

**Provost's Innovative Teaching Award
Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

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To say that I have always thought of myself as an educator is not an overstatement of facts; one of my earliest memories is of sitting my dolls down for their daily lessons! Years later, through my time of first being a student and then becoming a social worker in community settings, and as I later moved into an academic career, I learned the valuable lesson that to truly engage the learner in all of us is a gift and a responsibility that needs to be achieved by going beyond traditional didactic methods. I took this lesson with me as I moved into academia and began to conceive of my role as an educator to assist students in developing critical thinking skills and in becoming engaged and active lifelong learners.

I have cultivated my teaching practice at two universities and across a span of levels of education working with students from undergraduate to doctoral studies. This experience has included designing and delivering courses with innovative, interdisciplinary and interactive components to enhance student engagement. In doing so, I have familiarized myself with the scholarship of teaching to ensure that I learn from the experiences of others and to contribute to the field through my own research and writing. I believe that it was this passion for innovative teaching and continued learning and professional development that led to being awarded the Sue Williams Teaching Excellence Award in 2007, and nominated again in 2009 by my students.

I have relied upon innovative teaching approaches that move beyond a focus on didactic teaching to help me to bridge the gap between theory and practice that my students face in applying social work theoretical knowledge to practice issues. My special contribution to teaching has been the development of innovative teaching methods—examples provided below—that engage students in an interactive and participatory learning environment. Promoting interaction and participation have been the two guiding principles underlying my teaching from curriculum development, to designing course activities and assignments.

I have valued interaction between students as a way of enhancing peer learning. This has meant that I view my responsibility as an educator to cultivate community among my students by providing them with opportunities to help each other learn. I believe that if students are provided with the right tools, supports and guidance, they are able to assist each other in enhancing their learning. As future social workers, I believe that peer-learning has the potential to begin to shift students' perceptions of one another from classmates with the centre of attention being the professor, to a perception of their fellow students as future colleagues.

An example of applying the principle of peer learning through interaction is an assignment that I designed for a required graduate seminar on social work practice. This assignment revolved around students developing panel presentations to educate each other on themes related to course content. While presentation formats are used in many other courses, the innovative aspect of this particular assignment revolved around the actual development of the topics for discussion. Specifically, I began the process by requiring students to complete an abstract describing their proposed graduate research project. Students then read each other's abstracts and then engaged in an open-ended reflection process that I facilitated on their areas of social work practice interests; moving from this step, I assisted the students in organizing their ideas into themes, which then they assisted each other in turning into specific presentation topics

that they then thematically grouped into panel presentations. Students noted that this process allowed them to move from being passive learners to appreciating the value of interaction with each other as well as participation in creating course content. This particular graduate course also included innovative teaching approaches reflected in class activities such as the integration of arts-informed methods to assist students in engaging with material related to social work practice. I have presented on the outcomes of this course and wrote about these innovative methods in a peer-reviewed publication (please see article abstract: “Arts-informed teaching”).

Another example of promoting innovation through student peer-learning is the “passport activity” which accompanies student presentations in the undergraduate international social work course. For this assignment, students develop a poster presentation on a social work issue in a country of their choice. At the presentation portion of the class, 4-5 groups of students present their work in poster format and other students visit each presentation reading the posters and asking questions. This activity which favours student interaction and peer-learning also teaches the students the skill of developing poster presentations, useful in their community practice or for conference presentations. Accompanying the presentation is a journal in the shape of a passport that students take with them to each presentation they visit. The presentation group stamps their passport with a “visa” (usually a sticker unique to that group’s presentation) and the visiting students record their own thought about what they learned about social work from their classmates’ presentation. This passport is then submitted as an assignment.

I have also fostered innovation through the principle of participation, which I conceive of as valuing student engagement with course material. Relying on this principle has meant that I have utilized teaching methods that elicit participation as a way of enhancing the learning experience of students. Examples of participatory methods include: role plays, simulations that I have specifically designed for my courses, use of various media by students, as well as guided discussions of readings (please see attached article abstracts: “Reflections on experiential learning” and “Teaching community organizing”).

