

I began drafting this statement a couple of months ago on a return flight from Japan where I'd been teaching at Tokyo International University (TIU). My experience at TIU teaching across significant language barriers to diverse groups of students from around the globe—Japan, China, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, and Canada, for instance—was utterly invigorating. Daily, I was reminded of the basic principles that guide my pedagogy and sit at the heart of everything I do, as both a teacher and thinker. My life in the classroom is motivated by the following ideas—a list of realizations and reflections, not rules, that are always evolving. The list juxtaposes what I've come to understand as “problematic” and “productive” conceptions of learning and teaching, and these counterpoints serve as key frameworks for my vocation as a teacher-scholar.

First, *learning is not about being safe; teaching is about taking risks*. I open both my Literary and Feminist theory classes with the basic premise that our job, together, is to *unlearn* and *unknow*. In other words, I invite students to leave their ideologies and preconceptions at the door and try on other ways of knowing and being throughout the semester. My role, of course, is to model that reaching and risk taking, even as I ask that of my students. Among other things, I work to destabilize a hierarchical power dynamic in the classroom and re-center students (earnestly, not just performatively) at the core of my courses. Mastering all of their names, being open-minded and flexible, and positively reinforcing their good ideas and sustained engagement are but a few ways of reshaping a top-down power dynamic. Perhaps more importantly, though, I model very explicitly the reality of “failing” and *not* knowing. I confess to students when I don't have an answer, but promise I will follow up with more information soon; I acknowledge how difficult certain materials or ideas are for me to grasp; and I lean on them to help me acquire greater intellectual understanding and clarity. Likewise, I try to give students space for thinking and to listen deeply when they share thoughts and opinions. I especially employed those practices in my teaching at Tokyo International University, asking learners if I'd heard them correctly in discussion, pressing them to “say more” if they could, and sitting in silence while they mulled, processed, and worked through ideas.

In the same vein, *learning is not about confirmation and comfort; teaching is about encouraging diversity of thought and understanding*. Recently in my Disability in Literature and Culture class, I opened our meeting by having students respond to a question from the reading that provoked one of two (likely) immediate, gut responses. These responses initially divided the class, and I asked that students sit according to these polarized positions. This face-to-face meeting of the minds across a room can be unsettling, but it creates an atmosphere in which students must support their ideas using careful critical thinking and analysis. “Tie to the text!” and “Opinions are useless without proof!” I always remind them. My most satisfying moments in exercises like these come when, halfway through a discussion, a few students switch sides midst argument. As they reclaim seats on the other side of the seminar table, their literal movement through space testifies to the fact that they've spent time grappling with their belief systems and influencing principles. These generous, intense conversations about, for example, the pros and cons of reproductive health technologies or the bioethical complexities of assisted suicide invite students to ponder, self-reflect, and make evaluative assessments about their perceptions of the world and their places in it.

*Learning is not about confirming privileged ideas and social positions; teaching is about centering marginalized voices, epistemologies, and experiences*. My classrooms are comprised of many different students, each with their own unique history, embodiment, identity, and learning style. Some students are the first in their families to attend college while others were homeschooled throughout high school. Some are linguistically oriented; others are spatial thinkers. Some are genderqueer or asexual and out about their identities. Others are students of color who have felt silenced by educational institutions that repeatedly told them their voices and ideas weren't worth listening to. My goal is to create classroom spaces that affirm and respect each of these students for who they are—and thus, help them grow and change. While, arguably, content and syllabus construction are a couple ways to invite diverse perspectives into a classroom, I've found it equally important to cultivate collaborative standards for group dialogue that remind students about how much space they do or don't take up in a room. We transparently discuss, for instance, how inclusive classrooms openly acknowledge privilege and must

work to upend oppressive power dynamics that, even in a conversation about the construction of race in Elizabethan England, for example, often still silence precisely those students whose own lived experiences of race might matter most to our scholarly endeavors.

*Learning is not about grades; teaching is about cultivating a love of knowledge for its own sake.* Often students come to the classroom with a certain academic agenda in mind, one that has more to do with pre-professionalization and grade point average than with intellectual growth or excitement. Though I would never argue that grades are unnecessary or don't serve as incredible cultural capital in some circles, my goal is always that students come to appreciate the acquisition of knowledge as a means of personal development. I emphasize depth over breadth in my curriculum and urge learners to seek out complementary course materials that will fuel semester-long engagement. My primary objective, in other words, is that students realize that the purpose of attending a class like "Titillating Terrors in Early Modern Drama" is not to earn an "A" but rather to gain a sense of how early modern fears performed in Renaissance theater might inform our own contemporary anxieties and terrors. My role is to help students grasp the powerful place of premodern literature and history in the *now*. For instance, in a recent "tweet off" (think Trump vs Clinton) in my Shakespeare/Shakespeare course, I asked students to compose a competing twitter feed on the role of poetry from the perspectives of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. As we howled over the witty, ridiculous tweets they wrote, I was reminded of how exercises like this one bridge culture and time—in this case, pairing "new" media and "old" literature—and invite students to learn for the sake of learning and, moreover, to have a good time while doing it.

*Learning is not about monotonous content mastery; teaching is about pleasure, spontaneity, and harnessing the promise of what happens in the moment.* Insofar as I encourage my students to take charge of their education each and every class session, I am invigorated by watching my classes organically transform according to the specific needs and desires of my students. I never hesitate to let students take classroom discussions in fruitful directions not necessarily on my agenda for the day; I cherish those "teachable moments" that are never scripted neatly into a plan but that are so crucial to learning. When my students in Tokyo were discussing real-time news coverage of a tragic mass stabbing at a local facility for disabled people, we started our conversation there. If Willamette's newspaper publishes an article on gender-neutral bathrooms in the dorms or on retention of faculty of color on campus, and my students are abuzz about those issues, that serves as our way in to dialogue. If colleagues invite me at the last minute to engage a visiting scholar they've brought to campus or to merge our classes for larger group discussion of topics common to both our courses, I seize upon those unique, generative prospects. Indeed, this sometimes means a lecture on gender performativity or Reformation politics gets pushed until later the next week, or that we abandon a text I chose for one *students* chose; but ultimately, I have found that those moments of unexpected opportunity infuse the class with new life, deepen our core curriculum, and make visible learning as an organic, fun, and wonderfully surprising process.

*Learning is not about random facts that have no place in the world; teaching is about relating critical thinking to our personal, everyday lives.* Especially as an undergraduate student, the Renaissance world of Milton, Cavendish, Donne, or Wroth can often seem distant from "the real world." One of my goals is to bridge the gap between academic and nonacademic life, theory and praxis. The rhetorical and analytical skills I teach in the classroom help my students become better thinkers who can articulate new, interesting ideas as they matter for their own passions and lives. I explain to my undergraduates that whether they are pursuing careers in business, medicine, art, economics, or law, they will have to be able to read inquisitively, speak clearly, argue compellingly, and write fluently. I encourage them to imagine, even as first-years, how their current academic engagements shape and structure their everyday living practices and life goals. For example, in one class this semester we've been examining the *New York Times* "Disability" opinion page series, a weekly series of essays, art, and opinion by and about people living with disabilities. The supplemental critical disability theory students read in my course appears in practical and personal ways in these essays; and the close reading and deep thinking we undertake around these objects of inquiry enacts an intellectual ethos in which book learning and day-to-day life are always closely intertwined in powerful, inextricable ways.