

# Bringing PEACE to the Classroom

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One of the most intriguing, and perhaps intimidating, aspects of walking into a class for the first time and introducing yourself is deciding who you will be. The teaching persona you present to your students on that first day of class will set the tone for the rest of the semester.

As teachers, we get to consciously decide who we will be in the classroom. The creation of our teaching personas deserves careful consideration and is something I frequently discuss with my graduate students prior to their first teaching opportunity. In reflecting on the evolution of my teaching persona over the last two decades, and in discussing how my colleagues have developed and refined their own teaching personas, I offer an overarching recommendation for the basic elements of a teaching persona that will enhance the engagement of the teachers and students and contribute to a vibrant community of teachers and learners in the classroom. Simply, I recommend that through our teaching personas, we bring PEACE to our classrooms.

**Preparation.** Not only should you be prepared to walk into the classroom to teach, you should also be fully prepared on *what* you're teaching the class. Being prepared will not only make your students confident that class will be worthwhile and that they can trust your plan, but it will make you confident as well. Further, if you are not prepared to teach, why should your students be prepared to learn?

**Expertise.** Knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for good teaching. You should know your material and know how you will teach it. As with preparation, this should be evident to your students. Do be aware, however, that bringing expertise does not require that you talk over the heads of your students or hide behind that expertise. Part of being an expert—and a big responsibility of being a teacher—is making your knowledge accessible to your audience.

**Authenticity.** When I first was introduced to the notion of the teaching persona, it appeared to me that a teaching persona was a false presentation of the individual who was teaching. I soon realized this was not (or at least should not) be the case! The teaching persona you present must be a genuine representation of you and your personality. However, what you highlight and what you emphasize about who you are as an individual may vary from class to class. My teaching persona in a first-year experience class with first-generation students may appear different, in some ways, to my teaching persona in a graduate seminar on meta-analysis, but I am fundamentally the same person in both classes. Our students can tell when we are disingenuous (Cranton, 2001). Rather than potentially scaring them away by appearing to be someone we are not, I believe we should let our students see us as real people. Doing so will help our students learn and make our classrooms more connected learning communities.

**Caring.** Although you should care about your students and your class content, it is vital that you let your students know you care. Chat with them before class. Thank them for making the choice to come to class. Let them know and do things that show that you care about their learning and their performance. Show that you care about their questions, and find answers for the questions that you did not know how to answer. Invite them to office hours and mean it. Respond to their emails empathetically (*note*: this does not mean that you need to ignore your course policies on late work, missed classes, etc.). Do not just cover the content – share the content with them in a way that shows your dedication to the content and shows that you care they understand it.

**Engagement.** Engagement is complete investment in your task at all levels (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical; e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Paris, 2004; Rupayana, 2010; Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi, 2015; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Steele & Fullagar, 2009). When you are in your classroom, your teaching persona should display your engagement in your course material and in the experience of teaching it. It should be palpable. You should tell—or better yet, show—your students the value of the information and the class activities. Bring energy and enthusiasm to the information and activities. If you can't do that, then you may need to reconsider the inclusion of that information and activities in your class. When you are engaged, your students will be more engaged, and most importantly, your students will learn more (i.e., Trickle Down Engagement; Saucier, Miller, Martens, & Jones, under review).

## Finding PEACE in the Classroom

This conceptualization of the elements of our teaching personas reminds me that the classroom is an oasis. The classroom is a place where we, and our students, get to escape the other things that call for our attention and energy in our personal and professional lives. For the duration of my class, I can postpone worrying about university budget issues, the fact that Reviewer 2 hated my manuscript, the water in my basement, and my son waking up grumpy. While I am in class with my students, I bring PEACE through my teaching persona, and experience peace from the rest of life's concerns while we delve into academic content and learn together.

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