

**TEACHING PHILOSOPHY, 2010**  
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**My teaching philosophy is nested in the following concepts:**

- Conversation begins with asynchronicity and a desire to generate synchronicity.
- Learning is always active and knowing always constructed by the learner.
- Critical thinking is fundamental and often requires a little pushing.
- I am a role model and I desire peace, and disagreement.
- Sociology is the scientific study of human groups.
- Technology is an incredible teaching tool.
- Teaching is learning.

**Sociology**

Since there is no major in Sociology at Stevenson University, much of what I do as a professor is to provide students with a general understanding of Sociology and society. Sociology is the systematic scientific study of human groups, their relations, structures and dynamics. It is a controversial subject because one's beliefs are brought into question when the empirical evidence goes against the streams of messages distributed by social institutions such as the media.

Max Weber wrote that it was a Sociology professor's obligation to introduce students to "inconvenient facts," and to assist them in understanding how these facts might influence their thinking about society. A primary goal of my teaching is to provoke students to distinguish opinions from solid opinions. Solid opinions are nested in facts.

**Conversations**

For 20 plus years I was a social worker. I worked as an administrator, therapist and consultant for children and adolescents, their families and agencies working with them. It is through this work that I came to know I wanted a new society. A society in which conversations are opportunities to explore our differences and maybe even change our minds about each other and the society in which we live.

In the classroom I desire feisty conversations nested in facts, provoked by readings, lectures, and visual aids. I think conversations generate knowledge and understanding. Although small group conversations, under the "right" conditions are most useful, they are not always possible, particularly when teaching basic courses to a class of 25 plus students.

Conversations, particularly in diverse groups, often generate conflict. Thus conflict resolution, without violence, is a need. Some students find this process uncomfortable. Yet, I think it is important for them to experience this process, even though I might be considered rude or pushy.

I think the best that I can do as a teacher is to orient, invite and provoke students to see the bigger picture, to think critically, to analyze situations, and to articulate what they think based on the facts and their experiences. I realize that this process can be painful and difficult for some students.

### Critical Thinking

The ability to practice critical thinking requires a desire to grow intellectually. One must be willing to identify and challenge his or her assumptions. One must be willing to examine his or her own situation, milieu, attitudes and actions. After all, understanding one's self is vital to understanding others. This often requires a shift in their experiences with disagreement. I hope this occurs during their time with me in the classroom.

My interest in social justice led me to the work of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* and *Teaching Critical Thinking*. I find their use of a problem-posing approach for exploring our society useful when wanting students to think critically.

Often I relate the subject to current events. I think students learn more when they can identify with the subject matter. This might seem confusing to students since national and international life does not occur according to the order of a course outline or handout.

I also offer learning events outside the classroom, from Extra Credit Events to One Credit Options. Each semester, I identify 5 or more events (i.e. documentary movies, lectures, exhibits, on or off campus) that students can attend and earn points towards their grade. This particularly helps students who do not do well on traditional exams.

### Technology

I regularly use a variety of technologies. I develop a website for each course that I teach. Each website includes the course outline, the syllabus and links to internet resources such as sociological dictionaries, sociological websites and articles about current events. I often use video shorts for promoting conversation. I find a combination of lecture, visuals and conversations most interesting to students, although the combination is not always possible.

In all, I have taught 15 different courses in my 11 years at Stevenson University. I continue to reflect and grow with each semester. After all, teaching is learning.