

Sample teaching philosophy statement

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My teaching experience to date includes:

1. a stint working as an “assistant d’anglais” for one year at the Lycée Ste Jeanne d’Arc in Lyon, France (2005-2006), during which I was responsible for teaching English conversation classes.
2. three years teaching French 104 in the French Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) (2006-2009), during which I was responsible for teaching 4th semester grammar to UIUC undergraduates.
3. two years teaching French 4xx, a survey course at UIUC focusing on 18th century literature. This course is normally taught by a tenure track faculty member, but due to the unfortunate long term illness of the person who normally teaches this course, I was asked to fill in as long as needed.

In short, I believe I have varied experience in both the United States and France that will stand me in good stead as I begin my academic career as a specialist in Rousseau studies.

Based on my practical teaching experience and courses and workshops I have taken while a graduate student at UIUC, I feel I have had the opportunity to develop a good sense of who I am as literature and language instructor. I would therefore like to share my teaching philosophy with you as part of my application for the tenure track position in the Department of French, Italian and Linguistics at the University of X.

First, I have learned from my practical experience how important it is to run a well-organized classroom. I try to do this by giving my students (both graduate and undergraduate) a very clear statement of my expectations in my syllabus (see the sample provided) regarding what course material they will be responsible for, what assignments they will be expected to complete, and how they will be assessed. In order to cater to different learning styles, I provide my students with different kinds of assignments, and I make each assignment progressively more challenging to make sure that students are constantly challenged by the material I give them to interact with.

Second, based on methodology courses I have taken in the French Department, I have become increasingly committed to communicative approaches to language teaching. While communicative language teaching may be interpreted in many different ways, the way that I implement this approach involves focusing methodologically on communication and meaning while paying attention to the more traditional (but still vitally important) topics of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. In this regard, I have been particularly influenced by the work of Professor Jane Doe, with whom I have been privileged to work during my time as a

graduate student at UIUC. I enclose a sample lesson plan that illustrates this philosophy, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss my pedagogical ideas with you further.

A Reflection on Language Teaching Philosophy

Every modern language teacher, so long as he/she is not completely out of contact with colleagues in his/her field, will sooner or later be caught up in the perennial debate between two major frameworks, i.e. structure-based or communication/function-based teaching approach. Three years ago, when I was writing the statement of my teaching philosophy for my second year review, I still had the luxury not to identify myself with any particular school of teaching approach, as I was still a novice teacher — actually too inexperienced to have any fears, just like a first year philosophy student who believes that he has found that greatest philosophy ever. Back then I claimed that my approach was eclectic, somewhere in between of the two major frameworks. However, what is an eclectic approach any way? Is an eclectic approach possible? Am I saying that another three years of teaching only make me more doubtful about my daily classroom practices? If so, have I formed new teaching philosophy and style in place of the old ones? In this essay I am seeking to answer the above questions, and to take this opportunity sort out my thoughts about language teaching, which have been questioned, challenged and transformed on a daily basis.

In the last three years, attending classes and workshops at Teacher's College, especially classes about SLA (second language acquisition), has provided me opportunities to access a wide range of SLA theories that address to various aspects of language learning. I consider myself well versed in SLA literature, becoming quite familiar with the latest "trends" such as FoF (Focus on Form) and TBLT (task based language teaching). At first, I was a little overwhelmed by the numerous new terminologies, but soon I found out that SLA research is a great source for any language teachers. And I was even inspired to conduct my own research on learner errors since 2005. My research started as an ardent interest in treatment of learner errors. I believe that in order to find the optimal treatment for learner errors, it is necessary to identify the **types** of errors, analyze **sources** of errors and record the **course of development** of different types of errors.

While my data analysis is still in progress and research results inconclusive, I have some interesting findings about teacher's role that have contradicting my old beliefs. For example, I used to believe that a language teacher should always correct student's errors on the spot and explicitly, because accuracy weights more than fluency. But my data has shown that while some errors can be easily corrected, others remain persistent despite instructional interference; certain type of errors will reduce as the levels of learner's Chinese increases, irrelevant of the teacher's efforts. In other words, *teachers have limited control on students' output after learning has occurred*. I also observed that some errors are byproducts of instruction, such as overuse of a grammar form. Further readings in SLA research have confirmed that *classroom instruction, if not carried out properly, can do more harm to than helping learning* (On a side note, this is a disheartening fact because all teachers intend well for their students, but at the same this fact also imbued new significance to my job).

