

Throughout my education, I have been fortunate to learn from passionate and compassionate educators, who demonstrated that the classroom has the potential to be not only a place for learning a particular subject or skill, but also a locale for deep personal growth. As I reflect on my autobiography as a learner, the most powerful and impactful moments of my education were instances when I encountered feminist pedagogy at work. My own philosophy as a teacher of psychology represents the product of my experiences and reflects five basic principles: (1) foster a supportive space for learning and risk-taking, (2) encourage student engagement in novel and interesting ways, (3) value and honor feedback, (4) lead by radical compassion, and (5) have fun doing it.

Foster a supportive space for learning and risk-taking. I recognize that the academy can be a place where some students, particularly those with minoritized identities or nontraditional academic experiences, may feel unsafe or unseen. As part of a feminist pedagogical approach in which “integrity is not only possible but normal” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 6), I aim to create supportive spaces for students to be themselves without fear of backlash. The primary way I do this is by being open and vulnerable myself, sharing relevant details of my personal life with my students (while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries) in order to break down the traditional hierarchical structure of the classroom. In class discussions, I also prioritize the perspectives and contributions of students from minoritized gender, racial, and cultural backgrounds in order to create a classroom environment that is rich with diversity, rather than one that only amplifies dominant voices. Further, given the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed in my classes (e.g., Psychology of Human Sexual Behavior), I restrict recording in-class discussions to those who have a documented need, in order to create a safer space for students to share their opinions and experiences. It is impossible to take risks in a space where you are worried about being mocked or stigmatized, and I aim to create classroom environments in which students feel comfortable being themselves while stepping out of their comfort zones.

Encourage student engagement in novel and interesting ways. Another aspect of my teaching philosophy is to create spaces “where the joy and excitement as well as the hard work of learning provide the kind of positive feedback that magnifies the effort put into learning” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 6). One of my most effective teaching moments came when I used an active learning activity inspired by Hamon and Bull (2016). In this activity, students select seven random characteristics (e.g., Mohawk hairstyle, struggling to maintain a beach vacation house in Florida) and try to find someone in class with whom they would like to have a relationship, based on the traits they have selected. Students learn how social exchange theory works in practice and how cost-benefit analysis impacts our everyday decisions. Though the activity lasted only fifteen minutes, nearly every student who provided feedback that term commented that the activity was a highlight of the course. However, I am attentive to the unique needs and preferences of my students, so I integrate various strategies and opportunities for demonstrating learning in diverse ways, such as art or storytelling, communally or independently.

Value and honor feedback. To ensure that students have positive experiences with the course, critical reflection is an integral aspect of my teaching philosophy (Brookfield, 2006). As a social psychologist by training and a scholar of feminist thought by choice, I am engaged in a constant process of critical reflection in my everyday life. By providing students opportunities to share confidential feedback, and responding promptly and sensitively to it, I am able to incorporate their perspectives and work to create educational experiences that facilitate their learning. Sometimes this means incorporating additional online material or bringing in a guest lecture. For example, in my Psychology of Human Sexuality course, I maintained an “anonymous feedback and questions” form. Despite designing the syllabus prior to the start of the term, students asked dozens of questions about the topic of bisexuality. Therefore, I decided to modify the syllabus to address their questions by bringing in a guest lecturer who was a leading expert on the topic of bisexuality. By encouraging students to speak up and “talk back,” and by ensuring that their voices are heard, I hope to reconfigure the traditional power dynamic erected between students and professors (Beckman, 2014).

Lead by radical compassion. Perhaps the most important way that I engage with students is leading by radical compassion, or an “ethic of care” (Cornwell, 1998). My own academic success would have been impossible without the empathy, support, and flexibility of my professors. It is due to my own challenges as a learner that I adopt a position of radical compassion toward my students. This entails believing their stories and struggles without hassle, while maintaining an open door (and open inbox) policy for students to connect with me whenever they need me. This occasionally means meeting with students at unconventional times to discuss non-course-related topics and maintaining flexible deadlines for assignments. I am conscious that compassion, if left unchecked, can sometimes contribute to burnout, so I set firm boundaries and maintain the same level of compassion with myself as I do with my students.

Have fun doing it. The final pillar of my teaching philosophy is to let humor be a central component of the educational experience. Wherever possible, I aim to incorporate comedic video clips, activities, or images into the classroom to create a space where students can laugh and enjoy the process of learning. Particularly when topics are regarded as dry or heavy, it is important to provide a little levity to encourage and support student learning. I am particularly inspired by the teaching briefs published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, such as Dr. Amy Moore’s (2020) suggestion to selectively incorporate Saturday Night Live sketches into teaching research methods. I aim to include diverse music and media that are relevant, sensitive, and fun, to inspire student learning. I have a background in musical theater and improv, and I am certainly not afraid to look silly or embarrass myself a bit if I believe it can facilitate student learning.

In sum, my teaching philosophy is informed by a feminist pedagogical stance and supported through my own experiences as a learner and an educator. It is through the lens of these principles that I hope to continue to grow as an effective university instructor.