Journal of American Studies, **57** (2023), 1, 120–149

doi:10.1017/S0021875822000238

In Practice

Exchange: A Signature Pedagogy for American Studies in the UK

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What does it mean to teach American studies in UK higher education? We teach "American" content in our classes, modules, and degree programmes, but do we also conduct our teaching in ways specific to American studies? Lee Shulman describes a "signature pedagogy" as "the forms of instruction that leap to mind when we first think about the preparation of members of particular professions," encompassing both the types of teaching we conduct in our classrooms and the assumptions and values that underpin that practice.[1] Initial conversations about the concept of a signature pedagogy for American studies in the UK were held in a session organized by Lydia Plath on behalf of the Teaching American Studies Network at the Digital BAAS Conference in 2021, in the midst of a global pandemic that required all of us to reflect on our teaching practice. Building on that earlier conversation, this exchange was conducted between February and July 2022. The discussion explores American studies pedagogical approaches through the assumptions, beliefs, and values that underpin our teaching; the challenges of multi- and interdisciplinarity; and questions of identity, inclusion, and national context.

Question 1: Please introduce yourself by saying a little about yourself and your teaching experience.

Lydia Plath (LP): I am an Associate Professor in the History Department at the University of Warwick. I started my teaching journey during my PhD (also at

[1] Lee S. Shulman, "Signature Pedagogies in the Professions," *Daedalus*, 134, 3 (2005), 52–59. Other scholars have considered the concept of a signature pedagogy in American studies and related disciplines, but none have focussed on American studies in the UK context. See, for example, Mattias Oppermann, "Writing in 'That Other Space': Digital Storytelling and the Scholarship of Teaching in American Studies," *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 52, 3 (2007), 321–41; Lendol Calder, 'Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey,' *Journal of American History*, 92, 4 (2006), 1358–70.

Warwick) in 2007, and then part-time and fractional posts took me to both history and American studies departments across the UK. I spent several years teaching on the American studies programme at Canterbury Christ Church University before I returned to Warwick in a teaching-focussed role in 2017. I have been fortunate as an Americanist to teach largely within my area of specialism (American history modules' popularity with students means that I rarely have to teach on more general survey courses). My scholarly interests, both as a researcher and a teacher, lie in histories and representations of race, racism, and racist violence. I have taught histories of slavery, of white supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan, of lynching, and of the Black Freedom Movement. At the moment, I teach a second-year (intermediate) module called "America in Black and White? Contemporary US Race and Racism in Historical Context," in which students choose the topics they want to explore through a negotiated curriculum, and a final year advanced option called "Whiteness: An American History," in which we consider how whiteness and white supremacy have shaped all aspects of US history since the founding. Both modules take an activist approach to learning, and ask students to think about how historians can use our knowledge about the past to engage the public and change the future.

Hilary Emmett (HE): I am an Associate Professor in American Studies (Literature and Culture) at the University of East Anglia (UEA). After completing my BA in English and history at the University of Sydney in 1999, I moved to the United States, completing my PhD in American literature before 1865 at Cornell University in 2007. I returned to Australia in 2008 to teach at the University of Queensland, where I taught courses in transatlantic and American literatures as well as the first-year English literature survey course. I moved to UEA in 2012 to the Department of American Studies, which is now part of the wider School of Art, Media and American Studies. Since moving to UEA I have focussed my scholarly and pedagogical attention on teaching transnational American literature and culture but have taught modules ranging from "Reading Cultures" (an introduction to American studies) to contemporary American fiction, to nineteenth-century children's literature. My transnational teaching work focusses on America in the Pacific as well as comparative analyses of the literature and history of the United States and Australia. Key lenses through which we compare these two literary histories include questions of sovereignty and hospitality, gender and domesticity, and coerced and racialized labour.

Gyorgy Toth (GT): I am originally from Budapest, Hungary, and it was there at my alma mater, Eotvos Lorand University, where I began teaching courses such as Hungarian Literature in English Translation while I was finishing my master's in American studies and English language and literature back in 2003–4. During the last year when military service was still compulsory, I taught at university as unarmed civilian service. The following autumn found me at the University of Iowa, where I taught to earn a living and part of my training for a PhD in American studies. Here I got to teach American studies introductory courses. While at first I only knew that my teaching supervisor was Dr. Nick Yablon, I later realized that his teaching with cultural history and visual analysis (including paintings and historical photographs) was influenced by my "teaching grandfather," Prof. Neil Harris, historian at the University of Chicago. Iowa was a formative time for me, not only in my interdisciplinary training in "classic" and transnational American studies, but also

in a variety of ways of teaching. It was there that I picked up some of the American studies penchant for teaching critical thinking by relating texts from the past to our current dilemmas, challenges, and struggles. It was shocking for me to see white students from the rural Midwest claim that the civil rights movement has "solved" race relations, and espouse the kind of ideology that anyone in the US really had the power and the skills to achieve anything they wanted. It was poignant and difficult for me to be teaching the occasional Reserve Officers Training Corps cadet in class, knowing that these students may have to serve in either of the two simultaneous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. During my two years as graduate assistant in training for archival management, I also fell in love with using original primary sources in their physicality for teaching and learning, a wonderful privilege, and from our own vantage point, a vanishing art to be brought back for the benefit of our students.

As I was finishing my PhD, I was hired from Iowa to the Department of (now North) American Studies at Charles University in Prague, Czechia, where I spent two years. Here I was "the culture guy" at a department that was the kind of American studies akin to being the "America desk" of a national government: they offered history, politics, government, and the like to their students, with little old me teaching a variety of transatlantic relations, Native American history, and the globalization of American culture. Eventually I even got to teach my own designed "Theory & Method in American Studies," one of my prides and joys! Since 2014 I have been Lecturer in History at the University of Stirling, where I teach nineteenth-century US history (and occasionally twentieth century), as well as "Native American History and Policy," and "Transnational Histories of the Twentiethth-Century United States." This last one is a so-called "special subject," which would be equivalent to a US honours senior capstone full-year course. I am lucky to be teaching the last two modules, since both of them allow me to feed some of my own research into teaching – something that Stirling prides itself on doing. Having taught at five universities in as many countries on two continents, my pedagogical professional development is ongoing. In Iowa I was given an Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, at Stirling I was nominated to a supervisory award, and after years I managed to achieve a fellowship in the Higher Education Academy. Yet I have never experienced a semester as impossible for teaching as the spring of 2022.

Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello (ED-O): I am currently a Professor of American Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies and Chair of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Salem State University, northeast of Boston, Massachusetts (US), where I teach almost exclusively undergraduate students in general education courses, a few specialized American studies courses, and interdisciplinary research. I found my way to an American studies PhD programme (at Boston University) because of my deep desire to change the world; an interdisciplinary look at the structures, histories, and complexities of the United States drew me in but I could have been pulled to any critical interdisciplinary field (funding was essential for me so this was the one I went to). I am still looking to change the world and I believe that university classrooms are one of the places to do this work. I have been at Salem State for eighteen years, during which time I have had the chance (through Fulbright and Whiting fellowships and some partnerships I created) to teach at universities in Germany, Luxembourg, Greece, and Cote d'Ivoire, as well as developing course-based collaborations with universities in Iraq. Prior to my time at Salem State I taught in the Program in History and

Literature at Harvard; in the American Studies, Gender Studies, History, and Writing programs at Boston University; and as an adjunct faculty in writing and history at a couple of other institutions, including as the in-house writing specialist for the Aerospace Engineering Department at the University of Minnesota. Augmenting this work as a classroom instructor are my years (before, during, and since my PhD) working for social-service organizations addressing domestic violence and women's rights, working as a museum educator and exhibit developer and advising non-profits focussed on gender equity, immigration, and housing justice. For a handful of years I also directed and developed pedagogical materials and a website for large-scale projects offering professional development to primary and secondary teachers so that they could teach history and social studies using local history, art, artifacts, and the built environment. I began my career as an advocate for survivors of domestic violence. As such, I bring to my classroom teaching an eclectic approach to both teaching and learning (note: attention to both is necessary). Civic engagement, embodied learning, experiential learning, and a commitment to linking the academic and the "real" worlds drive my pedagogy.

At Salem State our programs and my courses serve a diverse student population, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college, are BIPOC, are low-income, and/or are immigrants or the children of immigrants. I teach introductory first-year seminars on topics such as "Food & Food Justice" and "The Wisdom of Running" (philosophy and running – and, yes, we run as part of class); core courses in American studies which serve as general education courses focussing on diversity and power dynamics and world cultures, and electives that draw both majors and students from across the university, such as "Utopias: Literary and Historical," "The Construction of Community," "Landscapes in Art and Literature," "The Global US," and "Immigrant Literatures and Histories." I also teach the interdisciplinary research methods and theory course for majors in our interdisciplinary-studies major (which American studies falls under) and senior capstone seminars in which students complete original interdisciplinary scholarship. Periodically I teach graduate seminars in American studies, history and English. Frequently, I have team-taught or taught linked courses and I am thrilled to report that in spring–summer of 2022 I completed year three (after COVID interruptions) of a study–travel course that explores and compares urban history, culture, and transformation in our city (Salem) and the city of Thessaloniki, Greece, in conjunction with my colleagues there. Anyone entering one of my classrooms will find students in small groups, or drafting shared responses in an electronic doc, or moving around the room reading comments posted on the board by classmates, or debating furiously, or trying to draw a set of objects arranged in front of them. And often we aren't in the *classroom* at all, but rather on the streets of Salem learning from residents or exploring examples of palimpsest, in the archives struggling to make sense of historic objects, discussing the silences and biases of archives, and learning how to create new knowledge.

