

Teaching Philosophy – Anjana Gigi Radhakrishnan

As an instructor, my primary goal is to impart a practice of lifelong learning and self-discovery to my students, a practice that will serve them both inside and outside the bounds of a university classroom. To do so, I invest significant time creating an open and caring learning environment, building community within the classroom, and teaching students to critically engage with the educational process. I believe that every student has something meaningful and unique to contribute to the lives of their peers, to me, and the world outside my classroom. It is my duty as a teacher to identify this potential in each student and provide them with the tools, encouragement, and support needed to expand their capabilities.

To develop an open and caring learning environment, I share an honest and vulnerable introduction of myself. I also start each class session by sharing my personal goals, fears, doubts, and accomplishments for the class, then ask each student to do the same. I do this to show students that learning is a perpetual process not only for students, but for teachers as well. I also conduct a self-reported demographic survey at the beginning of the class to collect information on my students' backgrounds, including their preferred pronouns, educational history (first generation, transfer, community college, alternative education, etc.), and connection to the United States (immigrant/generation, naturalized citizen, international student, undocumented, etc.). This allows students to share aspects of their lives that shape their experiences within and outside the classroom.

To encourage community building within the classroom, I prioritize small group work, class activities, brainstorming sessions, and assignments that allow students to engage in communicative language learning while also incorporating the personal into the educational. As an icebreaker, I have students bring in one of their favorite works of art and share why it speaks to them. Students are assessed through a combination of peer and teacher review. I am intentional in the ways I ask students to break into groups or pair up, using small group activities as an opportunity for students to build new and perhaps unexpected connections with each other. As the quarter progresses, I also give students opportunities to facilitate discussions and activities so they can practice demonstrating their own authority over knowledge and the learning process.

To foster students' critical engagement in the education process itself, I expose students to a wide range of knowledge systems and teach strategies to process information within real-world contexts. When I present information to students, I historicize it, critique it, and attach it to the materiality of their present realities. Lastly, I explain *why* it is important to critically engage with information and knowledge, particularly within Western education systems that are historically attached to colonial enterprises. When a student asks a question I do not know the answer to, I return the following week with my learnings and understandings as well as the steps I took to answer the question. When I make a mistake, I explain what takeaways I learned from the experience. I engage in these practices to show students that 'authority figures' and 'knowledge producers' are imperfect human beings just like them and that true learning and education can only be achieved through a commitment to humility, persistence, and introspection.

Ultimately, I want students to leave my classroom with a network of peers, a toolkit of critical learning strategies, and a deep-rooted confidence in their abilities to navigate the world. I want to encourage my students to be courageous and curious, independent yet intertwined, loving and nurturing of themselves and of one another. In creating a supportive learning environment, prioritizing opportunities for students to build connections with one another, and teaching critical engagement skills, I hope to give my students the resources and support to encourage them to be self-motivated, generous, and unlimited in their educational journeys.