

## SHIRLEY MOODY-TURNER - STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

At the core of my teaching philosophy is the belief that education is a space of empowerment where my job as a teacher is to provide students with opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills, and experiences to become informed, engaged, critical, and creative thinkers and citizens. Informed by Paulo Freire's landmark work in educational theory and practice, I utilize a range of student-centered teaching methods and activities to make the classroom a transformative space where students learn to be active readers who utilize a range of methods to make meaning from the texts with which they engage; critical thinkers who learn to analyze and evaluate a diversity of ideas, information, and situations; and persuasive writers and communicators, who gain the confidence and experience to conceptualize, articulate, and share their ideas, not only with me, but with their classmates, friends, families, and the wider public.

Three examples from my teaching oeuvre demonstrate the range of positive outcomes of my teaching philosophy. In my Introduction to Folklore Studies course, for example, I introduce students to the history of folklore scholarship, presenting the most significant approaches to studying folklore that have emerged over the last fifty years. At the same time, however, I ask students to bring in their own examples of folk songs, legends, myths, customs, and family practices. Students present these examples to the class, and in this way not only learn more about the material by becoming themselves teachers, but also begin to break down a longstanding misconception in folklore studies, that folklore belongs to "other people." By presenting their own folklore in class, and later conducting "campus collection projects," and eventually crafting major final collection projects and papers based on their own areas of interests, students learn that their own experiences and interests are valid spaces for scholarly, creative, and critical investigation and, by looking at their own folklore, they also learn to be more self-reflexive and empathetic when investigating the folklore and culture of others. Allowing students to work from their own areas of interest has other distinct advantages as well. One pre-med student, for instance, ended up doing his semester-long project on how the medical field could be more effective in communicating with its target communities if doctors were more aware of that community's folk practices and beliefs regarding medicine and illness. He wrote to me several years after taking my course to tell me that during his medical school interview, the committee was most interested in talking about this concept and the project he had done for my class (he was admitted to medical school and is on his way to becoming a practicing physician). This student-centered approach informed my participant-led, video documentary oral history course, Engl 497: Oral History, Narrative and New Media Technologies, which I co-designed and team-taught with WPSU specifically for student veterans. The course was based on the premise that student veterans of the Iraq war were in a unique position to become the storytellers and documentarians of their experiences and those of other veterans. The course earned much attention as a model for other participant-led oral history projects, and for our use of public media and web 2.0 technology in connecting the university with the larger community, we were awarded an Innovation Grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. In more recent courses, I have continued to incorporate a range of technology into my classroom practice. In my Engl 303 Honors Seminar, for example, the class created a course TUMBLR through which they analyzed and evaluated representations of race, class, and gender circulating in various digital and media outlets. Through this exercise, students learned that they do not have to be passive consumers of internet content, but can engage critically with the materials they observe and can enlist digital technologies to express and share their own perspectives and ideas.

While I teach across a range of subject areas, from folklore, to oral history, to literature, to cultural studies, my philosophy remains the same: learning is a collaborative endeavor, a mutual engagement between me, the students, the subject matter, and the world around us, and if it is done well, the students will develop the critical tools to become active and empowered global citizens, inspired to engage and shape the larger public discourse through a range of written, oral and digital media.