Nicole King (NK): I recently became an Associate Professor of American Literature in the Faculty of English, University of Oxford, and a Fellow in English at Exeter College. I teach nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century literatures in English, and offer MA and undergraduate options in my specialisms which include twentieth-, and twenty-first-century African American and Caribbean literature. Prior to this appointment I was a lecturer in the English and Creative Writing

Department at Goldsmiths, University of London, where I taught a similar range of modules in addition to black British literature. I research and publish in all of these areas. I started teaching undergraduates when I was completing my PhD at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. I then went on to my first full-time post in the English Department at the University of Maryland. I was hired at Maryland to teach specialist African American literature and Anglophone Caribbean literature modules (or "courses") as well as more general introductory ("survey") courses to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Looking back, one of the distinguishing aspects of Maryland was the "American studies-ness" of the environment and the varied, extensive research and teaching devoted to issues of race, gender, and creativity. Indeed, I joined an established cohort of American literature and folklore specialists (including Robert Levine, Martha Nell Smith, Marilee Lindemann, Vincent Caretta, and Barry Pearson), amongst whom there were no less than four senior black women: Mary Helen Washington, Gladys Marie Fry, Carla Peterson, and Shirley Wilson Logan. Soon after my arrival, the department hired two additional women of colour, Kandice Chuh and Merle Collins, and their respective specialisms in Asian American literature and theory and Caribbean literature and creative writing made it more appropriate to consider our collective departmental work not just in an American studies frame but also as encompassing literatures of the Americas. Given my colleagues' scholarship and research in rhetoric, material culture, the Caribbean, autobiography, history, transnationalism, music, publishing history, poetry, race, class, and gender, it is obvious that although my title was "assistant professor of English literature" I was forged in a distinctively American studies mould.

My next academic home, the Department of Literature at the University of California, San Diego, cemented and further developed my teaching and research on the transnational intersections of black identities, modernity, and narrative. The shift from being in an English department to being in a department of literature initially seemed subtle but it turned out to be monumental and invigorating. Further developments in my approaches to texts and teaching occurred when I moved to the UK and began focussing more explicitly on pedagogy as a member of the English Subject Centre, and then the Higher Education Academy. When I resumed full-time teaching and research at the University of Reading and then at Goldsmiths, I did so with renewed energy and expertise. I'll be exploring new types of classrooms and modes of teaching at Oxford.

Rebecca Stone (RS): I am an Associate Professor and the Director of Student Experience for the Faculty of Arts at the University of Warwick. After completing my undergraduate degree in American Studies at the University of Hull I went on to complete a master's and a PhD, both in American studies, at the University of Birmingham. My research is centred on the interaction between higher education and government, focussing specifically on the impact that national crises have on the relationship between universities and the state. I explore whether governmental intervention in higher education can ever be a positive good for tertiary education, especially in light of the separation between the federal government and the education system in the USA. In 2015 I took up a role teaching US history at Warwick, focussing on twentieth-century history. I subsequently also began researching pedagogies focussed on student experience and engagement in higher education. In this field I am

particularly interested in both the ways in which concerns over "employability" alter how we teach, and how digital pedagogies and learning tools impact, and will impact, the classroom. To this end I recently designed and built a digital pedagogy library which is hosted by the University of Warwick. This platform enables faculty members to design and share their own digital pedagogies, supporting my passion for community-based learning.

Jon Ward (JW): My full title, which is a rather an unwieldy one, is "Lecturer in Culture, Media & Creative Industries (Race and Diversity Studies)" at King's College London. After completing my BA in American Studies at UEA and my MA in Gender, Sexuality & Culture at the University of Manchester, I completed my PhD in American studies back at UEA in 2016. I began teaching in my second year of the PhD, teaching American studies undergraduates across various courses – some of which I had taken myself as an undergraduate. After finishing my PhD, I continued to work at UEA teaching undergraduate American studies modules and also teaching postgraduates in the Interdisciplinary Institute of the Humanities; this hourly paid teaching was also combined with various other teaching jobs: University of Hertfordshire (#Black Lives Matter and US Culture); University of Westminster (Gender and Politics); and Oxford Brookes University (Culture, Gender & Sexuality). I then landed at King's, where I started a two-year fixed-term position as a lecturer in American Literature in the English Department, before landing the holy grail of a permanent position as a lecturer in the Culture, Media & Creative Industries Department in 2021. Currently, as a new member of staff in a rapidly expanding department (we have just finished the second year of a new BA programme), my teaching duties are rather in flux but generally I teach Cultural Studies modules across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In my teaching and research, I am interested in representations of the body in literary and visual culture, particularly attending to race, gender, and sexuality; and thinking about the ways in which cultural representations can work as forms of containment, discipline, liberation, and resistance.

My scholarly career looks rather scattered, which is in part a reflection of the reality of trying to find secure employment in UK academia, but I have been lucky enough to centre teaching American studies in all of these roles – sometimes more covertly than others! I am particularly passionate about making the spaces in which I teach as inclusive as possible and working to empower students both as individuals and as part of a larger collective community within these spaces and beyond. I think this has been fairly successful – at both UEA and King's I have been nominated several times by students for teaching awards (and have been lucky enough to win a couple of times!), and my nominations frequently mention that my students have felt cared for, encouraged, and included. I feel that there is often an artificial binary made between learning and teaching – where we teach and students learn, and I think that one of the many things I love about my job is that the reality is much more dynamic and messy than this: as well as teaching my students, we learn together, and they often teach me new ways of thinking! I am also interested not only in *what* we learn, but *how* we learn, and the conditions under which learning takes place (or not) – this is an ongoing conversation that I have with my students and, given the changing realities of higher education in the UK, where precarity and inequalities are becoming ever more obvious, my students are only becoming increasingly interested in these dynamics.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Question 2: A "signature pedagogy," according to Shulman, has surface, deep, and implicit structures. He argues that the "concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning" are underpinned by "a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge" and "a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions" (these are also known as the "hidden curriculum").[2] What are the assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and/or values that underpin your pedagogies?

GT: This is particularly interesting for me because it is not only about potential signature pedagogies in American studies, but also about characteristic instructional methods for American studies in the UK – in my current case, transnational US history. It is important that we think about some signature pedagogies of American studies in the history of the field, right? My chosen pedagogy here is one Gene Wise articulated in the 1970s, called "dense facts." Wise said that dense facts are "those facts which are potentially most packed with meanings, which promise to reveal things beyond their manifest surface." For Wise, such "facts … both reveal deeper meanings inside themselves, and point outward to other facts, other ideas, other meanings." For Wise, this was an approach to scholarship – for me, it is an approach to teaching.[3] So what I am looking for is a person, an event, a phenomenon, or an object in a specific place in time, which I hope to use in teaching to facilitate my students' learning about its wider meanings. For example, I use the story of Hungarian revolutionary politician Louis Kossuth, who toured the United States in 1851–52, as a canvas onto which various groups of Americans projected their political agendas. Americans were quite taken with Kossuth's personality, and being a good orator he aimed to use his tour of the United States to raise American support (both popular and political in the US government) for a renewed push for Hungarian independence. His greatest public challenge was to somehow navigate the issue of slavery, which had divided the United States, and was becoming a political sinkhole. In my second-year US history survey module, I give my students a scenario in which they are assigned to specific groups of Americans (from pro-slavery southern politicians to radical abolitionists), who all have to try to persuade Kossuth to say and do what they want regarding slavery: an exercise that helps my students learn more about the landscape of a US politics and society divided over slavery. Another example: in my "American Indian History & Policy" module, I use the Ghost Dance shirt replica, on display in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Gallery. The shirt was said to have been taken from the body of a Lakota ghost dancer after the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, and it got to Glasgow with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, which toured the city in 1891–92. The show's interpreter gave the shirt to Kelvingrove Gallery, and the museum exhibited the item for a century. In the late 1990s, the Lakota families descended from the massacre victims asked the museum to return the shirt to them in South Dakota. The gallery first refused, but after much deliberation, at a hearing before Glasgow City Council, the museum announced that it would repatriate the

[2] Shulman, 54–55.

[3] Gene Wise, "Some Elementary Axioms for an American Culture Studies," *Prospects*, 4 (1979), 517–47, 529.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

item. As a gesture of goodwill, one of the Lakota elders made and sent a replica shirt to the museum, which it has been exhibiting ever since. This "dense fact" educates students not only about the history of the Ghost Dance, but about questions of repatriation, reappropriation, and the memory politics of the romanticization of the colonization of the West in popular culture.

LP: What Liz has written above about how university classrooms are spaces in which we can work to change the world really resonates with me. My fundamental belief about pedagogy is that it is not merely about teaching students "about" American history and culture – the what happened and why of it all – but rather giving them both the tools – practical skills like communication, developing arguments, analysing sources – and the critical imagination to see and create a better future. In other words, I want to empower them to have the vision and the ability to change the world, by introducing them to ideas, to concepts, and to ways of thinking that they might not otherwise encounter. Those are my lofty values, anyway! In my classes, students will meet Stuart Hall, bell hooks, W. E. B. Du Bois, Saidiya Hartman, Ibram X. Kendi, Ava DuVernay, and a host of other scholars (often women and people of colour) whose work has influenced my thinking and who I hope will influence the thinking of my students.