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So the question has become: "In what way can a teacher positively affect learners' language acquisition?". To answer this question, I need to borrow VanPatten(1995)' model which best captures the developmental stages and processes of language acquisition.

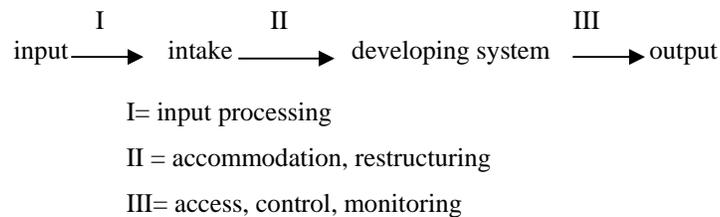


Fig. 11.1 A model of second language acquisition and use (based on VanPatten 1995).

First, it goes without saying that without **input** language learning can never occur. *Teacher can play an very active role here by providing input of large quantity and excellent quality*, especially in a foreign language learning environment while other forms of input (such as real communications in a native environment) are lacking. I have observed first hand that students who went through immersion summer program in China fare much better than those who attend regular Chinese classes at Columbia, even though the textbooks and the teaching approach are almost identical. So it must be the target language environment that provide extra opportunities for the learners to **use** the language, and more exposure to the authentic input in various forms. *Foreign language teachers, without that advantage of the target language environment, have to make extra efforts to enhance the classroom input.* They need to understand their students' needs well and adapt their teaching materials to their own classes. For example, the teacher can adapt and supplement the textbook, and if necessary to change the sequence of chapters. Indeed, it is easy said than done. Following a textbook and a well-established syllabus is so much easier on the part of the teacher, but as teachers we should not only provide knowledge, we should also engage students, to provide them opportunities to learn, and to activate their prior knowledge. The focus on input is obviously in line with communicative language teaching approach.

Second, learner's **intake** is derived from input but always less than input. For example, we all know that second language learners can understand more than they can actually use the TL (target language). Learners are heavily influenced by their NL (native language), and they tend to pick up the linguistic forms that are typologically close to their NL. Recent SLA literature has directed attention to the input process which accounts for how the intake happens. PI (Processing Instruction) is a pedagogical application of this strand of research. In a nutshell, PI allows teacher to manipulate learners' processing of the input, and by so doing teachers may alter the course of development of learner's IL (interlanguage) system. Traditional grammar instruction and drill, in contrast, do little at this level of processes, and therefore only have minimal effect on the developing system. The pedagogical inference of PI, in my opinion, is that *teachers should and can direct students' attention directly to linguistic forms*, which are dismissed by traditional communicative language teaching. Although **PI** is focused on linguistic forms, it does

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not fall into the framework of structure-based language teaching. It is rather a supplement to the communicative language teaching approach.

Third, regarding **output**, even though many researchers argue that teachers cannot alter the developing system and change the way learners access, control and monitor their developing system, I still believe that *traditional structure-based language teaching techniques can play a positive role here*. Chinese is more typologically distant from English than other European languages, and a certain amount of repetition and drilling are necessary to automate the correct form in output. This idea dovetails with traditional Chinese educational philosophy that meaning of words will emerge if one repeats them hundreds of times. That's probably why structure-based language teaching philosophy dominates and dictates Chinese teaching.

I think I have always been trying to "bridge" the gap between the two competing language teaching approaches and go eclectic, but the more I think about it, the more **I would identify my teaching philosophy with communicative language teaching, but with a strong focus on structures and forms**. No matter what approach I use, my ultimate goal as a classroom teacher is to 1) *understand students' learning processes and needs* 2) *master a large repertoire of teaching skills and techniques that will come in handy when I need to address different students' different needs*.

Hence, in my own classroom, you will see me use a wide range of teaching methods. I vary forms of input a lot---you will see me use visual and audio aids in addition to traditional textbooks; you will also see me use authentic materials to supplement textbooks; I haven't abandoned traditional grammar drills and explanations completely, because I know they can serve for a good purpose and I have found them extremely useful at the level of learners' working memory. But more often, you will see me implement a task-based language teaching. By finishing a language task collectively or individually in the classroom, the students will not only achieve communicative purposes, but will also attend to the forms and structures of the language that are necessary for successful communication. As for PI, given that there is little pedagogical implementation and application out there, I feel that it is where I can go beyond my own classroom and contribute to the second language teaching and research in general.

