

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

What can I know? As a teacher, I aim to communicate to my students that their answers to this question depend on how they are habituated to think. This conviction guides my interdisciplinary teaching practice that spans history and social and political theory. By introducing students to the habits of orienting themselves as historical actors that inhabit a particular moment in the grand sweep of events, constructing clear and nuanced arguments in writing and speech, and communicating purposefully and curiously with their peers, I hope to equip students with the tools for a lifetime of traveling through a world full of different ways of seeing and being.

What should I do? Students accustomed to didactic models of education often come to a classroom expecting clear answers to this question. In the beginning of the term, I invite students to conceive of themselves as agents of their own learning by asking them what they would like to accomplish in the course. Some hope to learn specific content or reassess their thinking on a topic; others intend to improve their writing; still others hope to become more comfortable speaking in class. I encourage students to return to their answers at multiple points during the term to ensure that they are achieving and revising their goals as they chart their own path through the course. I also invite students to consider themselves as ethical agents in the classroom. On the first day of discussion, I ask them to create a charter together, outlining a set of values, norms, and ground rules to guide their discussion section.

What might I hope? As a discussion facilitator for a free university-level humanities and cultural studies course for working adults from Vancouver's Downtown East Side, I often began discussion by asking a speculative question that encourages students to think about the kind of world that they would like to inhabit. In one discussion, before a class on the history of the residential schools that Indigenous students were forced to attend in Canada, the question of what a perfect school might look like prompted varied, surprising, and conflicting reflections on the relationship between family life and public morality, educational institutions and political action, and knowledge and justice. In a course on U.S. history, my students tried their hand at writing an op-ed that drew on the rhetorical style of an influential political text, such as *Narrative*

of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave or Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, to make an argument about a contemporary political issue.

Ideally, a discussion-based classroom is a space of recognition, where students feel seen and heard by their peers and their instructor. It is in part because of this aspiration that a classroom can be such a profoundly uncomfortable place when it fails to live up to its ideal form. Whether at a major public research university, an all-boys Catholic secondary school, or an English-language school, I have had the opportunity to teach student populations that are diverse in many ways. My students have come from varied educational, national, and familial background. For various reasons, they have had different experiences of my classrooms. In my teaching practice, I aim to find ways to meet the varied needs for recognition of different students with different experiences of the educational space that we share.

In my classroom discussion facilitation, I intervene to balance the demands of students with different styles of contributing, ensuring that the comfort of one student in the classroom does not come at the cost of that of another. I also work individually with students who are interested in developing ways of contributing that make them feel comfortable and proud, whether that means preparing their contributions in advance or keeping their comments short and focused on the text. In other contexts, too, many students feel most comfortable developing their ideas in one-on-one meetings with me, the instructor. Other students require different kinds of advocacy and investment, a reality that I actively attend to by reaching out to students who are repeatedly absent or neglect to turn in assignments.

Along with helping students practice verbal communication, I focus my teaching on training students to develop and hone their writing. I create different avenues for students to receive feedback on their written assignments, facilitating peer feedback of written work, offering to meet with students individually to discuss their writing, and providing detailed comments on every written assignment. My guidance is always forward-looking and practical. I combine praise of the strengths of students with instructions for things that the student might consider attempting in their next assignment, whether that entails toying with a new concept or leaving time to carefully check for grammatical errors. By doing so, I demonstrate that writing is a process and a practice, not the creation of a static final product or an unforgiving test of intellect.