Anna Pruitt Teaching Statement

My teaching philosophy is informed by my formal pedagogical training as well as community psychology values of collaboration, respect for diversity, sense of community, and power sharing. I strive to create a sense of community in my classroom and to create a safe space in which students of diverse backgrounds belong and contribute meaningfully. I conceptualize teaching and learning as processes of mutual knowledge sharing and building between teacher and students. Similar to Friere's "problem-posing education"[1] and bell hooks' "engaged pedagogy," my pedagogy views students as active players in knowledge production as opposed to passive receptacles to be filled with information. This approach encourages praxis: "action and reflection upon the world in order to change it."[2]

To encourage students to become active co-producers of knowledge, I rely on a collaborative learning[3] strategy that emphasizes group exercises and limited lecture time. My typical class structure includes a short lecture, followed by exercises in which students work together to solve a real-world problem or develop a research plan, small group discussions, thought reflections, or other participatory activities. This strategy works well when teaching research methods, allowing students to learn by doing. Recognizing that discussion-based classes can privilege more extraverted students, I provide opportunities for introverted students to share their knowledge (e.g., reflection papers; allowing time for reflection before group discussions). Overall, a student in my class will be encouraged to move beyond rote memorization and to engage with psychological material and theory critically and reflexively. Because self-reflection facilitates critical thinking and drawing connections, my course assignments encourage students to reflect on their own experiences as they critically apply course material.

Another key component to my pedagogy is a commitment to moving beyond a respect for diversity to full inclusion of different cultural perspectives. My syllabi include readings and materials from a diverse selection of scholars, and I am cognizant of the ways in which certain ways of teaching and assessing knowledge may be culturally biased. For example, to address potential cultural bias in assessment, I allow students multiple options for demonstrating their knowledge and mastery of course content. Students may choose between taking a multiple-choice exam, writing an essay, or proposing another way to display their mastery of the content that is grounded in their cultural background (e.g., a photo essay or mele). Additionally, in line with my values of collaboration and inclusion, I am committed to mentoring students from marginalized backgrounds in order to encourage academic success and increased representation in academia. I aim to make my classroom and academia a more welcoming space that values multiple experiences.

More specific teaching goals include increasing student knowledge in psychological research methods and statistics, increasing ability to think critically and scientifically, and increasing ability to understand and evaluate research. Importantly, I encourage students to engage with psychological theory and practice in a way that considers culture. Additionally, I look forward to mentoring and teaching graduate students in research methods and statistics, as one of my professional interests and teaching goals is to increase knowledge around using the best methods to answer specific research questions.

Teaching can be messy, and I approach it with humility, flexibility, and reflexivity. Perhaps most characteristic of my teaching method is my flexibility. This flexibility proved especially useful when switching to online teaching during the pandemic. I am willing to try new techniques, discard or adapt unsuccessful methods, and consider and integrate students' suggestions and emerging needs. I find that, as a result, the classroom becomes a more inclusive space of mutual learning.

---

[1] Friere, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (3rd ed.). New York: Bloomsbury.
[2] hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge, p. 14.
[3] Foster-Fishman, P. (1996). Applying Collaborative Learning Techniques in Undergraduate Community Courses. *The Community Psychologist, 29*(1), 10-14.