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I am honored to be nominated by my student for the Dr. James E. Mumford Excellence in Extraordinary Teaching Award. I have taught undergraduate and graduate courses on topics related to race, ethnicity, social inequality, and childhood at Indiana University.

In my classes, my teaching philosophy centers on three criteria. I believe that instructor must 1) promote critical thinking skills, 2) develop curricula that enable students to take knowledge outside of the classroom, and 3) foster a student-oriented environment where students see their own experiences as source of powerful knowledge. On the basis of my prior teaching experiences, since January 2020, I have been further developing innovative, creative, and compassionate teaching strategies in response to extraordinary circumstances.

Teaching is both scholarly and community project. An example illustrates this pedagogical approach. In my Ethnic and Race Relations undergraduate course, I regularly ask students to author a proposal that address the needs of their communities. Students in the past have authored impressive grant proposals based on the course readings and their personal experiences. At a historical moment when the global pandemic coincided with social movements aimed at eradicating police brutality within Black communities, I modified the proposal assignment to address current issues. Students drew from newspaper articles and course readings to produce a proposal that discussed how social inequalities embedded in the welfare state, criminal justice system, and health-care, housing, and immigration policies left marginalized communities more vulnerable to crisis. Students also came up with solutions to transform society. For example, students wrote about building grassroots activist organizations aimed at raising youth awareness about systematic inequality and building racial coalitions. In a society in which it is often difficult to go beyond celebrating difference to teach students about systematic inequality, I turned the crisis into teachable moments while helping students imagine a better world.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, I also put more effort into developing creative ways to evaluate students' performance. For example, instead of administering multiple-choice exams, I routinely came up with innovative assignments to increase students' engagement. In my Sociology of Childhood class, students produced a children's book with the goal of teaching children about empathy and inclusion. One student authored an inspiring book called "Black Boys Rock" that included Black heroes and ordinary Black men who overcame unique obstacles to make the world a better place to live for younger generations of Black men. This book was based on his own father's advice on how to survive and thrive as a Black man as well as his embodied experiences of being criminalized on a daily basis while attempting to overcome daily racism. With a practical mechanism to demonstrate their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, my students have been able to see their personal experiences as a source of knowledge and a tool for intellectual development.

Finally, as we battled “impossible” semesters, I continued to enact empathy in my teaching. Even before the pandemic, I came across students who experienced health crisis, housing insecurity, and unforeseen financial setbacks. These social problems have only amplified in recent years. Students, however, often blame themselves when they fail. Yet, I believe that it is institutional responsibility to provide sufficient resources and support for all students to thrive. With this aim, I endeavored to better understand the social situations that drive students’ classroom performance; additionally, I tried to make equitable decisions in light of students’ circumstances.

As an immigrant woman of color who grew up in a working-class household, I have experienced firsthand how good mentoring and teaching can shape students’ educational journeys. It is this understanding that drives my commitment to create inclusive teaching and mentoring strategies that can advance humanistic and social justice-oriented curriculum.