

Teaching Statement

Over the last decade, I have spent more time in a classroom than anywhere else. I have taught students at the elementary and middle school level, numerous professional development sessions for K-12 classroom teachers, as well as undergraduate, master's and doctoral level university courses. While each experience is unique to its particular context, there is a common thread: Good teaching at any level is built on a foundation of genuine human connection, and it incorporates equal opportunities for rigorous critical thinking and distributed skill practice.

Human Connection

I strongly believe that teachers, at all levels, should strive to see their students as people and commit to holistically understanding their students. This might seem like a rather basic supposition, but too often teachers see their students as caricatures instead of recognizing the unique experiences and aspirations of each student.

When I was receiving my Master's of Arts in Teaching at Relay Graduate School, I attended a large lecture on child development. During a break, the professor walked around and posed a simple question to resident teachers: "Tell me about the students in your classroom." This small act opened a door into human connection that enhanced my professional learning. In my classroom, I aim to do the same. At the start of each semester, I administer a survey to gauge the goals and experiences of my students. Once I know that many of my students are current school administrators, I might ask them, "Tell me about your school," while in an undergraduate class of aspiring teachers I might ask them, "Tell me about your favorite teacher." Throughout the course, I continually seek feedback from my students and adjust my instruction accordingly. This approach is not just sound pedagogy, but it also demonstrates a clear commitment to my students: It shows them that they are active co-constructors in our classroom community.

Rigorous Critical Thinking

Courses on education, policy, and leadership require students to engage in deep conceptual thought and wrestle with complex and nuanced issues. Neither of these things can happen without an appropriate class structure. First, I value collaborative norm setting to start out each course. This provides an opportunity to have an open discussion about how we will approach difficult topics and set important ground rules. For example, discussions around policy implementation require thoughtful discussions on issues related to racial equity, and a prerequisite for this type of conversation is shared norms, such as speaking from your own experience and refraining from essentializing the experiences of others.

Second, rigorous class activities require backward planning and a balance of structure and flexibility. In a class on policy implementation in which students must understand the role of street-level bureaucrats, I will assign students a theoretical piece and case study to read before class. During the class, we will begin with a structured activity, such as chunking the readings and asking students in pairs to answer key questions and share out with the class. During this time, I am listening to the conversations the students are having to determine where the class discussion might go and where I might want to probe further. Next, I open the class up for

discussion based on a few key prompts, and I utilize pre-planned “back pocket” questions that I might use if conversation stalls or gets off track.

Distributed Practice

Finally, I strongly believe that all courses should reflect principles of learning science and include robust practice aligned with course learning goals and the final assessment. Any course with a final paper will include smaller formative assessments that allow students to practice skills, such as synthesizing research sources and academic writing. In addition, each assignment is an opportunity for me to give feedback to students on their writing and gauge who could benefit from additional support. Similarly, a skill-based or methodology course, such as one on educational statistics, would include regular problem sets that mirror the skills on a final summative assessment. Providing regular feedback to students during their distributed practice opportunities helps to build student motivation and self-efficacy.

Mentoring

I believe that teaching and mentoring go hand-in-hand. As a course instructor, I seek to make space for students with particular interest in the subject to gain further knowledge or experience. In a class for pre-service teachers, I provided additional resources on proficiency-based grading after students learned about the concept and were looking for ways to implement into their own practice. In addition, I’ve served on a thesis defense committee for an undergraduate student whose research interests aligned with my own. I’ve greatly benefited from the mentorship that I’ve received throughout my academic career. My most successful mentors have made time for me, listened thoughtfully, respected my contributions, and followed through on their commitments. I seek to emulate these same attributes as a mentor.