In terms of my assumptions, I think I often presume that students choose my courses and come to my classes with the same vision as I do: that they are excited to interrogate the sources and to discover new ways of being in the world. Sometimes this is the case, and that's when teaching is an absolute pleasure. But with some reflection I am aware that, actually, many of my students choose my modules because they are vaguely interested in "America," they "did it at A level," or they've heard on the grapevine that my classes are "easier" than those of my colleagues and they want to get a first. (My students do get high marks, on average – but I maintain that my commitment to pedagogy and student support has something to do with that.) I used to have the approach, adapted from the Black Women's Club Movement, of "lifting as we climb" – that I'd bring all students to activist scholarship through hard work combined with determination and enthusiasm. That was an incorrect assumption, as it turned out: students were less concerned about being empowered, or given the space to develop their ideas, than they were about how to get the "right" answer and therefore high marks in their essays and exams. So now I try to bring an attitude of meeting the students where they are. I still introduce them to Hall, hooks, Du Bois, et al., but I also ask them what they want to get out of the module, what topics are important to them, and I try to help them to navigate their own paths through the assessment. I suppose what I'm saying is that I'm still committed to inclusivity and empowerment as the core values of my pedagogy, but how these work in practice develops and shifts depending on the needs, assumptions, and values of the students I teach.

HE: I think that the assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and/or values that underpin my pedagogy can probably be summed up by Jane Tompkins's extremely rich concept of the "cultural work" performed by literary texts.[4] While Tompkins's original

[4] Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790–1860* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

formulation of the concept was rooted in her argument that American novels of the long nineteenth century were less concerned with "timeless and universal ideals" than with providing "society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions," my teaching of American literature in an American studies department is founded on the broader idea that literary texts perform work upon their readers. This concept invariably makes an appearance in the first few weeks of any module I teach and is, I suppose, a kind of "threshold concept" (to use Meyer and Land's useful term) on which I then build to help students to consider the imbrication of form and content in literary texts.[5] It can also provide a clear pathway towards addressing the "so what?" question that is too often left implicit when we ask students to analyse texts. Simply asking students what cultural work a text performs, and, just as importantly, *how* it performs it, is a very effective way of modelling how to formulate a robust thesis statement that can then be methodically supported by textual and contextual evidence.

In terms of the "belief" lying behind my own deployment of this framework, it is the belief that literature shapes readers into social subjects and that novels, poems, and plays make arguments about the worlds that produced them. Moreover, such texts enter into conversation, and routinely argue, with each other. The re-visioning and revisiting of particular tropes and genres is thus fundamental to the way I design modules as I think this is crucial to the kind of research-oriented teaching I aspire to. On this pedagogical model, students consider *how we come to know what we know* – in terms of understanding not simply the relationship of research to knowledge, but also how our perceptions of the world (of Others, human and nonhuman, of landscapes, of objects, of institutions) have been shaped by the way writers have perceived and imagined their worlds.

ED-O: Although I do hold a PhD in American studies, my own graduate training was less about theories and approaches that define this interdisciplinary field than about the objects of study and often discrete disciplinary approaches. That said, my deep, long-standing belief in the interconnectedness of epistemologies, lived experiences, and a dizzying array of cultural projects and productions had arrived at grad school with me and fueled the teaching I began doing in my second year. From that point on, my pedagogy has assumed a link between knowing and doing. Between interrogating the "fixed" and "known" in the past and questioning heterodoxy in the present. Between using theoretical frameworks to see, seek and unpack and trusting lived experiences as important sources of wisdom and theorizing. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress* are still central for me decades after I first encountered them.[6] In addition, I follow the American studies tradition rooted in Du Bois's central unwillingness to limit his work, his life, or his professional

[5] Ibid., 200; J. H. F. Meyer and R. Land, "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising," in *Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses*, ETL project, Occasional Report 4, May 2003, at www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf (accessed 24 Aug. 2022).

[6] Paulo Freire and Myra Bergman Ramos, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

roles to one so-called "discipline."[7] Creating new knowledge about the "American" consciousness and "American" history, teaching that, and making that knowledge active in the here-and-now was his life's work and he was my first guide to all of this. Two more recent exemplars of this approach within American studies broadly conceived are Gloria Anzaldúa, Chicana, queer, borderlands theorist, poet, activist, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, geographer, framer of critical prison studies, and prison abolitionist. Their lives and work have modeled for me what is possible.

Additionally, my training in sociology, visual culture, and material culture, as well as more literature and history, means that I focus much of my teaching on helping students learn to master a range of analytical tools to interrogate cultural products from all aspects of daily life, past and present. A sample list would range from eighteenth-century mahogany furniture (the physical embodiment of commerce that fueled the transatlantic slave trade and lined early American coffers), to mid-twentieth-century hot combs (mass-produced objects designed to straighten the hair of black men and women), to the photography of Jacob Riis (simultaneously illuminating poverty/immigrant struggles and granting middle-class viewers unfettered access to those they could easily label as "other"), to the iconography of Taco Bell restaurant architecture … my list goes on. I want students to begin to realize that the take-away coffee cup they are carrying or the map of "the world" that was hanging in their elementary school classroom are both reflective of and work to shape "American culture."

The beliefs that undergird my approach actually seem to resonate more and more with students as time has passed. Early in my career, I found myself facing some of the challenges that Lydia mentions here – students in American studies or gender studies courses wanting to earn a high grade or revisit content they were comfortable with, or to take a course that they thought would be about American exceptionalism. I found myself needing to meet them where they were. I also found myself backing off of the action-oriented approach that I felt so deeply about. But I did not step away from it entirely; I sought in all classes to find ways to ask them to apply our class learning to contemporary issues, debates, realities that were of import to them. And this approach worked. More recently, say in the last ten years or so, I have found my students to be hungry for the relevance of classroom work and they are beginning to flock to American studies courses because the word is out that we engage centrally with the present even as we explore the past.

RS: Thinking about the assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and/or values that underpin my pedagogy, I immediately return to my formative training in American studies. I studied a wide range of disciplines as part of my undergraduate degree, and naturally I did not study them all with one person, or even within one (American studies) department, and was required to learn quickly that different people/disciplines did not think about or utilize information in the same ways or for the same reasons. As researchers in American studies we are naturally exposed to different ways of working as our research community does not share a single methodology or praxis. As such the fundamental value that underpins my pedagogy is that American

[7] For a brief, substantive overview of Du Bois see Thomas C. Holt, "Du Bois, W. E. B.", in Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, eds., *African American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), at https://hutchinscenter.fas.harvard.edu/web-dubois (accessed 2 Aug. 2022).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

studies "takes a village." Our discipline is, by definition, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, and requires a diversity of approaches, opinions, and skills.

I explore this concept in my pedagogy in three distinct ways. First, I endeavour to offer my students a multidisciplinary learning experience in my classroom, and where possible, an interdisciplinary one. I teach history, but my students engage with politics, literature, film, and more, exploring both sources and analysis from these disciplines. Second, I prioritize group work in seminars, drawing students out of their comfort zone and singular worldview. Finally, where possible I embed diverse assessments into modules which encourage students to define their own methodologies and audience, offering a more authentic approach to learning. In this way students begin to understand that information is not static, interpretations are not "obvious," and our personal experiences impact our understanding. Students are thus empowered to move beyond the boundaries of their own worldview, to consider the validity of alternative perspectives and to collaborate and to develop as part of a wider learning community.

American studies offers itself naturally to this liberal approach to education, enabling students to become skilled communicators who can understand diverse experiences and present information in different ways and for different audiences, and expert problem solvers who are able to look at issues and ideas from a range of perspectives and draw these varying ideas together into a coherent narrative. This praxis also enables me to build a more inclusive classroom environment and to support students in understanding the value of their learning.

NK: This is a tough question but I can begin by talking about some of my values: making space for all voices in the teaching space, modelling how to be a good listener and how to ask questions when something isn't clear, and using classes and assigned readings to showcase different approaches to texts and ideas. These are clearly variations on a theme and they derive from experiences at various stages of my life as a student and as a teacher. I have memories of being lost or confused in seminars and lectures at each stage of my education, so I do try to keep that at the forefront of my mind with my own students. I encourage students to stop me if I am not clear or if an idea I am discussing as if it were quite clear isn't yet clear to them. As you might imagine, students rarely take me up on this in a lecture. In seminars, generally speaking, the more confident students and/or those further along in their studies are more able to speak up when they do not understand something. So you learn to read the room, and be grateful to those question askers. Finding ways to nurture those other students' confidence is essential, however. A method that usually works for me is small-group work, as students can be more comfortable expressing partial understanding to one another than to me, and that's a good starting point. (If students are inclined to come to office hours that too can be a good space to review ideas or concepts.) In seminars I have developed (and shamelessly borrowed from other colleagues) various methods for taking the proverbial pulse of the class. These include using Post-it notes which prompt student questions such as "I'd like you to go over …" or "I feel/don't yet feel confident in my knowledge of X key concept" or "Here are three questions I have about the text." This final prompt is especially good at the start of a class as it immediately delivers a snapshot of the students in the room, their shared or similar queries, and may even offer, with a little rejigging, a seminar plan that is better than the one you walked in with!

