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Teaching Philosophy

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For my first international ethnographic fieldwork, I flew to Singapore (and then Bali, Indonesia) to work with the transwomen sex worker communities. With nothing but a voice recorder and a list of guide questions, I traveled, volunteered, and mingled with trans communities in Southeast Asia to inquire and learn about their lives and their stories. For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in people and stories. For me, storytelling is a powerful tool to connect, empower, and inspire change. This interest led me to anthropology, and as a life-long student of the discipline, I have spent a great deal of time pursuing an in-depth examination of people and their stories.

My interest in storytelling and sociocultural anthropology has helped me create my own voice and style as an educator and teacher. My teaching is grounded in the simplicity and basic principles of stories and storytelling: immersive, personal, relatable, respectful, and transparent. As an anthropologist, I tell my own stories and stories about other's stories. As an educator, I often anticipate and find myself a recipient of stories, especially from my audience and students. True learning in the classroom occurs when both the educator and students are actively engaged with the content and stories—resulting in productive conversations and debates—in agreement or not. Teaching should be a mutual and collaborative endeavour. It should also be flexible as the process of learning is different for everyone; it is not “one size fits all.”

In practice, my teaching aims to provide space for students to explore and ask questions and help them be independent during this process of learning. As an educator, I present myself as a reliable resource and scaffold to assist them in understanding anthropological concepts and theories to find their own voice as storytellers and as the recipient of stories themselves. Learning should be a back-and-forth dialogue, and this can be achieved by developing a rapport and being approachable with students. They need to feel comfortable with the subject matter and not be afraid to ask for help. This can be achieved if there is respect between the educator and the learners. I ensure that students understand the concepts clearly to create an atmosphere of progressive learning. As such, transparency between the learners and the instructor is very important in this process.

As assessments, examinations, projects, and papers are inevitable components of course to track students' progress, I believe that fair, timely, and constructive feedback is essential to promote learning and inspire curiosity among students. As the instructor and marker for these assessments, I provide detailed, written feedback, comments, and suggestions to students in addition to informal feedback in my seminar classes and/or office hours. If needed, I often arranged extra office and tutorial hours for students to come talk to me about their progress in the course and to ask any questions from lectures or modules that required clarification or explanation outside class time.

In summary, my teaching is oriented by the desire to help students to create their own voice to tell their stories—stories that matter even after the course is over. University should not just be about providing careers and job skills and to transmit scholarly research and knowledge, but to mould productive, mature, and caring individuals. As an educator, anthropologist, and a storyteller, I believe that goal is possible and achievable if we treat students with respect and confidence right from the start.