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Teaching Statement

Excellent language teaching begins with an instructor who is open to learning about learning and teaching at all stages of her career.[1] To me, this means being reflective about, setting goals for, and assessing my own teaching. This means being responsive to feedback from students, colleagues, and evaluators. This means staying current with findings in pedagogy and second language research, to evaluate and reflect upon these findings, and to make adjustments and changes to my own teaching practices accordingly for the benefit of student learning. In order for teachers to evaluate materials and ideas given to them in a way that results in positive development for both their teaching and their students' learning, Bill van Patten suggests that teachers should be able to articulate what their principles are first.[2] I will address the classroom, teaching approaches, assessment and teaching beyond the classroom in the discussion of my principles.

I believe that the language classroom is a space for interaction and communication where learners can produce and understand language without fear of failure.[3] In my teaching, I value compassion, understanding and flexibility in recognizing individual learning styles. My goal is to provide a supportive environment in which students from diverse backgrounds experience personal motivation and success in learning a second language.[4] I favor mixed small-group activities and think-pair-share activates with established partners to create an environment of trust and familiarity which works to lower students' affective filters. Selecting material that is relevant and interesting to learners' lives and educations also provides an engaging class atmosphere.

Important to my teaching is a balanced integration of proven approaches. In my classes, I often use authentic voices and texts as ACTFL recommends in its Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) guidelines in task-based language teaching.[5] Even in beginning language courses, authentic texts in the form of websites, message board entries, and short news articles can provide students with comprehensible input that both stretches their language skills and affirms their current abilities. I also regard Processing Instruction as a key input-based approach, as it focuses simultaneously on grammatical form and language meaning.[6]

Meaning-centered, communicative tasks that focus student attention on the completion of the tasks in the target language rather than grammar or linguistic-focused tasks is the core goal of my language teaching. At the same time, however, some explicit grammar instruction within a meaningful context also has a place in an excellent language classroom, and I hold the

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[1] Inspired by the Tattooed Professor. "Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto." Blog. <http://www.thetattooedprof.com/archives/624>

[2] Bill van Patten. *Tea with BVP*. Episode 14: "There's no such thing anymore as 'methods'". Podcast. < http://www.teawithbvp.com/>

[3] Referring to the "affective filter hypothesis" of Stephen Krashen. In: Ricardo Schütz. "Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition." *English Made in Brazil*. <http://www.sk.com.br/sk-krash.html>. Online. 2014.

[4] Patsy Lightbrown and Nina Spada. *How Languages are Learned*. Oxford: Oxford UP 1999. 163.

[5] David Nunan, "Task-Based Language Teaching, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 1.

[6] Victoria Russell. "Processing Instruction: From Theory to Practice." In: *The Language Educator*. Febuary 2011.

firm belief that adult learners, as they learn grammar through language, can utilize linguistic knowledge in their conscious learning.[7] It is the task of the language instructor to craft a language class that includes both structured input and authentic texts, and both input-based tasks and output-based tasks.

Assessment and reflection on learning in a classroom should come from both the instructor and students. An instructor must assess a student's performance for the purposes of grading and planning, but students should also have the opportunity to self-assess. I prefer Integrated Performance Assessment style evaluations in which students demonstrate their language competence through the completion of goal and meaning-oriented tasks, since this approach to assessment *shows* what our students can do with language. Additionally, the integration of can-do statements into a course is a valuable way for students to become involved in the assessment process. Can-do statements allow learners to evaluate their own performance in a way that is affirmative and self-motivating, and in doing so learners can participate in the setting of learning goals.

Lastly, excellent language teaching extends beyond the language classroom. For the instructor, this means being involved in the academic, local and global language communities and introducing learners to these communities. Students should feel encouraged to attend language club events, events and talks that address scholarship and politics within the target language community, and – when available – festivals and institutions in the local community of target language speakers. Beyond the classroom also means that language learning can have value for students whether they take only one semester or four years. I believe this value can come from a social justice and inter-cultural competence approach to language learning which emphasizes self-reflection, cultural learning, building relationships, and ethics. For example, I try to complement textbook topics with alternate narratives, such as minority voices in the target language or a focus on current events in target language nations and communities.

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[7] *National Capital Language Resource Center*. "The Essentials of Language Teaching: Teaching Grammar." <http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/grammar/grindex.htm>