

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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My teaching philosophy is driven by the belief that learning is a collaborative and interactive process. My research revolves around the remarkable role of interaction in language learning, and I see this mirrored in the classrooms of the most impactful and inspiring teachers I have known. These teachers emphasized three essential pieces of any culture of learning: learning how to learn, approaching information openly and critically, and making connections to integrate knowledge. I bring these same priorities to my teaching approach.

### **Learning how to learn**

I believe both lecture and seminar classes can be shaped into interactive opportunities for students to put general reasoning skills into practice, so that learning develops as an active skill. I create a low-stakes environment where students are emboldened to share their “hot takes” and speak up when things don’t make sense. I encourage admission of ignorance as a chance to learn something new, and maintain a conversational tone where students, in their words, “never feel dumb.” It is my responsibility as an instructor to embody the attitudes I wish to promote, which means allowing my own ignorance to serve as a learning opportunity. For instance, when leading a discussion for Introduction to Human Development, I was unable to answer a student’s questions about experimental protocols for non-human primate studies. We talked about the scope of research domains and how I might go about finding an answer to something far from my area of expertise. As a class, we turned fuzzy ideas into two specific questions and went through the process of accessing library resources to find answers.

Centering my classes around discussion when possible allows me to quickly identify and address students’ knowledge gaps. In the same introductory class, I noticed students mixing up anthropological and psychological approaches. I opened the floor to general questions about social science disciplines and learned that many students had never been explicitly taught several foundational concepts. For the next class I prepared a thirty-minute methods crash course with a brief lecture and group activity. One of the most meaningful moments in my time as an instructor happened two years later, when a graduating senior told me this crash course was the deciding factor for sticking with the major. I am proud that I was able to recognize missing pieces and make a lasting impact beyond my classroom for at least one student.

### **Critically approaching materials and concepts**

With the goal of developing analytic reasoning, I stress to my students that being critical is not the same as being dismissive. My students should feel empowered to find weak points in the arguments they encounter but also work to find value in ideas they disagree with. For instance, in a lesson about WEIRD bias in psychology, I randomly assigned students to argue for one of two polarized views on the topic in a loosely structured and lighthearted debate. After some creative work to defend extreme positions they would not typically endorse, they came together in a large group discussion to reflect on nuances of the issue they had not previously considered and to collectively form a more balanced position on the matter.

When teaching the psychology of language, I ask students to reflect on their own language usage, positioning them as experts of their own experience. Students are eager to engage with

course materials when they can imagine how it is directly reflected (or not!) in their own lives. Rather than brushing aside personal anecdotes as irrelevant to academic inquiry, I allow students to see their experience with language as a valuable tool for brainstorming, interrogating, and investing in a topic. Individual and shared experiences act as touchstones for delving into empirical work on course concepts, and written assignments allow students to practice differentiating objective and subjective evidence. Students learn to discern which kinds of evidence are appropriate in different forms of academic writing and oral presentation.

### **Making connections and integrating knowledge**

I aim to create opportunities for marginalized voices to be heard – quite literally – as not only welcome but indispensable in classroom discussions. By letting students make meaningful contributions to discussion through their own language expertise, I stress the importance of language diversity both academically and as a classroom community. Many contexts on a college campus implicitly or explicitly promote the use of a Mainstream American English academic register, muffling the voices of students who have been told their English is incorrect or found lacking. Individuals vulnerable to this kind of silencing are integral members of any complete discussion about language and interaction. As an instructor it is my responsibility to create opportunities for students to present their perspectives as necessary data for understanding the psychology of language. By underscoring the value of diverse language experience in the formal study of language, I can encourage contributions about interaction via multiple languages, dialects, and registers from students who identify with these experiences. These diverse voices are essential both for our theoretical understanding of interaction and for an inclusive classroom that fosters welcoming and productive discussion.

Recognizing individual differences in learning styles promotes student ownership of both classwork and their education more generally. One of the most common frustrations I have heard from students is feeling overwhelmed with pressure to bring “original ideas” into written assignments. In response, I highlight the value of a comparative approach to their coursework and tailor supports to individual students. For example, I offer students multiple strategies to go beyond a compare-and-contrast summary style paper, allowing comparative exercises to generate elusive original ideas. For students who struggle with rigidity, I ask them to imagine Piaget and Vygotsky getting a drink together at the end of a long day. *What are they laughing about? What are they fighting about? Does the barkeeper have any words of wisdom?* For students who learn more effectively with a structured exercise, I help them create a visual representation of the basic comparative framework they are familiar with as a first step toward a deeper analysis. I ask questions grounded in this visual representation to help students push farther. *Where are the gaps and blank spots in the diagram? What overlap surprises you?*

### **Assessment and evaluation**

I prefer to evaluate student progress in two pieces. First, weekly iterative assignments provide students with ongoing opportunities to develop their critical thinking and writing skills. Frequent feedback allows for incremental improvement in a low-stakes assessment, and progressive assignments allow me to monitor understanding and growth, intervening as needed. With occasional longer written assignments, I can assess broader learning objectives like drawing connections across multiple theories, discriminating among texts, and producing cohesive written arguments. This assessment style is also advantageous for classes on methodology, where

students can recognize and correct misconceptions with each step of a systematic concept, avoiding a domino effect of misunderstanding.

With any assessment, I believe students deserve evaluation that is transparent, consistent, and sufficient. It is important to me that my students recognize evaluation is never a punishment or personal judgment, but rather a tool they can leverage for their own benefit. I provide assignment rubrics outlining my expectations, providing structure for written feedback and modeling how students can improve future work. A comprehensive rubric holds me accountable to myself and my students in assigning grades fairly, ensures consistency among teams of graders, and allows students to take ownership of their work.

As I emphasize in my classroom, I believe the ability to recognize one's shortcomings, mistakes, and ignorance is one of the most important and admirable abilities a scholar can learn. I emphasize that it is a skill to develop rather than a personality trait and confess that I have gone through the painful process of choosing to be vulnerable to criticism. I try to embody this message as a teacher by both modeling how to admit to and learn from mistakes and by actively soliciting student feedback about their learning and my teaching. Since incorporating regular and anonymous requests for student feedback, I have been able to adapt my classes to meet the needs of each particular group. I am grateful for students' comments on both my syllabus and my teaching style, allowing me to design more effective lessons and to reflect on how I can do a better job promoting the diverse, inclusive, and supportive community I strive for.

My philosophy on teaching is motivated by the kind of teacher I always admired and aspire to be: flexible, inquisitive, and approachable. It is my hope that these practices reinforce a culture of trust and accountability, enabling my students to develop a sense of ownership of their education they may carry with them going forward.