

Melanie Forehand

Teaching Philosophy

Through my teaching experiences during the past ten years, I have developed a teaching philosophy focused on building and encouraging classroom and campus communities. My philosophy reflects my belief that language learning occurs most effectively when my students get to know each other and feel comfortable sharing their viewpoints. Rooted in my conception of language learning through community, my course design facilitates connections on three levels: within the classroom, within the campus, and within the world.

In the classroom, community as the basis for language learning begins with my own classroom management, which generates a sense of familiarity and a welcoming environment for diverse groups of students. My daily lessons have always begun with me calling roll. This activity only takes five minutes, but these are the most important five minutes of my class. When students hear their names, they know to respond “*presente*,” and they know that I will ask them a follow-up question about how they are doing. This routine allows my students to practice speaking in Spanish in a comfortable context and it provides me with a moment to observe the psychosocial well-being of each student. Both my personal experiences and pedagogical scholarship suggest the positive effects of these types of instructor-learner interactions on reducing language-acquisition anxiety and increasing student motivation (Street and Keramida 39-41). I have witnessed semester after semester how through this activity a classroom of novice-level students grows from giving simple, one-word answers such as “*bien*” to forming more complex responses about their preferences, activities, and lives at the university. What would otherwise be a simple administrative task of taking attendance assumes pedagogical importance as it allows students to learn about each other in a way that fosters a sense of community and serves as the critical foundation for interpersonal communication.

This inclusive environment goes beyond the classroom to the campus community. I prioritize being present for my students, extending my office hours to accommodate their schedules and hosting weekly Spanish conversation sessions and exam review sessions for students that want to have extra practice. Additionally, I promote their club activities, performances and sporting events in my course and make an effort to be present for their on-campus events. In my Introduction to Spanish class, my students and I made posters with Spanish commands such as *¡gana!* [win!], and we took them to the varsity tennis match to cheer on their classmate as she competed.

By bringing language learning beyond the classroom with active and applied learning activities, I facilitate student language acquisition within the context of the university community. My students regularly work with primary sources and campus resources to enhance their textbook’s information. Visits to the campus art gallery, the university arboretum, the music library, and the Center for Latin American Studies are a central part of my classes because they encourage connections between language courses, other academic subjects, and the campus community. In my Accelerated Introduction to Spanish course, students visited the campus art

gallery to describe and analyze the gallery's collection. When our gallery featured an exhibition about Dadaism, students read a brief explanation of the artistic movement and then used the target language to compare works by Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, and Tristan Tzara. After learning about the pieces, students modeled what they had learned in the exhibit to compose and present their own poems in Spanish in the Dada style. By increasing opportunities for contact with cultural works, I provide a space of convergence for the linguistic and the cultural.

I see it as my duty as a language instructor to invite students to apply their skills to broader contexts such as their campus, their city and international society. The classroom walls can obscure the relationship between language learning and the world in which it exists, so I seek to relate course content to my research interests and current events such as environmental movements, immigration and exile, and social activism through music. I use homework assignments, compositions, and project presentations not only to assess the students' grasp of grammar and vocabulary, but also to offer the students an opportunity to investigate and reflect on cultural topics from other countries. In my intermediate courses, students have used what they have learned about the politics, literature, art, and environment of a country to create a children's book about social issues in Spain and in Latin America. As a method of assessment, this assignment benefits students immensely because it evaluates their understanding of course content and allows them to form a deeper connection to research and cultural topics. What is more, this activity allows students to understand how their actions form their own communities and impact the world beyond the communities to which they belong. In addition to creating global connections in the classroom, I have helped students obtain internships and volunteer opportunities in Spanish-speaking countries where they combined their language skills with their interests in medicine, environmental science, and politics.

As a teacher, I believe my purpose is to present Spanish as a way to welcome students into classroom, campus, and global communities. Ultimately, the measure of my students' success is not just their capacity to acquire grammatical knowledge, but their ability to communicate and interact with linguistic and cultural competence as members of a campus and global community.