

Pedagogy Statement

Rebekah Popescu

Education is a process by which human beings gain skills, knowledge and experience. As an educator, I am committed to purposeful delivery of these components in a style that invites inclusive communal discourse and incentivises students to engage with the curriculum. My approach to teaching is inspired by the Socratic method in that I tend more towards being a 'guide on the side', as opposed to a 'sage on the stage'. My commitment is to provide a forum in which students can explore both theoretical content and themselves, in a safe, supportive environment.

In my academic role at Ikon, my pedagogical emphasis is on experiential learning, reflective and reflexive practice, relational awareness and phenomenological enquiry methods. Students often embark on their academic journey expecting to be 'taught' in the traditional sense where the lecturer is a purveyor of facts and they the consumers. My approach dismantles this expectation through consistent invitation for students to become interlocutors of their own lived experience in the pursuit of self awareness.

The ancient Delphic maxim "Know thyself", is a concept I revisit often as a signpost for students. The acquisition of knowledge in the field of psychotherapy opens many portals for deep introspection, to better understand the human condition. Gaining the competence to hold therapeutic space for clients depends on the capacity for remaining present, even if one is uncomfortable with what is emerging. As a lecturer, I aim to model this in the class environment, to examine what is being co-created among all participants. This is why I value parrhesia (defined as frank and candid speech), so that individual discomfort can become productive learning for the entire group.

Dan Siegel (2012) explains the concept of 'mind' as an "emergent, self-organising, embodied, and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information" (p. 7). As education primarily involves the mind, my goal is to ensure the flow of information is proportionate to the capacities of students, while challenging them to transcend limiting beliefs and perceptions. I endeavour always to remain sensitive to energies, relational dynamics and emerging interpersonal trends in the classroom as a collective mind force. All of these facets of mind can be utilised as teaching tools in the learning space.

In my clinical practice as a creative arts and equine-assisted psychotherapist, I maintain an 'I-thou' relational stance with clients as well as in horsemanship. Conceptualised by Martin Buber, the core theme of his philosophy is that people naturally adopt alternating relational attitudes with the world. 'I-Thou' is a relation of subject-to-subject, whilst 'I-It' is a relation of subject-to-object. The dialogic nature of my work in clinical practice and education oscillates between these two modes of relating. It encompasses both a subjective, person-to-person style of relating (authentic) and a more objective, goal-focused attitude (strategic). Successful therapeutic and educational outcomes are supported by the rhythmic and balanced alternation between these two relational stances. That is to say I do not dismiss the 'I-it' stance or simply use the 'I-thou' stance in isolation. The intuitive hovering between these two attitudes is a tool I employ as both teacher and clinician.

Kant stated that “the best way to understand is to do” (2003, p. 80). Whether it be figuring out how to play an arpeggio in D# minor on the piano, mastering the art of hebel stone sculpture or using creative arts modalities with an anxious client, the apprentice can watch a master in action; though to truly learn and remember well, I believe the gaining of competence of a particular skill can only be attained through practice. In my classroom, students benefit from targeted skills practice and experiential learning under professional guidance. Additionally, I provide masterclass-style demonstrations where students are invited to actively participate and thereafter debrief about the experience.

It is also my belief that awareness is a function of consciousness that supports all knowing. It is a process by which knowledge emerges onto the mental stage, initiated by multi-sensory experience. A partial or fully formed thought is constructed through conscious observations of phenomena occurring in the here and now. It brings focus or attention to a particular aspect of the present moment. Awareness can arrive gradually or suddenly, dictating the next thought emotion or sensation to be either responsive or reactive. As a teacher of training psychotherapists, it is my duty to help students navigate the terrain of conscious awareness as it is the basis for all human growth and development.

Through my own reflective and reflexive practice of teaching, I aim to bypass the traditional power imbalance between academic and student often seen in formal higher education, despite the fact that hierarchy will always be implicit in these roles. Stern presents the concept of a ‘shared feeling voyage’ where two or more people traverse the unfolding landscape in real time, together. In this shared private world, coherence and complexity are enlarged, creating an expanded intersubjective field that opens up new possibilities of ‘ways-of-being-with-one-another’. This is what I seek to co-create with my students.

REFERENCES

Kant, I. (2003) *On Education* (A.Churton, Trans.) New York: Dover Publications.

Siegel, D. (2012) *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. New York: Guilford Press

Stern, D. (2004). *The present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life* . New York: W.W. Norton.