

TEACHING STATEMENT

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On the first day I taught recitation, the class was as silent as a grave. It dawned upon me that I used to be exactly like my students now. When I was in their shoes, I was too afraid to ask questions because I didn't want to appear foolish. I sought to connect with my students and be a positive influence on their learning experience. So, I appealed to their fears and lightened the mood with a joke "My, those crickets are loud." The class chuckled. The tension erased in that moment and I realized that putting my students at ease would help them learn more effectively and made them more willing to ask questions in class.

I strived to be an approachable teacher and to create a space that allowed for even students who struggled with math to follow and enjoy the class. I made sure to relate to my students and show them I cared. This really helped diffuse a lot of the anxiety and allowed my students to better receive the material. Keeping in mind that everyone has a different way of processing information and approaching solutions to problems, I also made sure to go into multiple different ways of solving problems whenever possible. This seemed really alien to my students at first. When speaking to them outside of class, I found that a lot of students coming out of high school are not really taught problem solving skills so much as a how to follow a strict recipe on getting to the answer. This mentality often led to students making very strange errors on exams, where they often would completely miss what a problem was asking for and just regurgitate what they vaguely remembered. Thus, I tried to dismantle this mentality of memorizing the steps of how to get an answer without really understanding why. I started to stress the why whenever I discussed the process of solving a particular problem, explaining each and every step, even when it seemed redundant. I found remarkable improvement afterwards.

I also firmly believe teaching should not just consist of simply doing example problems for the students. When you always tell them exactly what to do, they are more prone to forgetting what you just taught them. I find that students learn best when they figure out what to do by themselves. So whenever I go over an example, I ask the class what to do at each step and why and I do not proceed until someone answers. As the semester progresses, students start answering more quickly. This helps them actively participate rather than passively consume and helps to establish a sense of community.

In order to encourage shy students to vocalize their progress and also foster communication with others, I created worksheets to be done in groups. But I did find that just having the students work on worksheets together wasn't always enough, since quite a few students would still work by themselves. I then decided to pass out only a limited number of worksheets where each group had one worksheet. This did the trick. I went around the room to answer any questions. After students were finished with the worksheet, I had one student per group come up and write down their work on the board. I would then go over the solutions, correcting any errors that the students made. This process allowed class to be more engaging and made students more likely to ask questions.

I found teaching to be really rewarding. I loved the feeling of being at the board of my classroom facing my students. It always boosted my confidence and was just fun. One of the things that was most rewarding for me was when a number of students would tell me that they didn't even like math, but they felt like they really learned in my class. Once, one of my students wrote a sweet note on her final exam saying how much she enjoyed the class with me. That made me so proud to be teaching. I loved knowing when I actually got through to my students. My hard work in preparing my class actually paid off, and my passion for math became contagious.