

Teaching Statement

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My teaching centers on the *practice of writing*, fostering a *collaborative learning environment*, and cultivating an appreciation of *historical texts* that, in virtue of their difficulty and foreignness, resist our ordinary ways of thinking. In developing these values in my teaching practice, I have found them to unlock the transformative power of pedagogy for students and for myself as the instructor. Here, I have been inspired by Freire, hooks, and Giroux.¹ These are the values that I strive to realize in my graduate and undergraduate teaching.

1 Writing as a Practice

I foreground writing in my courses. I do this not only because writing is inseparable from thinking, nor only because writing is the most valuable and transferable skill students develop in the liberal arts, but above all because writing is essential to the educational process of self-transformation. Through the objectification of thought that is writing, we come to know what we think and who we are.

I support my writing-centered pedagogy with four practices: regular, low-stakes writing assignments, scaffolded assignments, in-class writing exercises, and metacognitive reflections on writing practice. In seminars or smaller courses, I find it especially helpful to have students share drafts for peer revision. This activity has many virtues. Not only does it provide students with feedback on their writing's composition and argument, but it also instills writerly habits of revision and processuality and fosters a shared sense of cooperation among the class. I also participate, sharing my own work in progress. By showing students the inherent messiness of writing, their confidence is bolstered, as they appreciate that in facing their own writing challenges, they are not alone. After participating in peer review, students often report to me that they feel more satisfied with their writing for the course.

2 Collaborative Learning

I seek to foster a collaborative learning environment characterized by *deep listening* and *mutual intellectual respect*. These are positive virtues—they demand more than non-combativeness—and, like writing, they are also skills that students can develop through deliberate practice. My favorite exercise for improving deep listening is “circle.” This is a collective listening activity in which students take turns contributing to our discussion one by one. Deceptively simple, this activity teaches students to collaborate with one another to further our collective understanding of class material. During the exercise, I model various ways of productively engaging in exegetical dialogue, as outlined by Brookfield and Preskill.²

Intellectual respect can be cultivated through reciprocal teaching. For example, I have students complete a “divide-and-conquer” activity wherein I organize students into groups, assign them unique interpretive questions, and return them to the text. Each group then gives a mini-presentation of their findings while the others take notes. Activities of this kind, I have found, reinforce peer learning and mutual respect.

¹Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

²Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Discussion As a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), ch. 5.

3 Historicity

Finally, transformative pedagogy cannot, in my view, be indifferent to a course's content. When designing syllabi, I draw material from the relevant philosophical, historical, and scientific traditions. However, following MacIntyre and Jaeggi, I view traditions as essentially contestable.³ They are not sites of harmony but of disagreement. In my courses, I bring this discord into focus, foregrounding it. For example:

- In *17th- and 18th-century Philosophy*, a second-year course I taught at the University of Toronto, I incorporated readings from women philosophers who objected to the views of their male contemporaries (Margaret Cavendish contra Hobbes, Damaris Masham contra Locke, and Olympe de Gouges contra Rousseau). Students learned that our reading of women philosophers was not a historical interlude but participation in the debate over what counts as 'early modern philosophy.'
- For *Philosophy of Human Sexuality*, also a second-year course at Toronto, I approached the material historically. We began by closely reading Plato's *Symposium* and Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. We then turned to the feminist critique of the tradition's conception of sexuality in Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, and Judith Butler. Students became capable of evaluating the merits of the philosophical tradition for the rethinking of sexuality in our time.

Pedagogy excites me most when it enables students to perform unexpected acts of retrieval: when they recognize themselves as capable of recovering a way of thinking that, while undeniably a part of our tradition, seems alien to us today—a path untaken. These forgotten ideas can, in turn, form the basis for new forms of self-understanding and new means of addressing contemporary problems. This is the aim of my transformative pedagogy.

³Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).