

Teaching Statement

You learn how to cut down trees by cutting them down. ~Bateke Proverb

This Batake proverb alludes to the important role of ‘doing’ in the process of learning. I believe that students’ ‘doing’—their practice—in the classroom is essential to learning and knowledge production. When I reflect on the practices of teachers that most influenced me, I notice they all engaged students by allowing them to participate in ways that granted students the opportunity to create knowledge and understanding rather than passively receive it. While I do acknowledge the important role of imparting information in the class and synthesizing theory and practice in order to cultivate well-rounded students, my main goal is to help students develop critical thinking skills through active learning. I achieve this by utilizing a blended approach to teaching, drawing from critical and constructivist pedagogy philosophies.

Each time I enter the classroom, I prioritize equipping students with the tools necessary to become an intellectual in society. Drawing from a critical pedagogy philosophy, I believe that students are co-creators in knowledge. Thus, the responsibility for learning equally belongs to both teacher and student. Additionally, my role as a teacher is to help students frame discussion topics into larger cultural and sociopolitical contexts. For example, in my *Public Speaking* course, I stimulate critical thinking by asking students to make connections between this course and their professional or personal goals. Since the skills learned in *Public Speaking* are transferable across professions and even cultural contexts, I ask students to consider why public speaking is a requirement in the core curriculum and how the skills they learn and develop in this course can help them achieve their goals. An example of an activity students complete in class is conducting a critical examination of popular advertisements on television (i.e., Charmin Ultra, Amazon Alexa, etc.), analyze the rhetorical devices used, and determine their effectiveness on viewers. In doing so, students learn how to be active rather than passive consumers in society.

Secondly, I draw from a constructivist pedagogy philosophy which focuses on using experience to construct knowledge. I encourage students to investigate, question, and discuss in order to create meaning. For example, in *Public Speaking*, rather than telling students how technology might enhance our presentation during a public speaking event, I ask: How have developments in technology and software influenced the ways they present? How has it influenced the speaker-audience dynamic and the ways in which audiences receive or understand information? By asking these questions, I am encouraging students to draw from their own experiences as either speaker or audience member in order to facilitate understanding through active participation.

Equally important as a philosophy of teaching, learning styles must be adequately addressed in the classroom because students approach learning in myriad ways. I achieve this by creating a learning environment that is responsive to students’ various learning styles. For example, I often start my *Public Speaking* course with a lecture covering the most pertinent information from the reading material. This is helpful for students who learn by listening and absorbing information. During the latter part of the course, we may do various activities such as impromptu speeches, exercise in drafting an outline, exercise critiquing speeches, or small group discussions on a specific topic.

In order to assess whether learning is actually taking place, I take a multi-faceted approach to assessment. For instance, I now require students to submit at least one discussion question online related to the day’s reading prior to the beginning of class. This type of informal assessment helps students prepare for the class, but also aligns with my philosophical value of critical thinking and reflection. Students are also required to formally present multiple speeches throughout the term. This enables me to assess how well they are able to apply the content learned in the course and whether they are improving each time they present. Other assessments I incorporate throughout the course include self-assessments, quizzes, and group presentations. Since people often have multiple learning styles, engaging each of those styles results in better learning outcomes for all students.

My passion and enthusiasm for teaching is centered in my belief that education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals’ outlook and character, and thus society. I encourage students to experience learning as a participatory process. As the proverb above suggests, ‘doing’ is learning.