

## Teaching statement

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1. Teaching Philosophy
2. Teaching values
3. Teaching practices

### *1. Teaching philosophy*

As a social studies teacher-educator with a sociological background, I would describe the cornerstone of my teaching philosophy as a *critical* perspective on society and social issues. Such a critical perspective involves, among other things, the abilities to suspend judgement, to see things from multiple perspectives, to question others' as well as one's own assumptions, and to apply rigorous analysis based on evidence and logic.

When translated into teaching, this means encouraging students not to see society and societal issues in black and white; not to give in to popular/populist discourses; but to view them as complex matters having multiple dimensions, ambiguities, and contradictions. This ability to appreciate the complexity of society and societal issues and to analyze them critically is, for me, the ultimate objective of social studies education. Accordingly, in my teaching, I emphasize empowering students to inquire about society and social issues for themselves. I see myself as a Socratic guide or a curator of sociological knowledge who sparks students' curiosity, shows them the way, and provides them with the roadmap and the intellectual toolkit to brave their own paths in social/sociological inquiries. To this end, I am committed to a deeply student-centered style of teaching that is not only interactive and participatory, but also fundamentally empowering for the learners.

More specifically, my teaching is guided by the following sets of *values* and *practices* that are closely interrelated.

## 2. Teaching values

**Knowledge.** For any teacher/educator, solid knowledge in their relevant academic discipline(s) or field(s) constitutes the bedrock of their practice. I am committed to constant self-upgrading in order to maintain a strong and relevant knowledge basis to back up my teaching of academic content.

**Passion/Enthusiasm.** As an educator, I believe it is very important that I convey my passion/enthusiasm for my discipline/field to the students. Passion/enthusiasm is “infectious”: a passionate/enthusiastic teacher is able to demonstrate to students the intellectual pleasure and satisfaction of thinking and inquiring; and this often results in a higher level of student *engagement* as well as more effective learning.

**Partnership.** Echoing Paulo Freire’s dialogical view of pedagogy, I strongly believe in treating students as *partners* in the enterprise of learning, instead of passive recipients of handouts. A teacher can never be all-knowing, and students certainly have important observations/insights despite their supposed knowledge deficit. Treating students as junior partners in a shared journey of learning *empowers* them and gives them a sense of *ownership* of their learning.

**Care/concern for students’ learning.** A genuinely student-centered educator shows care and concern for students’ learning. Indeed, I believe that a teacher’s value is only validated in and through the student’s learning. Accordingly, I believe in constantly checking students’ understanding, and in adjusting teaching strategies to ensure optimal learning outcome. I believe in trying my best to make myself available to students. I also believe in, to the extent possible, paying attention to *individual* students – their individual interests, opinions, experiences, and struggles.

### 3. Teaching practices

**Questioning.** To fulfill my vision of cultivating active learners capable of critical and independent thinking, I believe in questioning as a key strategy to induce active thinking from students. When asked questions by students, instead of providing them an answer straightway, I often question them back in order to guide them towards arriving at an answer by themselves.

**Discussion.** Discussion is central to my teaching practice. The kinds of competence that social studies education aims to develop in students – such as logical reasoning, critical thinking, evaluating opinions, etc. – are often best developed through peer discussion. Discussion also empowers students, and reinforces the spirit of participation and engagement, which are core values underlying social studies education.

**Creating optimal learning environment.** Lively discussion, and participatory learning in general, depends on a safe and open learning environment in which students feel comfortable voicing their views in front of their instructor and peers. In my teaching, I strive to create an environment where students feel that their views are listened to and respected.

**Clarity.** One essential quality of an effective teacher is the ability to explain complex theories/concepts/ideas to students in clear and simple ways without being simplistic. In my teaching, I try my best to use interesting and relevant *real-life examples* to render abstract ideas concrete, so as to help student understand better.

**Appropriate resources.** Lastly, I believe that discussion/question-centered pedagogies can be effectively complemented by the use of appropriate/high-quality teaching resources. Such resources include not only carefully selected textual/audio-visual materials, but also purposefully created worksheets and lecture notes. When well made, such teaching resources add tremendous value to students' learning.