

Teaching Statement

By Christopher Palasz

Learning Philosophy

Learning is the process of discovering. When we learn, we discover new ways of approaching tasks and obstacles. We discover new ways to understand and address our lives, communities, and the world.

Teaching Philosophy

Teaching is a form of learning. Therefore, all learners can be teachers, and all teachers are learners. Learners and teachers collaborate to discover how to practically approach, assess, and utilize information that we encounter.

Praxis

Class Foundation

When I enter the classroom, I expect students to have varying interests and abilities. To foster an effective learning environment, I want them to feel comfortable and I want them to engage me and each other according to our individual interests and abilities as much as possible. To accomplish that, step one is getting to know each other and our expectations. On day one, I provide them with a clear framework of the course content, conduct, and assessment. Then we get to know each other and the first assignment is usually for them to provide me with a brief introduction, which is a response to some of my basic questions about their interests, studies, and goals. I also instruct them to ask a question to me which can be personal, professional, or academic in nature. The goal is to help me gauge their interests and ambitions so I can tailor course content to their needs and enjoyment.

Varied Teaching Methods

I regularly draw from a number of teaching methods. The general framework of a course will employ some repetitive elements on a regular or semi-regular basis that students will become familiar with. Those are mixed with other unique elements of each class's lesson to keep things fresh and interesting. I start every class by showing the weekly schedule so students can see how we are progressing, content wise. The first task in class is to complete a 'warm-up' as an introduction to the class topic where the goal is to generate a personal connection between the topic and the life or interests of each student. The final task of a lesson I refer to as the 'challenge'. These will vary in nature, depending on the subject of the course and what it allows. I may ask students to write something, discuss, or participate in a game or a more active exercise where they're required to stand up or get into groups to accomplish something.

One example of a warm-up I have used in a writing course to teach classification and division, the students were asked to stand up and get into groups. I then gave them a vague, guided principle of classification such as "hair" and instructed them to divide themselves into 2 or 3 well-defined groups according to that topic of classification. Afterwards, we discussed and assessed as a class how successful they were in doing so and drew conclusions about best practices for classification and division in writing.

In another class, the final challenge task was for students to write a 1 minute oral speech and then to deliver their speech in pairs. The topic of their speech was based on the main content from that day's

class and personalized to the life of each student. There isn't really a lot of time to dissect what went on during the challenge, but for each pair, there may be reflective discussion or a short write-up as time allows.

Primary Course Content

During the main body content of each class, I will sometimes incorporate individual brainstorming, discussion in pairs or small groups, and class discussions (or all three in that progression). I semi-regularly like to mix my students up as the circumstances allow. I will often scaffold practices such as giving peer feedback depending on the student needs and course content. I'll provide them with guided questions that use concepts from the course content for giving feedback. For example, in writing, one question might ask if their classmate wrote a thesis statement, and another question might ask them to give a score of 1-10 regarding the credibility of the sources their peer used in their writing.

Homework

Homework assignments are given for the purpose of preparing them for the next class's content or for assessing or reinforcing their current understanding of content we've covered. Examples of past homework that I have given include asking students to find reputable sources to use in their writing, to read and take notes about a reading or video that we will discuss in class, to record a short mini-presentation on a certain topic, to write a thesis statement and a brief outline for a paper they are preparing to write, or to respond to guided questions for peer feedback that will be discussed in class.

Exams

During exam periods, I enjoy giving my students the opportunity to design, create, or participate in a project that is meaningful for them and which can have direct application in their own career or academic goals, either immediately or in the future. Examples of projects could be: allowing them to choose between writing a paper of analysis about a certain topic that needs investigating, or to create a presentation about a topic that interests them according to a need they identify and take personal interest in, or for them to design and create something such as a course to teach, a detailed book outline to write, an informative guide or website, or perhaps a video promotion. Giving students options allows them to choose something that interests them and which is suited to their own strengths.

Goals

There is no perfect framework that fits all courses or all students. My approach to teaching is done with my learning and teaching philosophies in mind. The practical goals I seek are for my students to develop a way of viewing content and approaching obstacles that they had not previously practiced. Each student should attempt to integrate their personal strengths and interests that appear in their daily lives together with the material we cover in the course. Students will not all cross the same finish line at the end of the course, but there is a minimum standard that must be met, and each of them will take the next step in their own educational growth which they will demonstrate in the final project or test for the course.

Research / Flipping the Classroom

Previous employers have not fostered an environment of conducting organized Teacher Research or having a flipped classroom. However, these are two approaches that I openly seek to participate in if the opportunity is available.