Statement of Teaching

I have a simple intention – to speak honestly about my pedagogy at Loyola Marymount University. Teaching is one of the most significant acts of my life. My commitment to the field of education spans several life stages -- an elementary school teacher, a doctoral student at UCLA, a university professor, and a mother of three bilingual boys engaged in the California public school system. Throughout these various experiences, I have held firm to the idea that education can provide a space to dismantle racist, androcentric, and global capitalist oppressions, and in the same breath, radically liberate our sense of being, living, and thinking.

My goals in the classroom are to teach rigorously, democratically, and with feeling. I create a classroom space where there is a sense of struggle, where there is explicit acknowledgment of the union between theory and practice, and where we engage each other as whole persons and work together as learners.

To teach rigorously

Intellectual and honest teaching is incredibly important to me. I cannot state this strongly enough. I work to create a rigorous, highly intellectual environment by establishing a challenging and respectful classroom community for all students. I strive to support my students as intellectuals, teachers, and as people on their own particular intellectual journeys. The quality of my students’ work, and the tremendous comments in both formal and informal evaluations, give light to the environment created in my classes. The work I do as a teacher is demanding and intense, but it is also fulfilling and rewarding. As a faculty member in the School of Education, I am aware that those I teach, teach others. I do not take that responsibility lightly.

In practice, I encourage learners to examine educational discourse and power structures critically. I enable students to become aware of the historical, socio-political, economic, cultural, and subjective reality that shapes their lives and the lives of K-12 youth. In other words, I challenge students to analyze the relations among their daily experiences, classroom practices, the knowledge they produce, and the socio-political arrangements of the larger social order. In the end, I assist students to generate pedagogical practices directed towards changing these social power structures in the interests of greater equity.

Through my coursework, students produce critical media web pages, language and identity photo-stories, digital qualitative studies, and full-fledged research papers. The following projects are representative of student work: Qualitative study on white males and black youth in the classrooms; iMovie on queer students’ experiences in Catholic schools; qualitative pilot study on understandings of gender in Kindergarten urban classrooms through Disney films; media literacy webpages and lessons on race, class, and gender to disseminate to other teachers; and self-reflective photo-stories exploring the intersection of gender and language in the lives of bilingual teachers.

In addition to my work with undergraduate and graduate students, I also teach doctoral students in the School of Education. My work with doctoral students in the Educational
Doctorate for Leadership on Social Justice is best defined by Loyola Marymount University’s Mission Statement on the promotion of faith and justice: “LMU encourages students, faculty, and staff to identify with those living on the margins of society so that the intellectual inquiry and moral reflection endemic to university life will lead to meaningful work for transformative social change.”

As Chair of several doctoral students in the past few years, I advise students, and in particular, students of color who seek out my mentorship and expertise to engage in research that addresses social inequity and more importantly, provides recipes for social change. Sample dissertations include: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Obama Administration’s Education Speeches; Living Learning Communities: An Intervention in Keeping Women Strong in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics; Youth, Social Networking, and Resistance; and African youth and Media Literacy in the Inner-city.

To teach democratically
I am devoted to the (re) centering of student voice in the classroom. This approach encourages students to see the classroom as an exciting place, where honest confrontation, dialogue, and reciprocal interaction are valued. This is an active and applied pedagogy that results in developing student autonomy and liberation so students take more responsibility as co-constructors of knowledge.

Democratic participation in the classroom is a worthy goal in that greater learning occurs when students take a more active role in the learning process. I carefully sequence discussions and assignments to share responsibility for the course to students gradually, without sacrificing the depth and sophistication that I want to achieve in the classroom. The result is a classroom in which all students participate and in which thoughtful, informed dialogue is the primary mode of engagement. In practice, this means students are expected to co-construct elements of the syllabus, such as selection of readings, lecture searches for online sessions, and co-teaching sessions based in their practice as teachers.

As students take ownership of the class, their ways of knowing bubble up, offering and developing new critical insights, that in the end push forth their own unique understandings of the field of education. In my courses, I have experienced those moments when students imagine powerful ideas that give us pause, where we collectively feel the goosebumps in the room. Democratizing the classroom, at the end of the day, means that I as professor, also stand in awe at the brilliance of their ideas.

To teach with feeling
The emotional connections I strive to establish in and outside the classroom is one of the most significant and complex pedagogical aspects of my work. As a feminist scholar and pedagogue, centering emotions in the classroom ultimately reflects a partial collapse of the mind/body binary that exists in academic spaces. Deconstructing a dualism requires releasing the idea that any one aspect – in this case, the cognitive mind – is the controlling, dominant, defining or superior aspect. The feminist critique is not to reverse
this dichotomy, so that the repressed term becomes the dominant one, but to collapse them: to find ways of representing the world that might operate on different truths, that does not have to be defined within a hierarchical relationship of true/not-true, but can simply co-exist. In other words, to find a way of teaching and learning so that it does not have to be either the One or the Other, but can be represented as simply two, or more – and with each able to be defined on its own terms.

Through releasing the mind/body split, I mesh the emotional and intellectual layers in the classroom. I am unafraid to showcase the range of emotions in my teaching. Students witness my sadness, joy, and faith as I experience their emotional trajectories to confront difficult issues around identity and inequity. I blend the cognitive with the affect as students begin to think and feel aloud with fewer inhibitions. The students experience my mind and heart, as I layer on thick an emotional intensity in the classroom. As such, I push up against traditional notions of teaching and learning, where emotion is feared in the classroom because it upsets the hierarchy that presumes the mind (rationality) should always have dominion over the body (emotionality). I further the idea that teaching and learning from the senses, from the feeling states, from tears, transforms the classroom space. Ultimately, it deepens the cognitive experiences of my students.

My most recent experience as a faculty member reveals my commitment to cultivate my craft as a teacher. In collaboration with colleagues, I participated in the launch of a co-teaching, hybrid framework for MA students in the Bay region in the fall of 2012. As a hybrid program, we flew up to the Bay every few weeks to conduct face-to-face sessions followed with cutting-edge online sessions. Coupled with a co-teaching model that blended key conceptual components from both courses, the students were able to produce digital stories, policy briefs, and videos of research findings. The courses were incredibly successful. As such, we will resume our work in the fall.

Lastly, as a teacher-scholar, I affirm the idea that teaching and scholarship go hand-in-hand. In 2012, I published a book around the construct of mother-scholar to (re)imagine K-12 education. A significant aspect of this work reconceptualised how we approach teaching and learning in the classroom. Thus, my scholarship adds another hyphen, teacher-scholar-mother. This is a construct I look forward to deepening in both my classroom and in my scholarship at Loyola Marymount University.

I deeply recognize that my work as a pedagogue at Loyola Marymount University reflects its rich history of the education of the whole person and the promotion of justice. Against this backdrop, I am able to engage in pedagogy I believe in with enthusiasm and faith. In this, and because I hold a fundamental belief in the extraordinary power of innovative pedagogy and collaborative, collegial relationships between teacher and student, I am both humbled and proud to teach.