, lecturing, assessment). Assignments in the program included designing materials and methods of assessment for courses we have taught or likely will teach. I believe that the CUTL program has enhanced my understanding and ability to provide an enriching learning environment for students in my own teaching.