

Teaching Philosophy Statement

In regards to educational philosophy, I tend to adopt elements of Dewey's progressivism and Friere's emancipatory pedagogy although utilizing them in a pure form in a classroom setting is sometimes problematic. Progressivists try to center the curriculum around the experiences, interests and abilities of students. They plan lessons that around curiosity and push students to a higher level of learning. Progressivists attempt to accomplish this by having students learn by doing. They encourage students to interact with each other and to learn cooperation, tolerance, and democracy. Through problem-solving experiences in the classroom they hope to replicate experiences outside the classroom.

To approximate a progressive educational philosophy, I incorporate into the classroom experience, group projects that involve learning by doing, and videos to replicate experience outside the classroom that they cannot possibly experience on their own. Through the group projects, students apply the concepts or theories we have discussed in class. Not only do they learn how to apply the concepts, but also how to analyze a particular situation from a sociological point of view

From Freire's emancipatory pedagogy, I reject the banking theory of education which relies on a dichotomy between the narrating subject and the patient, listening objects (students). In the banking theory of education, the task of the narrating subject is to fill the students with contents of his narration, and requires students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Students become empty vessels or containers which the teacher fills with narrative. Education is an act of depositing in which students are the depositories and instructors the depositors. In contrast, an emancipatory pedagogy requires replacing its vertical teacher—student relationships of the banking theory with student-teacher and teacher-students relationships. The teacher does not just teach but also is taught in dialogue with students. Together they become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow. This pedagogy uses the problem-posing method in which the students are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The role of the problem posing educator is to present the material to students for their consideration, and re-considers his earlier considerations as students express their own. Problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the process by which students discover reality, and in this process, become critical thinkers. This process regards students as being authentic only when they are engaged in inquiry and creative transformation.

I attempt to implement the emancipatory pedagogy through small group projects that involve groups answering questions about a problem that I have posed for them to explore. These projects involve groups in conducting their own research on the topic such that they become investigators who share their research with me. As their guide, I comment on the extent to which their research has adequately answered the question.

To the extent that I realize my philosophical and pedagogical objectives is of course determined not only by my abilities, but also by students' abilities, their prior socialization into passive or active learning, their experiences with passive or active learning in other sociology classes as well as classes in other disciplines, and the extent to which their cognitive abilities in the higher order thinking skills have been developed throughout the college career.

Implementing My Teaching Philosophy

All of my syllabi incorporate the following statement:

It is my hope that you will enhance your skills as a critical thinker, communicator, researcher and life-long learner as we progress together through this course. I believe that learning is more than memorizing information and answering questions on a test. It is using information to gain an understanding of how things work and then to make them better. I like the following definition of learning:

"Learning (is) a process that culminates in the ability: to ask the right questions and frame good problems, to acquire information and evaluate sources of information, to critically investigate and solve problems, to make choices among many alternatives, to explain concepts to others (both verbally and in writing) and to generalize to new situations." Ganter SL & Kinder JS, editors. Targeting Institutional Change: Quality Undergraduate Science Education for All Students. *Targeting Curricular Change: Reform in undergraduate education in science, math, engineering, and technology*. A report of the 1998 AAHE Conference on Institutional Change. The American Association for Higher Education

I attempt to implement my teaching philosophy through Learning Circles.

Introduction: A Learning Circle is a self managed learning group. Participants learn at their own pace, drawing on their own experiences and without a lecturer or 'expert' running the show. Learning occurs through shared dialogue and inquiry. In this process all are teachers and learners. The direction, pace, style and topics are directed by the group. This may incorporate a variety of resources. There are three roles for members within a learning circle, *organizing*, *facilitating* (shared by the group) and *participating*.

Process: A typical learning circle (more traditionally called a study circle) is a group of people who meet regularly to discuss, learn about and consider action on an issue of concern to them, their communities or the wider society. Discussions are facilitated by a group leader which in our case will be your instructor, at least initially until we become more comfortable with the process such that anyone may assume the role. Learning circle groups use common resource material, which in our case will be our textbook, videos, and identified websites. The material is a guide to assist learning.

Learning circles make issues and ideas accessible: Learning occurs through shared inquiry and dialogue. All teach and all learn. Class members will progress at their own pace, drawing on their own experience and understanding. Life experience provides us with a great deal of knowledge — usually more than we realize. Learning circles are a way of drawing this out — and increasing class members' self-confidence.

Learning without being taught: As we become more comfortable with this process, class members will decide what issues to explore and how much time to spend on particular topics. Initially sessions will be guided by me, but later any class member may assume the role of the facilitator or coordinator. Sometimes the role of facilitator is shared among the class members in order to give everyone the chance to develop their skills. The facilitator helps the group frame its discussion and engage in lively talk in which everyone has the opportunity to participate equally.

Learning with resource information: Our class discussion will be supported by resource information. This can include our text, graphics, pictures, video, or websites. Resource

material is simply a guide to support and help frame discussions. Class members are welcome to find their own resources—whatever they think they need to support their own learning priorities.

Outcomes: Outcomes achieved earning circles are intended to lead to action and change — in the views or behavior of class members or in their situation. As a method of learning, it is democratic in spirit, reflecting a belief that an informed community is essential to genuine participation and that ordinary people have the right and the ability to contribute to social change. Educational research on learning circles shows that: 1) The most satisfying aspects of participation for class members are sharing experiences, considering other viewpoints and learning more in a stimulating and thought-provoking environment. 2) Actions and change do result — ranging from a desire to learn more and a commitment to educate and inform others, to changes in daily life. 3) Class members develop greater self-confidence and a more critical approach. 4) The experience of participating in a learning circle leads to interest in using the same approach to explore other important issues.

Procedure: We sit in a learning group circle, and I have prepared name plates for each of you to place on your desk so that we may be able to become better acquainted. You will pick up your name plate each class period. As learning groups are only effective when students are engaged & participating, attendance is a must!

At the beginning of the class period, we reflect on issues or ideas that class members may have thought after the last class session. To start group discussion, I will pose a series of questions that will follow the general format of: 1) Based upon our experience, what do we know about the topic? 2) What do our resource materials tell us about the topic? 3) What do you think about the topic? 4) What are the implications of this for our lives? 5) What can we do about it?

Obviously, before we can begin to reflect on the meaning and significance of the topic, we have to know something about it. Thus it is imperative that you come class prepared to discuss the content, and that can only be accomplished by reading it before class. If there are topics, words, or issues that you don't understand, we will stop the discussion at your request and try to address those concerns. Always bring your textbook to class!