My assumptions and beliefs in terms of teaching American literature/American studies are not so hidden (and I talk about them in my other responses). Students in my literature classes get healthy servings of historical and cultural contexts and

learn to analyse and critically engage with these contexts as part of their study of the literature at hand. Students don't automatically know how to hold these varied analytical frameworks and varied types of information in perfect (or imperfect) balance when they start working with me and I do not provide them with a formula. However, it *is* implicit in each class session, and although they may not see it until I point it out, each week students perfect their juggling and balancing skills a bit more. As Rebecca says above, American studies implicitly and explicitly lends itself to a "liberal approach" to learning – I try to capitalize on that in my teaching.

JW: When I initially started teaching, I definitely held many assumptions that centred my own experience in several ways. Before starting my undergraduate degree in American studies, I had always been fascinated by the US, and particularly was an avid consumer of American popular culture. This fascination was only exacerbated by the fact that I had never been to the US as this was completely beyond my family's economic reach, and in fact my choice to do American studies at UEA was largely swayed because of the compulsory third year studying in the US – this was the only way I thought I would ever be able to afford to go to America. Aside from this intellectual/experiential relationship with the US, as an undergraduate student I also struggled with some of the structures of university. For example, as someone who finds it much easier to process information if I read it rather than listening to it, and also who prefers to discuss rather than being talked at, I didn't understand the point of lectures; one of the things that I was also excited about experiencing more at university than school was a lack of definitive answers: I wanted to spend more time asking questions than producing answers. When I started teaching it was on the same undergraduate programme that I had studied (many years earlier), and this encouraged me to think that there would be little difference between my own experience and that of my students. As Lydia mentioned earlier, I was also struck by how many of my students are motivated by finding the "right" answers in order to secure the highest grades, and value the lecture as one of the most desirable forms of teaching. While I certainly think this is amplified by the marketization of higher education in the UK, I also endeavour to avoid presuming that my students think about education in the same ways that I do, and I especially try not to fall into the trap of thinking of them as a monolithic group.

When I think of my teaching now, one of the things that fundamentally underpins it is viewing teaching and learning as a space and process of *possibility*: the various possibilities that the students bring into the room, as well as the possibilities that lie beyond the classroom. I am interested in thinking critically about what can be achieved both within the structures of the university and outside them – there is no point in considering the classroom as though it exists in a vacuum. As such, this is often where my interests converge with the students': although we might be thinking about these broad questions in some starkly different ways, this is a way in for us to think collectively and critically about what the students believe is possible in my classroom, as well as thinking about what we want to achieve in this space. I am inspired by bell hooks in my pedagogical practice, and I particularly like the idea that "learning is a place where paradise can be created" – for me the classroom offers an exciting space of possible radical resistance, creation, and community.[8] In reflecting on how I approach

[8] hooks, 207.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

teaching, I ask myself the question of what my students will take away from my classes now, and in twenty years from now when the granular details of what we have covered have long evaporated: as such I focus much more on how we approach knowledge and engagement, rather than focussing more on the content – i.e. *how* and *why* we think about particular ideas or texts, rather than just *what* we think. I encourage my students to view the classroom as a space for thinking carefully, thinking critically, and thinking vulnerably.

Question 3: Many of us who teach American studies are not employed in American studies departments, but rather are based in history, English literature, politics, media studies, and so on. What, if anything, is "American studies" about your approach to learning and teaching?

GT: Indeed, since I was originally trained in American Studies – although my training also involved exposure to several "traditional" disciplines, such as anthropology, history and art history – I am keenly aware of the value and limits of an American studies pedagogy. During my job search, at least one UK university department told me that they would need to "make sure" that I could teach history. Since I am a rule follower, in my current position as a historian I spent the first several years paying careful attention to teaching skills specific to the subject of history to my students (primary-source interpretation, correction for likely biases in methodology, the politics of scholarly publications, etc.).

Since American studies has had a good number of "turns," and it is interdisciplinary to begin with, if there is anything in pedagogies that is my American studies approach, it is a focus on the politics (power relations) of my subject matter, and perhaps an emphasis on critical thinking that links some of our subject matter to the present. I find myself trying to highlight how the past informs the struggles of the present – that, to use *Time Travels* radio presenter Susan Morrison's slogan, US "history is never just the past."[9] I think it is up to us teachers and students to "refract" our subject matter in the past into rays that illuminate our present as well. For example, this past week when I was discussing the 1999 repatriation of the Ghost Dance shirt from the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum of Glasgow to the Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge Lakota, the topic of caring for human remains and funerary objects took my mind to the bodies of the dead in Ukraine – both those Ukrainians massacred in Bucha, and those dead bodies of Russian soldiers whom Ukrainians are caring for until their families can retrieve them. A month ago, in my "Transnational Histories of the 20th Century United States" class, I was asking my students what themes in the module the war in Ukraine linked to. They successfully identified the history of transatlantic relations, but I also wanted them not only to identify war, the military, and security as a theme, but specifically to see that it was not only the refugee exodus from Ukraine, but also the thousands of volunteers going to fight there from around the world who were making this a transnational conflict to some degree. More recently, the graffiti "Wolverines" on the side of a burned-out

[9] *Time Travels*, BBC Radio Scotland, at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b094d4hl (accessed 8 Sept. 2022).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Russian tank in the middle of Ukraine reconnected this war with uniquely Reagan-era American visions of invasion and resistance.

As an American studies approach, I also used to advocate for organizing and activism amongst my students, but I have stopped this since I left the United States, because an American-style framing of the issues may mislead as much as help. Perhaps as my patience runs out with British imperialism, misogyny, racism, and ruthless capitalist exploitation of the workers while farming out social services to charities, I may return to urging my students to protest, occupy, and take direct action for their own future.

LP: I've had a really interesting, and at times challenging, relationship with this question. I was originally trained as a historian – both at undergraduate and postgraduate level – and "American studies" wasn't something I consciously engaged with until I was employed at a university where I was situated specifically within the American studies subject area. It became increasingly clear to me over the years I worked at that institution that my colleagues in history (although we were in the same department, and although I taught modules that were actually very traditionally historical) did not see me as a "historian" and, much like Gyorgy's experience above, questioned my ability to teach history. At first I found this rather offensive, but then I decided simply to embrace my identity as a scholar of American studies, and this was probably the best decision I ever made! Of course, as the fates would have it, I'm now back in a history department (the same one that trained me, so they can't really accuse me of not being a "proper" historian …), and I have to bring in my American studies approach with a bit more stealth.

For me, what it means to teach US history through American studies is, much like others have said above, to centre my pedagogy in the present. As a precocious PhD student I recall turning my nose up at "presentism" in history, but now I can't imagine trying to study the past without asking my students to engage with what it means for us today, or without today's central concerns – in my case, often framed around racism and the continual violence of white supremacy – foremost in our minds. We often do this by bringing popular culture into the classroom: and American studies has reminded me that this is a legitimate mode of inquiry, with its own methodologies and approaches (though I do find myself increasingly distant from the culture my students discuss).

My approach is also grounded in the history of American studies in Britain: that idea of the relationship ("special" or otherwise) between what happens in the United States and what is happening in the UK. My students demand that we don't see histories of race, protest movements, or racism through a US-centric lens, as my students of colour point out that racism – and a history of antiracist activism – does not only exist across the Atlantic.[10] So I encourage them to think like activists, but to think about what that means in a British context. I'm learning much more about British history every year, and in some ways I think that the way American

[10] For an excellent discussion of the impact of a US-centric approach to understanding histories of race and racism in Britain see Megan Hunt, Benjamin Houston, Brian Ward, and Nick Megoran, "'He Was Shot because America Will Not Give Up on Racism': Martin Luther King Jr. and the African American Civil Rights Movement in British Schools," *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 2 (2021), 387–417.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

studies forces us to challenge the boundaries of "America" is at the heart of the discipline.

HE: I do feel genuinely lucky to be in an American studies department within a wider school that covers art history and film and media studies as well. In some ways we get the best of several possible worlds in that our students have the chance to take a deep dive into American cultural texts through a robust historical lens, while at the same time top-down university "encouragement" to be efficient in sharing modules within the school actually means that our students have what is arguably more seamless access to modules in art history, media and film studies. The flip side of this is, however, that certain topics get ring-fenced as the province of other schools: we teach American, not English, literature (or even literatures in English!) and this can make some of our modules – especially the introductory survey courses – seem a little siloed at times. Recently we've been able to do more collaborative and team-based teaching and I've been excited to take on a shared module in "Transatlantic Literatures" that attracts students from American studies as well as literature. Reading both Gyorgy and Lydia's responses above, it strikes me that that module offers a bit of an object lesson in the difference between American studies pedagogy and more traditionally discipline-based teaching.

