Teaching and Research Philosophy

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Objectives

My main objective as a university professor is to foster critical thinking around ideas of social structures, social inequality, identity formation, and social justice. Students will inevitably enter the classroom with an established understanding of these processes. Their ideas will be elaborated upon, challenged, and examined from divergent critical perspectives. While not necessarily teaching a particular perspective, a diversity of perspectives, originating from many different social locations, is imperative to a learning environment, and this is what the student will provide. When students can examine social issues from perspectives not necessarily of their own, this will establish patterns of critical thinking skills that they can maintain for life, assisting in problem solving, and social acceptance. While the student may leave the classroom with the same perspective with which they entered, they will understand more broadly where that perspective developed, how it is on par with other perspectives, and ways in which difference is a social value.

Methods

Methods of teaching should also go beyond traditional lecturing, which postures the learned professor at the front-and-center, while receptive students remain passive. Students have much to contribute; and therefore, lectures should be tempered with discussion. In this way, the professor can more easily observe their progress. Students learn in a variety of ways, and many are unable to truly grasp information from lectures. Therefore, other methods should be utilized, and I would provide this diversity so as to engage as many students as possible. These methods may include, but are not limited to: videos, photography, optional fieldtrips, personal research, paper writing, examinations, lectures, group exercises, collaborative learning, personal revelations, and discussions.

My research methods incorporate mixed-methods ethnographic practices. My major research projects have been based upon ethnographic methodology: in-depth interviews, oral history, participant observation, fieldwork, and visual representations. As a Project Manager for the Scholar-Practitioner Team in Anthropology at CUNY Graduate Center (funded by Kellogg), the research that we conducted on the impact of welfare reform was based upon: focus groups, in-depth personal interviews, Photo Voice, 200 surveys conducted outside of job sites, statistical analysis, and collaboration with community organizations. As a doctoral student at The New School for Social Research, I took many
ethnography classes and worked closely with Professor Williams, the ethnography expert within the department.

Because of my emphasis on qualitative methodology, I am very much interested in teaching research methods, encouraging students to take a closer look at the world around them from a grassroots, social perspective. This would encourage the understanding that education and knowledge are not a monopoly of the university, but rather, are found within personal social settings. This class would encourage students to explore their communities and cities, as the Chicago School encouraged, as a social laboratory.

**Effectiveness**

Teaching effectiveness can be measured in a variety of ways: the evolving understanding of students about social structures as observed during the semester, their increased interest in the subject matter and the department, student evaluations, in-class, integrated feedback before the semester ends, and the involvement of other faculty members, such as co-teaching or classroom observation.

Effectiveness in research can be measured by the application of outcomes to real world structures, academic article publication, book publications, conference presentations, documentary video screenings, and invited lectures. As a disciplined and devoted researcher, I place heavy emphasis on publication and presentation of academic work. Individual and collaborative research is a central aspect of my academic life.

**Teaching Interest**

I have a background in political science, women’s studies, and sociology, providing particular social understandings and research perspectives. Within Women’s Studies, I studied Asian American history, Ethnic Studies, and the deconstruction and complication of racial categories through the example of mixed race identity. I am very much interested in studying overlooked identities and the critical deconstruction of essentialized and generalized identity categorizations. I am very much interested in teaching courses on women of color and impacts of globalization on women.

As a sociologist, I have studied social movements from a historical and tactical perspective. I am very much interested in teaching courses on social movements, social inequality, and social justice. Related to this work, I have researched the role of progressive legal organizations and the growth of the prison industrial complex. Therefore I am also interested in teaching about the structures of crime and punishment as well as theories of deviance.

As an ethnographer, I am very much interested in teaching methodology classes based upon qualitative methodology. I am interested in encouraging students to participate and critically examine the social interactions of the real world.
Research Agenda

Returning to my Master’s thesis research on the intersections of mixed race and bisexual identities, I would like to continue this work on exploring what Chinese ethnic identities means when viewed through the fractured, postmodern lens of issues ranging from Americanization, globalization, being mixed race, international adoption, being second generation, and the Diaspora. I plan on making a documentary film exploring my family’s complex relationship to Chinese identity. Through the initial lens of my family, I intend to extend the study by interviewing a large number of Chinese in at least three countries, in order to examine the Diaspora. I plan on beginning the initial fieldwork for this project in Summer 2010.

Current Research Project: Covered (women and tattoos)
Covered ethnographically explores the social world of heavily tattooed women and female tattoo artists in the United States. Fieldwork began in January 2006, at the annual all-female tattoo convention called Marked for Life, in Orlando, Florida. Spanning three and a half years, I traveled across the United States and videotaped interviews with seventy heavily tattooed women and female tattooists. I conducted fieldwork at numerous national tattoo conventions, tattoo shops, and other related social gatherings. While tattooing has exponentially grown in popularity, especially for women, the tattooing literature and films have almost exclusively focused on the stories of men. Covered aims to fill this oversight by presenting the history of women in the tattooing profession, providing a space for heavily tattooed women to speak to their experience of daily life negotiating social sanctions, and to present this information in an explicitly feminist perspective that counters the sexually objectifying view of women represented in the tattoo magazines. The filming and editing of the feature length documentary film was completed in December 2009. The documentary will be released in January 2010 and sent to numerous international film festivals globally. A manuscript and academic articles will be written based upon this research in 2010.

Last Research Project: Defending a Choice for Women
Beginning in August 2006, I began fieldwork at a local, ongoing clinic defense protest that transpired each Saturday in Miami. Local Catholic churches protested against the abortion and contraception services provided by a clinic named A Choice for Women, and the Miami Clinic Access Project (MCAP) was established to defend this clinic. I was a participant observer for six months at the clinic, interviewed participants, assisted in scheduling many public forums about the protests, and utilized visual documentation methods. From this research, I created my first short documentary video Defending a Choice for Women. This documentary is an educational tool, useful for classroom settings and community organizations. The movie was accepted at four international film festivals and shown on community access television. I also completed the article “Defending a Choice for Women: A Feminist Video Ethnography,” which was accepted for publication in the upcoming collection Feminist Activism in the Academy (North Carolina: McFarland Press, 2010), edited by Ellen Mayock & Domnica Radulescu.
Professional Aims

My career aims are rooted firmly in the university setting. I intend to pursue an academic career for which I will continue to conduct research on broad issues stemming from social inequality. I very much enjoy teaching and that is central to my professional aims. My involvement with students is central to my academic work, and I am committed to mentoring, assisting, advising, and working with students outside of the classroom as well. I can provide mentoring and leadership, especially for female and minority students. In addition, I very much enjoy conducting ethnographic research on inequality issues from my local community and nationwide, and will continue to pursue a research agenda directed towards publishing academic articles and books as well as producing documentary films. I am also very much committed to serve the department, university, and community in which I find myself, and will work within committees and provide service to the best of my ability.