

Teaching Philosophy

Every student has the potential to learn and grow. An analogy I use is that each student has a fire within them, and my mission is to foster and guide that fire. For some students, this fire is an intense flame, so I work to feed the flame, encouraging it to take new heights and directions. For other students, this flame is a tiny simmering ember that needs time, nurturing, and resources to continue to burn and spark into a flame. I integrate theories to guide my teaching to reach this goal of sparking learning and growth in every one of my students: sociocultural theory, humanistic perspective, and intersectionality.

I use two concepts from sociocultural theory. First, for each student, I find the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the zone between what students know and what they can know with assistance. I find the ZPD in formal and informal ways. I make it my mission to arrive early and class to informally talk with students. These conversations can be fun like how's their dog or a topic we discussed in class and reviewing assignments. These interactions serve several purposes, such as building rapport and trust, and help me find where the students are in their ZPD. A formal assessment of the ZPD is through guided lectures, in-class work, and assignments. I have a 100-level course assignment to produce an APA-formatted title and reference page. While lecturing, I ask students to follow on their computers then walk around the room to check-in on their work and answer questions one-on-one. Recently, I noticed the need for knowledge in using Microsoft Word. I then altered my lecture to include formatting tools in Word. Second, I implement scaffolding, which is using cultural tools to support learning in the zone. I design my courses so that students have multiple tools available, including books, scholarly research, peers, library staff, community resources, one-on-one instruction, PowerPoints, media, and real-life situations.

I use two theories to inform my teaching within the humanistic perspective: hierarchy of needs and free will. To extend toward self-actualization, students must have each hierarchy of needs met within the pyramid, including basic needs, safety, belonging, and esteem. I partner with our resources (e.g., police, success center, student affairs, clubs), bringing these services into classes through visits, assignments, and informal referrals. I sometimes offer to walk a student to the resource and start an engagement with the service. Recently, I invited students to support a club's pizza party for 5th-grade students from an inner-city school. I sat back and watched the smiles and engagement of the 5th-graders and my students, seeing them feel proud in using learned skills in engaging with the children. I assist students in activating their free will to work toward self-actualization despite biological or contextual factors that can determine their destiny. This philosophy drives my passion working at a Commonwealth Campus where some students come to us with many challenges and barriers but a desire to learn and grow in knowledge and education. I work to develop relationships with each student, listening to their concerns and hopes so that I can motivate and assist them in creating their path to success.

Finally, intersectionality guides the design and delivery of my courses and interactions with students. Intersectionality recognizes that every person has multiple identities that intersect in different ways and diverse contexts that can contribute to experiences of marginalization and privilege. Some identities are visible, and others are not. Within interactions, a person can be marginalized due to intersecting identities. Thus, I begin every semester by establishing guidelines and expectations for creating a safe and respectable space. We discuss how to listen and ground responses in human development theories and research so that we respond in an informed manner. I also work to make my classroom accessible using tools that could limit the engagement of those with invisible disabilities or identities, as illustrated in the following examples. A person with PTSD could have a triggered response when lights get turned on or off without preparation, so I always state, "I am going to turn the lights off now." I ensure that the closed caption is turned on if I play a video in class. I also use inclusive language, such as instead of saying your parents, I will say, "Your mom, dad, grandparent, friend, or guardian." Finally, I provide a quiet, safe opportunity for students to inform me of their preferred names, pronouns, and anything they want to disclose privately.

My teaching philosophy integrates theories and the passion to see my students thrive. I achieve this in classroom teaching, mentoring, advising, and service. My greatest joy every semester is watching our students cross that stage to get their diplomas, ready to make a change in the world and their lives.