References:

VanPatten, B., & Sanz, C. (1995). From input to output : processing instruction and communicative tasks. In F. Eckman et al. (Eds.), *Second language acquisition theory and pedagogy*, (pp. 169-185). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Statement of My Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy has evolved from my experience as both a second language student and teacher. When creating curricula, reminding myself of what it is like to learn a second language is uppermost in my mind. I remember how intimidating it can be to communicate in class, how challenging it can be to use newly learned vocabulary and grammar accurately, and how important I feel it is to be corrected. As a result, creating a comfortable and non-threatening learning environment, teaching appropriate usage of vocabulary and grammar, and providing consistent error correction are the foundation of my teaching beliefs.

The more comfortable and involved students feel, the more likely they are to take risks and become active participants in class activities. Treating students with respect by truly listening to them and by tapping into their prior knowledge can give them the self-confidence they need to speak up. Our students come to us with lots of information and life experience, and bringing this to the foreground can give them confidence to communicate about this knowledge in English. This empowers students and hopefully establishes trust in the classroom. By providing a variety of classroom activities and presenting material through different kinds of media the amount of student participation will increase as various learner styles are being targeted.

When creating a thematic unit, it is necessary to consider not only activity variety but also the linguistic tools that are required to communicate about this topic. A successful lesson has a natural flow of activities that introduce and recycle new lexical items and structures in all skill areas, so that students feel confident about the words and forms they need to discuss a topic. Furthermore, students need opportunities to go beyond the form of the language and delve into appropriate usage. Variety is not just for variety's sake, but has been proven to help students learn more than just lists of words but true control of the language. For example, when teaching new verbs, it is helpful to provide students with the appropriate prepositions that follow certain verbs or point out if a verb is transitive so that students know this verb always needs to be followed by a noun phrase. When teaching new nouns, it is useful to generate a list of common adjectives that precede these nouns. While native speakers understand the phrase "a high person or a high building" this is not native speaker usage, so students need to be taught that we say

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“tall person or a tall building” when referring to height. Therefore, I believe in teaching vocabulary in “chunks” rather than isolated words; providing students with these appropriate collocations will increase their ability to share their opinions with confidence.

In my opinion, fluency goes hand in hand with accuracy. Rambling on at length does not make a person proficient in a foreign language. Accuracy is just as important as fluency. Therefore, students need to be consistently given feedback in some form in order to learn to self-correct and become more accurate. Different types of activities, however, call for varied forms of error correction. In a guided classroom discussion, error correction can be immediate, but if a student is giving a presentation, it might be best to give feedback at the end so as not to interrupt the fluency of the activity.

Learning to be proficient in a second language takes effort on the part of the teacher and students. Teaching is an ongoing learning process and the longer I teach, the more I realize I can learn from my students as well as my colleagues. At this point in my career, I believe that creating a comfortable and non-threatening classroom environment, teaching appropriate usage of grammar and vocabulary, and providing consistent feedback is essential to teaching effectively.

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher of German language and culture, my goal is to help students understand that "learning German" means accomplishing tasks and goals using language: negotiating, questioning, playing, collecting and interpreting information. Writing is a tool for expressing meaningful ideas and reading a means of getting information, increasing knowledge, questioning, interpreting, and growing. I want my students to learn strategies and reasons for communicating in interpretational, interactive, and presentational modes.

In order to achieve these goals, my primary tasks are

- To apply methods that enable each student to use German from his/her entry point toward acceptable and attainable goals,
- To recognize student strengths in order to build confidence, and
- To assess each student's German language capability in a clear, fair, ongoing process.

Since there are as many ways of learning as there are students, I try to continue to review and update traditional methods, for example, most recently by:

- Supplementing multiple-stage essay assignments with peer-writing conferences and holistic grading,
- Encouraging mini-presentations in small groups that allow students to rehearse, give each other feedback and increase overall production and comprehension,
- Introducing more reading and reading strategies from elementary German onwards,
- Developing pedagogically sound uses of new technology supporting primary skills and encouraging inquiry and lifelong learning (Wimba, Websearch, Courseworks),
- Using portfolio evaluations beginning at the intermediate level, and
- Individualizing language support to advanced students so that "bridge courses" really lead to successful communicators.

Whether beginners are trying to master the basics of the German gender system and build logical responses to simple personal questions, or intermediate students are discovering links between fairytales, Romanticism, and the Greens, or potential majors in "Berlin: Past and Present" are honing structures while interpreting the city's subway system or multicultural politics or poetry, my role is informed by the same basic principles:

- I teach German language and culture to my students *in German*.
- My classroom aims to be student-oriented.
- My approach to teaching and language acquisition is a functional one in which students apply German to learn German.
- Becoming functional in a foreign language requires years of practice, and I set expectations accordingly.
- Assessment using rubrics, models, and feedback needs to be applied at all levels to help students to progress and to keep track of my teaching effectiveness.
- It's essential to remain flexible and open to new developments and to build on time-proven principles of teaching.