A specific example of innovative participatory learning is the Globalization Game that I developed to assist my students in learning about the sociopolitical, environmental, and economic impacts of globalization on communities. The Game has received positive feedback from students and other professors who have seen me present on this educational tool and who have requested copies for their classroom. Working in small groups, the Game provides students with the opportunity to find answers in their assigned readings and on-line, which is a positive use of mobile technology in the classroom. Once they reach the answer, a discussion ensues in the larger group (the classroom) and links are made to social work practice. This activity which occurs early on in the course sets the stage for greater student participation and builds a sense of community as each point scored by one team is added to a total benefiting everyone in class.

Favouring participation has also meant engaging students in critically reflecting on their own learning. An example is when I provided students with the opportunity to mock-grade their own papers. While I retained the responsibility of grading the papers and assigning the final mark, students were provided with the opportunity to learn how to evaluate their own work, in what could be considered “formative evaluation” where the aim is not only to assign a grade, but the evaluation itself becomes an opportunity to learn. While learning to grade their own papers, students develop critical reflection skills. In order to help students develop these skills, I discussed with them grading criteria and then provided them with worksheets that I asked them to use in grading their own papers. Once their own grading was completed, they had the chance to revise the paper to reflect their own critiques of their work. Students then handed the final

paper with their grading sheet, at which point provided feedback that built upon and pushed further the students' own perceptions and reflections on their work.

Another example is a classroom activity where I worked with students on designing a "model of exercising personal agency". This activity resulted in the development of a visual model focusing on the internal and external barriers that hinder social workers in exercising their agency in practice and the factors that could be helpful in overcoming these barriers (please see article abstract: "Revaluing student knowledge").

Consistent with my goals of lifelong learning and the development of critical reflections skills for my students, I have also valued these aims in my own teaching practice. Since the beginning of my academic career, I have conceived of myself as an "intentional educator", which has led me to continually seek ways to reflect upon and enhance my own teaching. This has translated into keeping a reflection journal on my teaching, and attending professional development workshops and lectures. As a way of making a contribution, I have also developed and presented workshops on teaching-related topics for other professors (in social work and other disciplines). These workshops have invariably been learning experiences for me because they have permitted me to actively engage with my colleagues in focused discussions of teaching and learning. Considering the importance I accord to teaching and to working collegially and as I have taken on the role of FCS Chair of Learning & Teaching this year, I am excited by the continued opportunities to contribute in this way.

My years of experience have instilled within me a passion for the enhancement of teaching practice, which has led directly to my engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning. This process has allowed me to critically reflect on my own teaching practice and to engage in key issues and debates raised in the scholarship. It has also afforded me the opportunity to mentor as co-authors students interested in developing their writing portfolio and skills. In addition to a publication record that began in my second year as an educator and continues until today on issues related to teaching methods, teaching philosophy and reflections on teaching role (please see my CV), I have also begun to be involved in interdisciplinary collaborations to further enhance teaching.

Specifically, with the help of a Faculty of Community Services grant, I have engaged in course development with colleagues from the School of Image Arts. The outcome is an interdisciplinary course bringing social justice and media together for graduate students in both schools (please see attached course description). I believe this passion, interest and ability to forge cross-faculty collaborations to be important assets for the enhancement of teaching practice. In essence, this learning from others within the University as well as integrating learnings from the scholarship can provide a fertile ground for the development of new ideas to spur the growth of further scholarship as well as innovative teaching practice.

A final example is an undergraduate course that I developed bringing the creative arts together with helping professions (please see attached course description). This course on art and social transformation is geared towards students in the Faculty of Community Services and as such brings interdisciplinary perspectives into the classroom to enhance student learning through different ways of knowing.

In ending, I wish to express the great privilege I feel working with students over the past 14 years. The more innovation I introduce into the classroom and curriculum, the more I feel rewarded with closer connections with students, a growing sense of community in the classroom, and closer affinity with other educators committed to fostering an engaged and critically reflexive community of learners able to positively contribute to their future practice.