I'd definitely agree that starting from the present is one way we establish an American studies approach at my institution. Indeed, it structures our first semester "Intro to American Studies" module and speaks to my own commitment to "engaged pedagogy," as laid out in bell hooks's foundational formulation of this kind of teaching practice: the bringing together of education and lived reality. However, as Lydia also notes, there is a difference between engaged, relevant pedagogy and "presentism," and so this mode of teaching also goes hand in hand with thoughtful historicization of our content. Where this can become tricky in teaching across courses rooted in related but separate disciplines is the question: what aspects of this history do we emphasize? "Transatlantic Literatures" is team-taught by colleagues in American Studies and Literature. One of the first texts we engage is Aphra Behn's 1688 novel *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave*.[11] This text is generally recognized as an early iteration of the trope of the "noble savage" and offers a seemingly sympathetic portrayal of an African prince tricked into enslavement by unscrupulous white traffickers who leads a justified rebellion against his enslavers. However, the colleague from Literature who gave the lecture that week was productively critical of the idea that this text might be thought of as "abolitionist," and indeed carefully historicized it in relation to Behn's conservative politics and Royalist sympathies, noting that there is much overlap between her rendering of Oroonoko and popular representations of King James II, who was also known as Caesar and the "black" Stuart. My task, then, was to acknowledge the importance of this context but equally to hold space to engage my Americanist students' interests in the long and transnational history of black freedom struggles, while at the same time teaching formal analysis of a literary text. Luckily, I was aided in this juggling act by Ramesh Mallipeddi's excellent article "Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Sympathy in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," which highlights the language of spectacle in the novel.[12] Via Mallipeddi's accounts

[11] Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Writings* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
[12] Ramesh Mallipeddi, "Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Sympathy in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 45, 4 (2012), 475–96.

of the conventions of Restoration drama, of royal pomp and pageantry, we were able to trace how such literary renderings of othered and exoticized bodies show us very clearly how concepts such as "race" are discursively constructed and maintained. In this way, the students on the module are able to be literary historians of the present (or, as I think this forum would like to call it: engaged practitioners of American studies).

RS: I think my experience as an Americanist is in direct opposition to Lydia's. Through undergraduate, master's and PhD, I have studied as an Americanist in American studies departments. I have always written "history" but did not consider myself to be a historian until I joined a history department in 2015. I questioned my own ability to teach US history without bringing American studies into the equation and have had my ability to teach history questioned. I have feared becoming "bored" by the confines of a single discipline (although have yet to experience the reality of this). I have learned to accept this duality, embrace it, and understand its benefits. For me, it enables me to bring into the classroom an interdisciplinary experience which is too often absent from historical instruction. We understand an event or period in consideration with the culture that surrounds it, the political temperament of the time, the geography of the space, the economy. Moreover, to utilize only one methodology or approach in our examination or understanding is to limit our possibilities and interpretations. American studies is a diverse discipline that enables us to study a space in its entirety, to learn from each other, and to understand new connections in turn.

I had not considered the benefit of "presentism" in this space, but as I write this I realize that this approach underpins my pedagogy – to consider the past without considering the present is to suggest that the issues we study exist wholly in the past: that problems are solved; that historical actors were negligent, ignorant, or evil; that such things could never, would never, happen now. I encourage my students to think of history as fluid and changeable, as both rooted in time and space and similarly free of it. Taking an American studies approach to historical study makes this consideration much easier to convey; our sources for the present are different to those that students may be used to and thus the methodologies involved are necessarily different. Being able to recognize and switch between these methodologies enables students to build a robust understanding of the past and present in relation to one another, and (hopefully) to begin to see patterns and solutions that enable them to impact their world and their own histories simultaneously as they write the histories of others.

ED-O: Oh my, this question! I've taught in departments of history, English/literature, history and literature, gender studies, American studies, and now in a department of interdisciplinary studies for over a decade. In each of these settings I have often felt obliged to prove that I can be whatever that discipline needs. I often joke that "I'm not (fill in the blank) but I play one in the classroom and in publications." While I've taught and mentored graduate students in both history and English and worked as a public historian, I sometimes feel at the margins of everything; there has long been scepticism of my skills and knowledge from more "standard" departments over the years. I've been excluded from access to academic positions because I did not have a "history" or other more traditional degree. That said, it is ironic that more often these days here in the US I find that I am challenged by some in more established fields/departments who assert that they too are doing "American studies," especially as those fields begin to embrace cultural studies more consistently.

Having taught both in the US and in Europe (and in three different European countries), I am well aware of the limits that some national curricula/outcomes, accrediting bodies, and university politics place on both content and pedagogy in courses labelled "American studies." In the US in history departments I've often had to limit my cultural studies framing; in English departments, literary theory has been front and centre and literary texts (more so than other texts) predominate.

These limitations have persisted too in my European classrooms. However, in a number of cases and ways, the English or English studies departments I have taught for in Europe (the landing place, it seems, for visiting professors of American studies) have been willing to accept my more multidisciplinary approach as long as my syllabi align with departmental requirements. No matter where I have taught (Greece, Luxembourg, Germany, the United States), perhaps what my students would say marks my "American studies approach" to all my courses is two things.

First, I intentionally take an interdisciplinary – not just multidisciplinary or additive – approach to our learning. I work to help students master a range of methodologies and disciplinary skills and then synthesize and integrate the same in addition to integrating diverse content that often would be taught in a number of different departments (statistical data sets alongside novels or poetry alongside diary entries or historical photographs). We are interested in content, form, and the conventions of the various "texts" we are integrating.

Second, I regularly integrate experimental practices in courses, from participating in community-based work with NGOs to consider how theoretical understandings of place making and liberty hold up in practice (as discussed in my recent chapter),[13] to cooking and eating in classrooms in Germany and the US. I also have worked very hard to develop assessments that require students to demonstrate required "disciplinary" outcomes (from research skills, to citation styles, to producing certain amounts of written communication, and analysis of cultural products) without resorting to the standard term paper or exam. Examples of this in both the US and Europe include the production of digital exhibits, class websites, blogs, photo-essays about "Western" iconography in Europe, and student-produced zines that are now part of a public library collection.

NK: I am one of those people who has never held an American studies post. Instead, I have worked in faculties, schools, or departments of English or of literature. Such is the popularity of American literature, however, that I have never been the only American literature person in any of my academic positions, and that, in turn, has facilitated more of a "studies" approach, an interdisciplinary approach, especially when I've been teaching collaboratively. For instance, at Goldsmiths, Caroline Blinder is a specialist in visual cultures and American literature, whilst Richard Crownshaw works on American literature and the environmental humanities, and Padraig Kirwan is an interdisciplinary specialist in US and Canadian Indigenous literatures and cultures; together we taught an MA core module that drew on our varied expertise even as it provided an introduction to American literature and culture dating back to the

[13] Kristin Anderson, Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Jake Lefker, and Rosario Ubiera-Minaya, "Ruined for Life: Service-Learning & Taking American Studies Scholarship Seriously in an American Studies Intro Course," in Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Joseph Entin, and Rebecca Hill, eds., *Teaching American Studies: The State of the Classroom as State of the Field* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2021), 262–87.

American Renaissance. Our different specialisms meant that many different types of texts and "ways of seeing" and doing literary and cultural analyses were placed before our students and each other. All very exciting and sometimes daunting! In this regard it's important to point out the capaciousness of many departments of English and literature – we can (and do) teach and move betwixt and between cultural studies, New Historicism, high theory and so on.

I think it is also important to point out that African American literature is itself shaped by and in conversation with African American studies. Indeed, African American literature has always been multi- and interdisciplinary (think of African American slave narratives in this regard), and consequently interdisciplinarity is always somewhere in the foreground or background of my teaching spaces. Some of my perennial historical and cultural reference points, particularly in modules that are introductory in nature, are the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments to the US Constitution, the 1896 *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* Supreme Court decision and the 1954 *Brown* v. *Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court decision. These legal narratives that shaped the US live in the bones and sinews of the various texts I teach.

JW: My sense of an American studies approach to learning and teaching is very much informed by the specific context of studying a nation from an explicit point of "outsiderness": my first experience of American studies was encountering it in a UK university, and I continue to think about the value of studying a subject from a position where the extent of how "knowable" your subject can be is foregrounded. This amplifies questions of how we might understand and experience the US that I discuss with my students – what knowledge of America arises from being a US resident (whether as a citizen, undocumented, or an immigrant)? From having spent time there (whether as resident or visitor)? From consuming American culture? This opens up space for us to think about different ways of knowing, as well as different knowledges that everyone in class has of the US, which contributes to a sense of inclusiveness as there are no forms of knowledge that are inherently superior to any others, but we also discuss which of these forms of knowledge might be constructed as such.

From starting as an undergraduate doing an American studies degree right up to the present, I have found myself having to explain what American studies is, whether because people haven't heard of the subject, or they doubt the legitimacy of it: although this is at times annoying, I actually think this is a good position to be in – having to constantly think about how others might view your subject and how you can demonstrate its usefulness means that there is a constant reflexiveness to my engagement with American studies. In my responses to such questions, I often lean heavily on the importance of interdisciplinarity – this is something that I think is really fundamental to American studies learning and teaching.

Question 4: As we have noted, the field of American studies research is diverse, multifaceted, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and decentred. Do we share (any) common pedagogies?

LP: When I asked this question at the session at the Digital BAAS conference in 2021, one of the gut responses from a participant was "No!" and I have been thinking about this ever since. My gut reaction is "yes," but I struggle to pin down why. I recall a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

colleague who is a literary scholar asking me what on earth I meant by "primary" and "secondary" sources some years ago, because to her everything is a "text" – and I realized that we were speaking fundamentally different languages even though our topics were quite similar. But that said, while the mechanics of our multiple disciplines are sometimes quite different, what we share is an approach to learning that seeks to move beyond knowledge for its own sake, and which really focusses on students as learners and creators of knowledge. I think we forget sometimes how radical this actually is! While other disciplines are only now beginning to move away from the "sage on the stage" approach, American studies has often been at the forefront of innovation because (as everyone notes above), it has been driven by questions about politics and power. Despite the decentred and multifaceted nature of our discipline, our central concerns with scholarship as an agent of change bring a sense of purpose to our pedagogy. At its most basic level, how can we teach about power and protest – two of the key themes of American history and culture – without thinking about the classroom as a site in which both power and protest occur? At another session of the Teaching American Studies Network in 2022, we created a word cloud that asked participants to convey their "teaching philosophies." Words like "inclusive," "interactive," "collaborative," "meaningful," and "curiosity" all featured. I think these perfectly frame what I understand as the common pedagogies of American studies: but perhaps these are also the common pedagogies of the humanities more generally. So I'm still pondering this one.

