Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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I acquired a love for teaching during my first job as a swimming instructor and nearly every position I have held since then has centered on education. I have always felt privileged to be a part of these formative learning experiences and have tried to infuse my classes with the enthusiasm I have for the subject matter, be it language, literature, or feminist theory. In the process of teaching, I deepen my understanding of these areas and gain valuable insights from my students that enhance not only my teaching abilities but also other aspects of my professional life, such as my research. For this reason, I approach my students not just as learners but also as potential teachers.

At the collegiate level, I try to recreate my undergraduate experience at a small liberal arts institution where courses were challenging, classroom discussions were animated, and professors and students formed tight-knit bonds that lasted throughout the academic career. To this end, I make a concerted effort to get to know and respect each of my students from the most motivated to the most resistant. In the process, I have discovered how to reach students with different learning styles. I have achieved this by creating a diversified classroom experience that incorporates music, film and TPR exercises, as well as computer mediated activities. I have also designed creative exercises that strengthen students’ engagement with the material, such as having the class “map” patterns of repetition in a poem by Pablo Neruda, write a poem in Spanish inspired by a Hispanic author, or stage a debate by taking on the persona of a historical or fictional character. Finally, I am attentive to the special needs of heritage speakers as well as learners from different disciplines and am always available to help students outside of class.

I believe that becoming an excellent educator is an ongoing process requiring external feedback and I have seen the positive results that have come from applying the new techniques and strategies I’ve gleaned in teaching development workshops and individual consultations with the staff of the University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. I have found, however, that often the best advice comes from the students themselves. As a result, I pay close attention to my students’ end-of-term evaluations, often tweaking the syllabus or trying out new activities in response to their feedback, and additionally have students fill out mid-term evaluations in order to maximize the impact of my teaching.
My effectiveness as a teacher is not only gauged through these periodic evaluations and workshops, but also in each class session. I often ask students to summarize reading passages or grammar concepts so that I may fill in any gaps in their understanding while recognizing all that they have learned. In addition to coming away with a firm understanding of the concepts and techniques taught in my classes, it is my hope that my students will also be inspired by the linguistic, literary and cultural material they are exposed to. I have seen this happen as many of my students have become interested in study abroad programs or have decided to major or minor in the subject field, whether it is Spanish, Portuguese or Women’s Studies. Knowing that not all students will take this path, I try to make my classes relevant for those who will not pursue future studies in the field by teaching skills that can be applied in other settings, such as memorization skills, time management and critical thinking. Most importantly, through exposure to cultural, literary and theoretical material, I give students an opportunity to expand their horizons and reevaluate their beliefs. In listening to and reading their responses, I may be moved to reconsider mine as well.