

Philosophy of Teaching Statement

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In the past few decades there has been a renewal of interest in language learning - particularly in this country. Volumes of articles, books, papers, and anthologies have been written; websites developed; and conferences held about teaching techniques and methodologies, learning strategies, language learning in context, and last but not least, teaching philosophies. With this background I would be naïve to think that I could come up with an original, concise, beautifully eloquent, and perfectly structured teaching philosophy. Hence, I describe a philosophy that works for me. Alice Omaggio Hadley writes in 1993 that this continuing struggle to understand, clarify, and articulate one's beliefs and practices is at the very heart of being a teacher and a researcher.

As a teacher I know that I need to be able to choose widely among the multitude of options at hand – as they are presented in professional literature, as I observe them in my peers, and as I have experienced them myself in the five years of being a Teaching Assistant for undergraduate German language courses. We need to know why we make these choices and we need to be flexible and open to implement new ideas into our teaching at the same time. Despite everything that has been written, I do know what works best for me when I teach in the classroom, I do know why I love to teach and I do know that I learn as I teach.

Personal interaction with my students is one of the most important aspects of my teaching. Familiarity with my students is crucial to the development of a good rapport with them. I make a great effort to know their names. Since language classes are small enough, I learn their majors and interests, their schedules, and sometimes an unusual situation (sick mother, infant daughter). I make myself available outside the classroom by encouraging students to come to office hours, I schedule one-on-one appointments whenever necessary in addition to office hours if students have conflicting schedules, and I use email extensively to communicate with my students. I have great respect for the individuality of each student. I have a willingness to listen and answer any question.

I strive to maintain a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning and encourages dialogue. The students always sit in a circle rather than in a row behind each other's backs. They often work in groups or with a partner in order to focus on communicative rather than a teacher-centered approach, thereby making room for individual expression. I bring regalia and props, current German newspaper articles, and popular songs; I use the audio-visual equipment as well as the World Wide Web and other electronic resources. I try to adhere to the goals I have spelled out in the course syllabus, but I know to be flexible and to adapt my teaching whenever necessary. I am friendly, not intimidating yet with appropriate boundaries. A conducive learning atmosphere has to be one of mutual respect. A sprinkling of humor and a willingness to laugh at myself and with the students goes a very long way.

Teaching is a learning experience. I learn to be flexible in my methodology and approach, to deal with unusual students and learning strategies, and to communicate better every time I teach. I learn that every student has a story. I learn to turn my devotion and dedication into a fun activity for the students; I learn from a nod of comprehension and gain happiness from the smile at a joke. I receive as much as I give. I learn every day that teaching is a learning experience.