GT: This is a brilliant question, because it is making us at one and the same time think about our individual differences and how we still belong together as Americanists in pedagogy! It occurs to me that one division that used to be relevant to this in the decades of the Cold War was approaches to teaching and learning about the United States of America studies. I wonder whether starting, with the 1960s, Americanists within the United States often taught American studies as "critical patriots" – one of my senior PhD student colleagues, Russell Peterson, used this concept and Caroline Kennedy's 2003 *A Patriot's Handbook* anthology when I taught with him at the University of Iowa between 2007 and 2010.[14] This was a spectrum of critical posture that nevertheless often reinforced the supremacy of the nation and love of country in the liberal, progressive, and multicultural tradition. Yet at its heart was still a recognition of conflict between social groups. Further away geographically but at times quite exposed to and dependent on the US government's programmes of American studies as cultural diplomacy developed a more affirming and overall celebratory kind of pedagogy, which fundamentally positioned itself in an alliance with the United States, including its dominant ethos, values, and culture. Western European academics who themselves benefited from participating in Cold War American studies programmes tended to become explainers/interpreters of the United States. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, despite the official propaganda against the US, academics were carefully interested in its study, if quite limited in their opportunities for it. All of these camps changed over the decades – and several of them merged. A number of academics established the International American Studies Association in the post-9/11 period, partly in order to provide a home to scholars who want to steer

[14] Caroline Kennedy, ed., *A Patriot's Handbook: Songs, Poems, Stories, and Speeches Celebrating the Land We Love* (New York: Hachette, 2003).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

away from a US exceptionalism not only in scholarship but also in the assumptions and hierarchy of the older American studies revolving around the United States both as geography and as intellectual vantage point.

I wonder, if there is one thing that our pedagogies may share, it is the recognition of conflict between groups, and the resulting issues that remain to be addressed, including historical and social justice. Some genres of "classic" American literature are the actual products of these: captivity narratives, abolitionist "slave" narratives. Perhaps we all teach in some ways about resistance to oppression, even if in forms such as subversion, satire, etc. Likely we all teach in some versions the dominant iconography and mythology of Anglo-Saxon Protestant "America" – but not without including various challenges to it. Perhaps what all our teaching recognizes is hierarchy and conflict. Out of many, not one, but conflict.

ED-O: I want to pick up on so much that has been said here and amplify it. In fact, the act of amplification is perhaps one of the key markers of pedagogies of American studies: amplifying divergent and diverse voices, amplifying the material realities of the subjects of our teaching and the contexts in which learning and teaching happens, amplifying questions within the academy writ large and in the lives of our students about whether and how "American" ideas/ideals have currency or value in the here and now. I see this more and more over the last decade or so as I have collaborated with scholars around the world. Even in places where "American studies" had for a long time meant either "US history" or "US literature" or an area studies approach (often with exceptionalism as a not-so-hidden agenda) there has been a shift towards relevance beyond the classroom and the intentional decentring of previous canons of works and narrative arcs. I appreciate the references to Hartman and Lowe in this discussion, since they are exactly the type of works and scholars who inspire and shape my thinking.

I also think that, increasingly, teaching done under the auspices of American studies in some way or another is informed by critical theory. My own roots are in critical race theory and I am increasingly exploring critical disability studies, critical Latinx studies, and others to refine not only what but how I teach. I know that this might not be shared among all who teach American studies, but the cross-pollination happening more and more in scholarly organizations and the increasing willingness to consider pedagogy in conference spaces (think of recent American Studies Association, British Association for American Studies, and European Association for American Studies conference programmes) suggests to me that there is some movement towards integration of pedagogy as discipline creation/transformation.[15] So I suppose what I am saying is "yes" I see some shared pedagogies, but, then again, I'm both wildly optimistic, and have been working to this end for some time, so perhaps I am seeing more group movement than is really there.

RS: I hope you'll forgive me for not directly answering this question, but I'm going to interpret it in a slightly different way and answer a resounding "yes!" We *share* all of our pedagogies in American studies, because we exist in a multidisciplinary community and thus cannot rely on the expectation that our audience automatically understands

[15] For a recent accounting of the growth of this conference focus within the American Studies Association and the European Association for American Studies see the Introduction to Duclos-Orsello, Entin, and Hill.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

our approach. Lydia's anecdote about primary and secondary sources illustrates this well – in a purely historical community it would be madness to explain this element of our work; our colleagues would think we had lost the plot. In an American studies community, however, it is an act of kindness and inclusivity to share the basics of our disciplinary methodologies with our audiences. As such we learn from each other, grow and diversify our own praxis, and move more easily between learning spaces. We exist as a community of practice as well as a community of ideas.

NK: I feel like this question might be easier to answer for someone who was trained in American studies or who teaches in an American studies department. As a specialist in African American and Caribbean literature/studies, in recent years I have found myself relying on literature pedagogies more and more. That is, I encourage my students to attend to the art and form of texts and to use our classes to sharpen their skills of literary analysis. This helps (most of the time) to dull any temptation students may have to read individual authors as sociologists or (solely) as biographers of a people. Of course, that they are tempted in such directions is partly my fault as I include history and sociology in my lectures and classes to provide information about relevant social and cultural contexts that have shaped the literatures and writers directly and indirectly. Is this an American studies pedagogy? I'm not sure. Another way to come at this question is to consider how I *learn* as an American studies scholar. In that regard I find that the "American studies" books I return to and that influence my own scholarship are frequently either interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary. A few examples of the types of books I am thinking of are Brathwaite's *History of the Voice* (1984), Bernstein's *Racial Innocence* (2011), Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), Sharpe's *In the Wake* (2016), and Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019).[16]

JW: I'm really not sure what I think in response to this question! While I don't think that there necessarily any common pedagogies that are shared in such a diverse field as American studies, I really like Rebecca's point above about our pedagogies being explicitly informed by the sharing that cuts across disciplinary boundaries, because of the inherent interdisciplinarity of American studies.

Question 5: How has your identity, and the identity of your students, shaped the way you teach American studies? To what extent are American studies pedagogies shaped by national or other contexts?

GT: Yes, this is a big one. I used to poke fun a little at my students in the United States Midwest by telling them in a very heavy Hungarian accent who I was, and that I would

[16] Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984); Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2016); Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"teach you all there is to know about American values." Then I would watch their faces as they were wondering how unlucky they were to get "the foreign TA (teaching assistant)." After a few seconds, I would tell them in decent American English that they would not have to worry about my language – but that I being from outside the United States, they would need to explain to me why they believed in an idea (l). And this is the way I would use my positionality – as a curious outsider. One student wrote in their feedback, "Stop pretending that you are not an American." I am glad that I did not stop doing so then.

One approach that I have picked up in my PhD training is to use our own positionality and current geographic vantage point to critically interrogate our topics in American studies. When, in early March 2022, the second week of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I remotely participated at a conference, I used my geographical position of visiting family in Lithuania near the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad to ask some uncomfortable questions about our Western solidarities with the oppressed defending their homeland and rights in Europe and in North America. As mentioned above, when I taught American studies in Central Europe, I used the Hungarian revolutionary Lajos Kossuth's 1851–52 trip to the United States to discuss with my students the limits of political solidarities and the ethics of (not) taking a position on an issue like enslavement. The last few years I have been thinking about and using Scottish historical engagement with North America to understand the role played by the people who lived in and visited Scotland over the centuries in colonialism and resistance.

My own identity is as much a work in progress as it has ever been. I used to be a chameleon, and I still adjust to some degree to my surroundings. As you see, I carefully try to use my "foreignness" in my teaching. However, once in a while, I do challenge my students to use my own complex identity to critique the very idea and categories of the nation-state. I am a Hungarian Jew (for several generations now, a contradiction in terms), who was trained for a PhD in the United States Midwest, has lived and taught in Prague, and has been teaching at the University of Stirling, Scotland, a symbolic "Brave Heart" of resistance and independence. When British voters decided that they wanted to leave the European Union, the UK government immediately began to "sort out" my kind – cosmopolitan, urban, liberal progressive – and Scotland doubled down on keeping us as members of their imagined community. I like to point out to my students that our national governments are unable to deal with any kind of complexity, and they can only squeeze us into cookie-cutter national categories. Now I am a Hungarian citizen and a British subject, living in the shadow of the next Scottish independence referendum.

You all are so much better at teaching to the needs and features of your students than I am. I struggled with teaching about race to US Midwestern students before Black Lives Matter. I struggled teaching to Czech students about the ethics of US transnational corporations exploiting overseas workers, or why sexism and male dominance are unfair to women. Now I struggle to explain to Scottish students how a whole society could thrive on the idea of property in human bondage, or how US Indian reformers genuinely believed that boarding schools would help Native Americans achieve "civilization" and happiness. But I could also be struggling to get them to see their own forefathers as willingly serving the British Empire and its horrors across the globe. Yet the potential is always there to use American studies as a lens to examine your own society.