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American Language Program
February 18, 2009

Statement about teaching

The first English class I ever taught was a group of low-intermediate students in the ALP's intensive program. Fresh from graduate school in linguistics, I had no language teaching experience nor any background in pedagogy or second language acquisition. My level leader (who taught half of the class' 16 hours per week) met with me the Friday before my first class and suggested that I teach the modal verbs of ability, *can* and *can't*. There was no textbook, but I was not concerned, since I knew what modal verbs were. I first decided that if teaching one modal was good, teaching all the modals would be even better. I then set about preparing an elegant, three dimensional model of the semantic fields of English modals, with each modal arrayed along one of the intersecting axes. In class, I explained my analysis, gradually reproducing the three-dimensional model on the blackboard. At the end of class, I asked if there were any questions. No one said anything, and I felt gratified that everyone had understood.

My level leader observed that class, and we met afterwards. Looking back on our meeting, I still marvel at her kindness and tact. She did not say, as she could have, that not one student had understood my analysis and that not one student had spoken a word. Rather, she suggested that teaching only *can* and *can't* would have allowed the students to actually use English and then showed me the ALP's picture files, which included pictures of people engaged in a variety of activities. I saw immediately how students could use those pictures to practice *can* and *can't*; it also made sense to me that in a language class, the students should use the language.

That class and that meeting began a long and continuing learning journey for me. My teachers have been my students, my colleagues, and faceless researchers who study how second languages are learned. Sometimes they teach me different facets of the same lesson.

One teaching issue that I became immediately aware of is the need for language students to be actively engaged in classroom activities. At the ALP, most teachers plan several classes around a central topic which is developed through materials from a variety of media (readings, listenings, videos). The vocabulary and language structures come from those materials, and all language skills are practiced in the context of the topic. Because the topic continues over several classes, there is a recycling and reinforcement of the targeted vocabulary and language features, which promotes learning and retention. Student interactions also lead to involvement with English. The students in an ALP class typically come from several countries, and the exchange of different cultural perspectives on an issue is often as interesting to students as the issue itself. This interest leads to more participation, which leads to more practice, which leads to greater learning. The series of classes culminates in a writing assignment on the topic; after spending several classes exploring the topic through a variety of materials and discussions and after working with vocabulary and language features relevant to the topic, students have something to say and the tools to say it.

A second issue that was not apparent to me after that first class was the role of error correction in developing accuracy (no errors, of course, could have occurred in my first class

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because no students spoke). High levels of accuracy, as well as high levels of fluency, are crucial goals for most ALP students, who plan either to attend a U.S. university or to use English in a professional capacity. Research suggests that fluency will not develop without substantial use of the language for real communication; on the other hand, spontaneous speech, the most natural form of real communication, is likely to be the least accurate. In the classroom, the two goals may seem to be at odds: when the teacher directs students' attention to their errors, there will be some interruption of activities that promote fluency. I have been lucky to observe a range of techniques that my colleagues at the ALP use for error correction and have learned much from them. Research on second language acquisition also provides insights. Some features of language are learned in stages that apparently cannot be skipped. My students, for example, will first learn to pronounce the English TH sounds when they occur at the beginning of a word (*think* or *then*), next in the middle of a word (*author*, *other*), and finally at the end of a word (*bath*, *breathe*). With beginning students, I draw attention to mispronunciations of TH at the beginnings of words (*think*) and am less concerned with mispronunciations in other positions. With more advanced students, the focus shifts. Not all features of language, however, proceed in stages, "fixing themselves" as learning progresses. The omission of the 3rd singular present -s ending (*he plays*), for example, is an extremely common error among ESL students at all levels and may only improve through (relentless) on-the-spot error correction. More generally, research also suggests that students should be familiar with the teacher's approach to error correction and that error correction should be limited to structures that can be corrected quickly and whose rules are well-understood by the student.

