

A few years ago, I came upon a quote from John C. Maxwell that stayed with me:

Students don't care what you know until they know that you care.

This quote helped me realize the consistent theme that underlies both my teaching and my research. My work has been aimed at showing that a feeling of belonging, of being seen and acknowledged, is not just about feeling good-- it is a direct determinant of academic achievement. I have helped document that feelings of acceptance and belonging are related to GPA ([S-1](#))¹, and that trusting mentoring relationships not only help mentors provide more helpful feedback, but help students receive critical feedback as well ([S-2](#)).

Teaching is not only about the transmission of knowledge. It's not just about writing formulas or psychological theories on the board and waiting for students to upload the knowledge that I impart. Instead, it's about taking care of the whole student-- their feelings, their struggles, their ideas. Of course, I am not the first to come to this realization. This ethos is embodied all over Berkeley, in the various clubs, centers, mentoring programs and academic advisors that students have access to. And yet, among many professors, the "sage on the stage" model of knowledge transmission reigns. I am committed to helping Berkeley create a new model where students can be whole in the eyes of professors, and hope to one day be able to write cogently about such a model. In the meantime, however, I know one thing that helps: for me, the professor, to also be whole and fully present when I teach.

To start, I make an overt point of learning my students' names. It sounds simple, but in a large classroom, this can be exceedingly difficult to do. The effort is worthwhile: students move from the back to the front of the class, attendance improves, and dialogue begins. This is the first step in breaking down the "sage" stereotype-- the approach is more of a guided conversation and a joint discovery. Rather than trying to scribble down everything I say and yielding to the temptation of Facebook, I find my students growing intrinsically motivated and engaged. The bCourses photo feature is my most used tool, and I make a point of studying this before class.

A second strategy that I use is to show my fallibility, as an explicit challenge to the brilliant, inaccessible professor stereotype. For example, I am frank with my students that there are times, in my efforts to learn students' names, that I sometimes confuse students based on gender, skin color, or other surface characteristics, yet also share how hurtful it is for me to be similarly confused on the basis of my ethnicity. I use this double role as both enactor and target of stereotypes to begin more nuanced conversations with respect to categorization and stereotyping. Nevertheless, when I say or do something that can upset a student, I make a point of apologizing, publicly where necessary, or to check in with them after class. This helps communicate my interest in their well-being, and to emphasize that we can grow from our mistakes.

¹ This document embeds live links that connect directly to supplementary material. The links are provided at the end as well.

I try to share different aspects of myself. I want my students to know that behind the professor, there is someone who makes bad jokes (and sometimes good ones), who has a family, who struggles with the very issues that they ask about. How do I do this? I show pictures of my kids, I share experiences in daily life that remind me of the lessons I want to convey (e.g., [S-3](#)), and I purposely tell students about details of studies I forget so that they know that I will not hold them to any standard that I myself cannot fulfill.

I work purposefully to also establish rapport among the students themselves. This is because when one teaches about prejudice and bias, there will inevitably be difficult and uncomfortable conversations, raw emotions, and a need for deep self-reflection. We build rapport together to allow the students to engage in courageous conversations around social identity, so that ultimately, they can become social justice leaders themselves ([S-4](#)).

An additional goal is to ensure that underrepresented and stigmatized students, who experience a lack of belonging on university campuses with particular severity, feel like they can aspire to brilliant scholarship at Berkeley. Using Berkeley data, I have examined structural barriers to scholarly success that I hope will inform our campus ([S-5](#)). In my own classes, I constantly experiment with ways to help my students examine (or reexamine) their relationship to data. Many students come to my classes deeply interested in social justice, yet also deeply suspicious about statistics. Sometimes this is a disciplinary mindset where data and numbers are seen as positivist and reductionist. Other times there is the threat about, simply, not being “good” at math. Often, it is both. Using the methods of trust and rapport described above, I devote significant time to the scientific method in my classes on prejudice and stigma. We cover main effects, interactions, and significance, and until recently I had my students design and describe ideal findings for an experiment as their final project. Just this year, I have taken advantage of support from the Data Science Initiative at Berkeley to allow students to analyze their own, real-world data and engage in the process of discovery through data for themselves ([S-6](#)). I feel this is a very concrete way for students to see that data and social justice are not incompatible with one another.

Teaching is a central part of who I am, and, I have come to realize, who I am as a scholar and thinker. Knowing this makes me feel whole. I want my students, prospective teachers and scholars themselves, to feel whole too.

Supplementary material links

S-1:

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6jb4k73v>

S-2:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1thOznRbHeWYuN0SJOg624YUUXlPNa7RU/view?usp=sharing>

S-3:

<http://blogs.berkeley.edu/2017/02/09/does-what-i-study-even-matter-now-yes-it-does-heres-why/>

S-4:

<http://newscenter.berkeley.edu/2011/04/28/campus-diversity/>

S-5:

<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0174296>

S-6:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xazdQ56Rzam20FoE85kERHAU9s9JFhQD/view?usp=sharing>