RS: This is a fascinating question, and one for which I must once again draw on my experience as a lifelong Americanist. I have always studied America, and have,

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naturally, always done so as a Brit – in this field that has made me something of an outsider. As an undergraduate I was an American studies student when I "should" have been studying English or history or politics, or, at the very least, *Europe*. I still keenly recall today the confused looks when I told people I studied "American studies" and the inevitable question, "what are you going to do with that?" I struggled to find a sense of belonging or respect. I don't come from a privileged background or from a tradition of university attendance, and thus when I started at uni I also felt very much as if others had more of a sense of place than I did. Eventually I found myself studying US history in the US, where, much to my disappointment, those I viewed – finally – as my peers saw me as even more of an outsider than I had ever been. This sense of never-quite-belonging in academia has permeated my career as a not-quite-historian and has subsequently informed my pedagogy.

Studying the US in the UK is a wildly different experience than studying the US in the US. I am reminded of this each year when US exchange students sign up to take my modules. These students typically have one of two goals: to study their history from a new perspective, or to coast through a class they believe will be easy for them. I endeavour to meet my students where they are, to respect their experience and push the boundaries of it at the same time. I invite my students to consider our topics in relation to their lived experiences, to find a sense of their own history in our work; I also, however, try to encourage them as outsiders and to support them in learning the value of self-reflection as a methodology.

NK: My identities as an African American, cisgender woman, originally from New York City has certainly shaped my teaching. For one thing, especially in the UK, I will often be the only black female scholar/teacher my students ever encounter as undergraduate or postgraduate students. That is a great responsibility. An awareness of my own identity in the classroom and the way in which it might loom large has led me to invite students to consider their own identities critically and to analyse their own standpoints vis-à-vis our texts (this works well as a prompt for a reading-journal exercise). I've also moved around a fair bit over my career and that has impacted my teaching too. When I left the East Coast of America, where I had been both raised and educated, to join the UC San Diego Department of Literature, my sense of my identity in the classroom and my approach to teaching changed in parallel with that geographical shift. San Diego's position on the border with Mexico, and California's overall Pacific orientation, meant that my students brought new frameworks and contexts to my classes on Caribbean and African American literatures, which required that I do the same. Living and working in the southwestern corner of America as a member of a vigorously international, multilingual department precipitated a self-conscious pivot on my part to transnational American studies that still defines my teaching and research practice. So, yes, for me place and identity as they pertain both to myself and to my students have had an ongoing, shaping influence on my teaching.

ED-O: My own identity as a low-income white woman student with very little understanding of academia but many personal struggles and challenges, including with inequality, family trauma, and injustice shaped not only my own intellectual journey (and my ultimate home in interdisciplinary studies, gender studies, African American studies, and critical American Studies) but also everything I've done in (and outside) every classroom since. I sought out education and courses that would

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help me try to make sense of what I saw around me and give me tools to make sense of my/the world and fight back. Over the years, as I've become more established in this field (something that makes me laugh since I am a completely accidental academic), I have continued to shape my practice around this approach: that the work in and of the classroom can and should have real-world resonance. I'm a public humanist first and foremost. Critically, the students I have taught here in the US for the last eighteen years have sharpened my focus and encouraged me to meet them where they are and to be even bolder and more intentional about the pedagogical possibilities of the theoretical frames that I've adopted over time. I've refocussed my introductory course to centre questions of equity in US history and the mechanisms by which equity has been limited. I've been able to attend more and more to intersectionality as a lens through which we explore the past because my students are living the challenges of it daily and they are seeking language to describe and explain and make sense of it. In my university, discussions of gender expression, identity, and LGBTQIA+ rights are very prevalent, as are discussions about racial violence, anti-blackness and the particular experiences of Afro-Latinx students. Crafting syllabi and guiding questions/activities that bring these issues to light is an ongoing project for me. And over time, student responses to readings and material and to my own teaching of the same have forced me to grapple with my own whiteness and my privilege. I cannot separate who I am from what and how I teach and I don't shy away from naming my positionality and my biases for students. I have learned to be more vulnerable in the classroom and sit with silence. As a result, over the years, I've developed mini-lessons and workshops to talk about and explore the bias inherent in analysis and scholarly endeavours and encouraged my students to be more and more attentive to their own subject positions vis-à-vis our work together. I've also sought training and adopted new strategies for engaging students in classrooms so that more voices have space to be heard. It is worth noting that at this stage of my life and career I am also the parent of a college student. So I have embraced the fact that I can see some of the work we do as professors from the student side. This is a blessing and one that I am still learning from.

HE: My identity in the classroom teaching American Studies in the UK has always been overdetermined by my Australian-ness (though this is, of course, inextricable from my identity as a white, cis, straight, settler colonist woman). The influence of my Australian identity has in part been a deliberate strategy to triangulate the study of US settler colonialism and British Empire via Australia in order to make clear the mutual implication of each – enslavement, genocide, dispossession, and appropriation are not things that happened only outside, over there in America – but has also at times been inadvertent, the result of my own encounters with the "unknown unknowns" inherent to teaching in an unfamiliar institutional context. I wrote a piece about this for the *Australasian Journal of American Studies* soon after arriving in the UK in which I talked about having to adjust my own assumptions about what students knew about Australia and how that affected their understanding of comparative Australian–US literature.[17] Since then I have thought further about

[17] Hilary Emmett, "'One of These Things Is (and Is Not) Like the Other': Comparative Australian–American Studies and 'Enchanted' Pedagogy," *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 33, 2 (2014), 121–37.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

what it means to lean into the triangle created by working on transpacific American studies from the transatlantic position of a UK university.

I think that we have a particularly exciting, if not unique, chance in the UK to turn transpacific American studies into a chance for engaged pedagogy by emphasizing the triangles that are illuminated by close engagement with this region. This way of looking at or from America reflects more similarity than difference between the US and the UK in some historical and cultural arenas and thus can occasion the kind of self-examination crucial to projects such as decolonizing the curriculum. Specifically, asking British students to look at the Pacific via America (taking the thirty-six-hour flight rather than the twenty-four-hour flight!) sheds light on the history and legacies of coerced and unfree labour that continued in Australia following abolition and emancipation in both the Caribbean and the United States. Reading the history of South Sea Islander labour on Queensland sugar plantations alongside recent work on the afterlife of the plantation in US and Caribbean history makes more widely visible a history that has only received significant attention beyond the academy within the past decade. As a British colony, Australia was made rich from the mid-nineteenth century onwards by, among other things, the cultivation of sugar. The expertise and capital to do so was in some cases brought by white men either from the Caribbean or who had benefited financially from slavery in the Caribbean. They brought with them the knowledge about the complicated and intensive processes needed to grow, harvest, and treat sugarcane.[18] And they also brought with them a keen sense of how to maximize profit: by exploiting the labour of people deemed by that new science of race to be inferior or perhaps not even, or not quite, human. Yet this history is rarely part of the curriculum when we think about transnational American studies and its implications for decolonization. Looking beyond the classroom, and in fields where our students might go on to find employment, even the National Trust's timely 2020 report into the connections between colonialism and the properties held by the trust makes no mention of wealth derived from the Australian colonies. Transnational triangulation thus underscores not only the contemporary relevance of the American studies degree, but also that looking from an alternative angle eradicates blind spots that render a radically hopeful, decolonizing vision more complete.

JW: As I mentioned in my response to Question 3, thinking from a position of "outsiderness" is something that I have found to be productive (if not also difficult a lot of the time). As a black queer scholar who is also the first in my family to go to university, a sense of outsiderness or otherness informs the way I move through the world, and this undoubtedly shapes the ways that I teach. This is amplified by the fact that much of my teaching experience has been done in spaces where the majority of my colleagues and students are white, and I am very used to being the only black member of staff in my department, as well as the only black person in my classroom. This makes it easier to discuss issues of power, privilege, and identity with my students, as these dynamics are made visible in particular ways. This then enables us to engage with positionality, and to think about the multiplicity of experiences and voices that

[18] Emma Christopher, "An Illegitimate Offspring: South Sea Islanders, Queensland Sugar, and the Heirs of the British Atlantic Slave Complex," *History Workshop Journal*, 90 (2020), 233–52.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

we as scholars should consider, as well as thinking reflexively about our own subjectivity. While I don't want to declaratively say to what extent American studies pedagogies are shaped by national or other contexts, I certainly think that they should be impacted by such contexts – as I noted above, the university classroom does not exist in a vacuum and so our pedagogies should reflect the broader contexts in which they are situated.

LP: Students perceive me to be (and indeed I am) a white, cis, privileged British woman, who lives and teaches only about an hour from where she grew up. But, like all of us, I also have hidden identities: I am a US citizen by birth, with a father and grandfather who served in the US military (fighting in the Cold War and World War II respectively), and much of my family lives on the West Coast in California and Nevada. One half of me, then, is a posh English woman from the Worcestershire countryside, the other half of me was unironically raised by the principles of a cowboy from Reno. I go back and forth on whether to "reveal" my Americanness to my students. I used to hear (and be offended by) anti-American sentiments and generalizations, but more recently students have been more self-reflexive because it's no longer the case that all the "awful" things happen "over there." I think I will always remember a student I taught in Glasgow saying to me after we concluded a module on slavery in the American South in 2011, "thank goodness we didn't do that here." I was horrified that my teaching had been so unreflexively US-focussed that I hadn't taught them about the role Scotland played in slavery. The following year I took them on a slavery tour of the city, and tried to make sure I embedded the transnational into my approach.[19]

So, as others have said, the national context here is really important – for me this isn't just looking at the US from a British perspective, but from the British perspective in our own very complex political moment. Brexit, Black Lives Matter, the rise of global white nationalism: these all impact how those of us in the UK – both as teachers and as students – view the US and its role in the world. As I said above, I've been learning a lot more about British history recently, especially as my black British students – of whom we have a significant number in my department – have pushed us to make transatlantic connections. I have learned a great deal about British, African, and American histories and cultures, but also about pedagogies, from the range of students that I've had the good fortune to encounter in the past few years. It used to be the norm that I'd teach histories of race to an almost lily-white classroom; this is happily no longer the case, and it really does change how students approach the material, what their expectations are, and how our conversations are framed.

