Statement of teaching philosophy

My teaching philosophy is based on three key principles, which have informed my pedagogy.

Principle 1: Contextualized instruction

While I am an experienced educator, I continue to see teaching as a contextualized activity, and as such, I believe that every class requires modification. This approach to teaching is in line with contextualized instruction, which looks to "help students see meaning in the academic material they are studying by connecting academic subjects with the context of their daily lives." (Johnson, 2002, p. 25). Using contextualized instruction (CI) requires a recurrent analysis of the goals I have for a course, an evaluation of how well students achieve those goals, willingness to change, and time to implement changes.

To meet these goals, I follow what I call a cyclical process of feedback. Using principles of qualitative research, saturation and triangulation, I look for patterns in the feedback I receive. Student comments in course evaluations have informed major changes; for instance, whether I replace a textbook or revise an assignment. Feedback sessions, which are student-facilitated class periods, have helped me decide on changes to class structure, for instance, class activities or assessment. Third, I keep reflective notes on how students respond to different class activities, which help me determine how well materials are working. These notes are then made into a *reflection* at the end of the semester, which I use as part of my annual reviews—see portfolio evidence. Taken together, different sources of feedback allow me to see patterns of response and they have informed curriculum changes.

Principle 2: Student engagement & experiential learning

While the course content will change, one of my main teaching goals is to help students understand their role in their own learning. Drawing from principles of communities of practice (Lave, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1998) and from experiential learning, I provide students with ample opportunities to apply what they learn and I use humor to enhance student engagement. For instance, in *Introduction to Linguistics*, students learn about the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and the different articulatory organs involved in speech production. Rather than lecturing about how sounds are produced, I start class with a familiar concept: accents. Then I introduce sounds, ask students to produce them using a mirror, and conclude the discussion by explaining the role articulation plays in language teaching and learning. Students find a mirror activity I use intimidating, but I find that experiencing the concept generates better results: students remember the sounds because they could feel them as they produced them or simply because the activity made them laugh, and was therefore memorable—please see *peer teaching evaluation below* for an example of how I use experiential learning and engage students in class.

Whether it is using a mirror to track articulatory sounds, journaling to document teaching experiences, interviewing an expert to learn about paraphrasing, or just tutoring non-native English speakers at the Mildred Terry library, my students experience learning first hand. It is true that some learners, especially lower division students, find this approach challenging mainly because it forces them out of their passive roles. However, cultivating student engagement while allowing them to apply what they know fosters student learning. Having to apply what they learn also challenges students to understand concepts and to articulate that understanding to others. Overall, I see my duty as an educator to make course content relatable, understandable, as well

as practical, and this is especially important when teaching required courses that enroll first-year students since these students are the college population most vulnerable to attrition.

Principle 3: Affective factors

Research in psychology has demonstrated that students' rapport to members of the classroom community can shape their attitudes toward a subject. More specifically, although most of the available research has been conducted with children, there is evidence suggesting that "the degree to which a teacher encourages, accepts, respects, and trusts students can have an impact on their ability and willingness to engage in class" (Strati, Shmidt, Maier, 2017, p 133). In line with this research, I believe that students respond well when they feel acknowledged as individuals and when they see a genuine interest on their professor's part to help them learn. I demonstrate this interest by providing extensive scaffolding in class, acknowledging when activities are not working well, and being flexible with assignment submissions. Fostering good interpersonal relationships benefits all members of the classroom community: when teachers care about their students, they are more likely to improve their classes and most students will reciprocate by working hard.

Because factors like race, gender, or ethnicity can also shape a student's acceptance of or rejection of authority (Lee, 2008), in my classes, I create a culture of accountability and respect of our individual roles. I do so by implementing clear policies, stressing the differences between my role as a professor and my personality, and by adding accountability measures, while still demonstrating to students that I care about their learning. For example, I schedule meetings outside of class around midterm to discuss students' progress, which allows me to stress students' role in their learning outcomes, including their grades, while getting to know them as individuals. Overall, I find that while there are exceptions, most students respond well to the tension present in my teaching philosophy: showing students that I care about their learning while challenging them to succeed (please see *student correspondence* section in portfolio for emails demonstrating students' perception of this tension and of other themes).

References

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