

Teaching Philosophy

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I believe in the power of the story. It is the foundation of my courses from composition to creative writing. However, it becomes quite problematic when we only hear one narrative. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has said, “tell one story over and over again about a people and that people become that [one] story.” This is a partial explanation of why I teach my students to analyze literature from the historical, psychological and societal influences. It is the reason why I guide them to closely read a piece of text, so that they can critically analyze the text, and thereby critically contemplate their world. In my classroom, I honor differences and provide a safe learning environment so that the students will become vested in the writing process thereby their own work.

I also use multiple methods of teaching that are inclusive of various learning styles like linguistic, visual, auditory and kinesthetic. I do this not only because I acquired these tools, but because growing up during the eighties I had difficulty learning from the traditional lecture format of the classroom. I would often find myself going home to re-learn the day’s lesson. I originally thought it was because I was learning a different dialect in school than the African-American Vernacular used in my household. I would later also discern that I was predominantly a visual learner.

My role is to engage my students in a short amount of time while assisting them in information retention. Now, I incorporate various pedagogy in a number of ways. I use material that is relevant, visually intriguing prompts, provocative questions and small groups. My goal is to guide the students into a place where they are active participants while they are cultivating their course objectives of drafting, peer-editing, revising, synthesizing and sourcing credible research materials.

For example, a typical day in a research paper class began with a visual prompt that instigated a free-writing assignment. I projected a picture of a hand wrapped around bars. The bars were inside of what looked like a person’s head. I didn’t say much about the New York Times image except that I told the class to consider what we had been reading, which was both *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood and *Kindred* by Octavia Butler. The students would figure out through their free-write the thematic connection of free speech both in the picture, in the subsequent sharing of their work, and the peer-lead discussion questions about the text. They then were able to take this one societal, historic and/or psychological issue and synthesize it into a larger research paper.

My intention was to guide the students to achieve the overarching day’s lesson, facilitate discussions, provide information where prior knowledge didn’t exist and refocus the class back to the course objectives. Often discussions were continued on BlackBoard where I challenged students to revisit, and at times re-consider the text in light of larger societal issues i.e. big pharma, the environment, sexual exploitation, racism.

It is my belief that as a teacher I am at the forefront. I am the first line of engagement with our students, who will later become so much more. With this in mind, I hope to teach beyond proper grammatical English of how to structure a sentence correctly, or create a well-balanced essay but to instill a sense of investigative learning and thinking that will empower students throughout their careers into their lives in our communities.