Question 6: Finally, what advice would you give someone about to embark on their first journey into teaching American studies?

GT: Just how you phrased it: it is a journey that the teacher undertakes with the students. In the process, the teacher needs to be curious and enthusiastic, and inclusive of

[19] The tour was conducted by historian Stephen Mullen, entitled *"It wisnae us!" Glasgow's Built Heritage, Tobacco, the Slave Trade and Abolition* (Glasgow: Glasgow Built Preservation Trust, 2007). See https://antislavery.ac.uk/items/show/31 (accessed 8 Sept. 2022).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

students' voices and perspectives, but also encourage them to be rigorous in their examination of the issues. It is important for the teacher to get a strong sense of the past and the diversity of Americanist teaching and scholarship. This will enable them to, progressively and regularly, reflect on their own practice and how well they facilitate their students' learning. Oh, and one more thing. Teaching is not giving the students what they think they want or need. It is training them and developing the skills that they need, and enabling them to subsequently choose what they want. You are a teacher, you know what your students need, and you should have the authority to provide them with such training. You are brave – some people, like me, are already calling you a hero. Over the years, you will find out why.

NK: My advice is to read widely, collaborate in unexpected ways and keep up an ongoing conversation with your students about what American studies might mean and what it could mean in the near and distant future. In terms of collaboration, be a crosser of borders, including institutional borders (e.g. departments or "schools" within your institution), sector borders (e.g. schools, community centres), geographical and ideological borders. In terms of being in conversation with your students, you could also open that up more widely to consider whom else, in the multifaceted aspects of our work, do you want to be in conversation with? Who do you want to speak to and hear from (and how)? Consider whether they do or do not have access to scholarly journals, university classes or academic conferences. What can you do differently if such access is limited or nonexistent? Find these interlocutors, talk to them all along the way. Find your people and keep finding them.

ED-O: I'd tell them to remember that the field is being made and remade in the moment as people like them and their students grapple with the complex histories and narratives and texts of American studies. More specifically, I'd encourage anyone starting out to think of their classrooms as places where American studies *happens*, not just where it is taught. I'd encourage them to take the approach in the classroom that Horwitz so eloquently noted a couple of decades ago in his introduction to *The American Studies Anthology*: that Americanists scour the disciplines to find and refine the tools and materials that they need to ask and answer big questions.[20] I think this applies to how we, as educators, should approach our reading and thinking as we prepare to teach, as well as to how we engage students in the classroom. As for collaborations and borders: I emphatically say embrace the first and smash the second! Reach out across and through boundaries between departments, disciplines, silos, schools, countries; seek out the insights and knowledge from activists, artists, and community leaders as well as fellow academics; make yourself known to be someone who thrives on sharing ideas and walking alongside other educators and students as you grapple with the challenges of structuring learning so that students are engaged and transformed. Be willing to and capable of changing your approach and your goals if students' needs change; become comfortable with uncertainty … teaching is an art and it can (and should) unsettle you; remember that a classroom can be anywhere teaching and learning happen (four university walls are not sacred); remember that

[20] Richard P. Horwitz, ed., *The American Studies Anthology* (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), xxx.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238 Published online by Cambridge University Press

you are a facilitator of learning. This is key. And, finally, seek out, find, and embrace the joy and creativity in what you are doing!

JW: I would encourage anyone embarking on teaching for the first time to try to be cognizant of their own assumptions, and to try to keep these in check as much as possible. In terms of American studies I think this is really important – there are particular mythologies and stereotypes that circulate around American culture that are particularly dominant, and I think that we often expect students to relate to these rather than having a more complex intellectual connection. In my experience, while these mythologies and stereotypes are often part of classroom discussion, they rapidly give way to much more insightful and nuanced critical engagement on the part of my students. I also think that because of the nature of the subject, and the ways in which it is perceived both within the academy and outside, having those conversations with your students about what they think American studies is, and why they want to study American culture, will not only inform your approaches to teaching them (which should be tailored to each different cohort), but also encourage you to keep reflecting on what American studies is for you.

HE: I don't have much to add to what has already been said here as I concur wholeheartedly with Liz and Nicole's exhortation to "Only connect!" (as E. M. Forster would say). Collaborations across disciplinary borders are absolutely key to rich and complex American studies teaching – and collaboration is also a reminder that we can't, and don't have to, "do it all." It's so important to remember that it's not an admission of imposter syndrome to learn from one's colleagues. I'm also excited by the possibilities for connection across what Nicole calls "sector borders" as one of the things we've been thinking about at UEA are ways to plunge back into the materiality of American studies learning and teaching post-pandemic. It's not enough just to have our students back in the classroom; we're looking at ways of immersing students in American sites in the local area, like the Second Air Division Memorial Library, which offers us a space to engage the wider Norfolk community, field trips to the birthplace of Harriet Martineau, or a prowl around the village of Hingham in search of traces of Abraham Lincoln's forebears. I'd urge those at the beginning of their teaching journey to be creative about ways to make visible and tangible those shared transatlantic literary, cultural, and social histories. This, too, is another way to answer Jon's call to question our own assumptions about what constitutes "American" culture – to think critically about what we might otherwise have thought of as "Other" and what is entangled and enmeshed with our own self-conception.

RS: Be yourself and trust that you are supposed to be here. Trust also that your students will respond better to an authentic but imperfect approach than to someone trying to play a role. Not everything will go to plan, and the only power you'll have will be over how you respond. Any academic will tell you that the unplanned moments are often more impactful than the painstakingly constructed lectures and seminars, and allowing your students to share in these moments is also much easier than trying to hide them.

Consider also your power as an educator. Reflect on your positionality and that of your students, and allow this information to alter your practice. The topics you discuss will shape your students' worldview, but how you teach and the skills you impart along

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the way will also have an impact. Try not to ignore these elements of your practice as they may be what students recall in years hence.

As a new teaching fellow, I was once admonished for taking the time to learn my students' names. Take the time to learn your students' names.

LP: I second all of the above, and I would especially encourage those new to teaching to embrace the fact that we are all still learning. As a PhD student or early-career academic, it is easy to feel thrust into the classroom in the uneasy position of "expert" – when we are usually nothing of the sort. "Don't smile until Christmas," was the advice I was given by an older academic when I expressed my concerns about imposter syndrome. That answer – to assert power through a feigned seriousness and authority over both the subject matter and the students in the room – could not be further from my current practice and advice today. You do know more than your students (I promise!), but if you express a willingness to learn, and in doing so to help them to understand that learning is an ongoing process, you'll meet your students at that intersection of teaching and learning where the magic happens. Students choose American studies for the same reasons that we do: because they are fascinated by American culture; passionate about issues of social, racial, and climate justice; or simply just enthusiastic to learn more about the histories, literatures, and cultures that we encounter under its wide umbrella. You have the opportunity to empower them to take the knowledge and skills they encounter in your classrooms out into the world. Teaching such students is a pleasure and a privilege, so, most of all, enjoy it!

After the written exchange was completed, the participants met online to reflect on our discussions. In that meeting, we talked about the relationship between teaching and learning; issues of power, privilege, community, and precarity in the classroom and beyond; who and what has influenced our pedagogical practice; the intersections between teaching, research, and activism; and what we want our teaching to enable our students to do.

Reflecting on the question of what an American studies "signature pedagogy" might be, we concluded that what "leaps to mind" about teaching American studies is that it is fundamentally about giving students the tools to make sense of the texts (whether historical, literary, cultural, or political) that both reflect and shape their lived experience and the world around them, so that they can go out into the world and create and effect change in whatever space they find themselves.

American studies in the UK is transnational, born as it was out of the idea and the critique of the "special relationship" in the 1950s, and it is about understanding and challenging relationships of power. As a pedagogy, then, our classrooms are spaces in which students can learn to understand structures of power, privilege, and resistance. By making ourselves vulnerable as teachers through sharing power with students, we can help them learn how, when, and where to enact their power to make change. As such, American studies classrooms are spaces for meaningful conversations that enable collaboration between students, and between staff and students.

American studies pedagogy is about embracing possibilities; believing that everything is possible to study, that everything is worthy of study, and that everything can be studied in many and different ways. Our students encounter difficult, complex, and entangled ideas about American society and culture, and our role is to help them garner the tools and knowledge to engage with them with confidence. By considering texts through interdisciplinary lenses, American studies pedagogy

encourages students to see things from multiple perspectives, and enables them to bring these perspectives together to imagine alternatives and to create new possibilities.

In sum, what makes teaching American studies so exciting is that it's a space where we can be innovative and curious and enthusiastic about what we do. American studies can empower students not only to understand the world around them, but to see themselves as challengers of the status quo: and we can give them the tools to become agents of change.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875822000238.