These are two facets of teaching that I have learned since that first class. But there is much more. I've learned about the world from students who come from all of its corners and share their views over the course of a semester. They frequently reveal to me stereotypes I was not aware I had and possibilities I had never considered. I also learn as I research materials for new lessons: about global population trends; about parallels and contrasts between Gilded Age capitalists and those of today; about why the mental rocket ship of humans took off while that of the other great apes remains on the launching pad. And finally, each day reveals more to me about the magnificence and mysteries of human language, the subject that brought me into graduate school. There is no complete grammar of any living language. My students remind me of this when they ferret out some usage in English I had never thought about and ask, "Why does English do X in this context but Y in another?" I sometimes have to say, "I don't know, I'll look it up." I search every available reference, including an old 7-volume English grammar of remarkable detail; I ask my colleagues. And it is no longer a surprise when I cannot find a clear answer, only the shared intuitions of native speakers that "this is the way it is in English." These quests and discoveries, the product of the current that flows between teaching and learning, motivate and invigorate me. They make teaching an adventure, with the risks and rewards of any good adventure.

I still have days when my lessons fall flat, when I wonder whether my efforts have an impact on student accuracy. My teaching beliefs and practices continue to change as I continue to learn from students, colleagues and other language professionals. Although I know that I am a better teacher than I was on the day when I taught the entire modal system to an uncomprehending first class, observed by an astonished but kind level leader, I know that the day will never come when I say I have nothing left to learn, no improvements left to make.

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Excerpts from Teaching Philosophies from Other Universities p.1

One of the first French instructors at UVa to use computer technology in the classroom, I now routinely design and incorporate video and web-based activities in my classes in order to hone students' growing language skills and to expose them to the diverse and complex French-speaking world. I find that my students not only enjoy experiencing French through technology but that they also engage with the material more effectively. Activities that use authentic French language web sites spark students' curiosity: they return on their own time to peruse the virtual collections at the Louvre, read about traveling in Morocco, or look up the current number one song in France. I believe that new media technology is a powerful tool that both students and teachers of foreign language should be encouraged to explore. To that end, I give frequent workshops on the usefulness of instructional technology to my colleagues in French and in other foreign language departments. <http://www.carolynfay.com/portfolio/philosophy>

I keep a very extensive library of German literature and language materials from which I continually draw upon to supplement the required textbook and I create many materials from clipart and original drawings illustrating principles and meanings of concepts and words from the curriculum. . . . To see that students receive as much authentic input as possible, I ask them to keep a weekly lab journal. I accept a wide variety of experiences in fulfillment of their lab requirement: German movies; news broadcasts (Deutsche Welle on TV, 1470 AM radio, and Internet); computer assisted language learning (CALL) programs; German lyric music; radio plays; etc. These experiences offer context rich target language input. Students exercise metalinguistic learning strategies when they record the instances of their understanding and the sources of their confusion. <http://webgerman.com/caplan/Portfolio/Caplan/statement5.htm>

This does not mean that there is no room for grammar in my classes, especially — in the case of U.S. students learning Spanish or Portuguese — when we are dealing with topics that are particularly difficult for English speakers such as “ser/estar,” “por/para,” the preterit/imperfect, the subjunctive, etc. In class, I make a point of answering concisely any grammar questions my students may have by way of examples in context, always using the target language. If the students do not have any questions, then I make sure they understand the assigned grammar points by engaging them in short conversations using the structures under study, going over their homework, or by giving them a short quiz. That is the time — when the focus is primarily on grammatical accuracy — when I correct any errors or doubts they may have. When engaged in a conversation in the target language with a student, I never try to correct grammatical errors explicitly, unless the errors make his or her message unintelligible. If that is the case, I try to correct the student with “sympathetic feedback,” by responding in a positive and supportive way to him or her and rephrasing correctly what he or she has said. <http://www.sedycias.com/teachingp.htm>

In my classes I tend to involve the students in activities that require their active participation and efforts in discovering how the language works. It would be much easier to provide the students with simple, easy to follow rules and expect them to memorize them. On the contrary, I expect the students to work the rules out for themselves in order to construct a solid system upon which they can rely in order to become competent and independent speakers/writers in the foreign language (Warschauer and Meskill). In other words, a constructivist approach is what I favor, whereby the learner first observes, then makes hypotheses about the language, then tests his/her hypotheses and finally draws conclusions. For this reason, it is extremely important to engage the students in meaningful tasks that require them to solve a problem, in this case of a linguistic nature (Jonassen, Howland, Moore and Marra, p 20). Fore example, when I want to introduce the *passato prossimo*, i.e. the past tense, in Italian I start with a PowerPoint presentation about my summer vacation. The use of pictures, written words and spoken commentary helps students grasp how the *passato prossimo* is formed and used. Later they are encouraged to analyze the instances provided and formulate hypotheses about the new verb tense. <http://academic.udayton.edu/VitoBrondolo/philosophy.html>

I believe a Japanese language class works the best when it turns into a learning community. A learning community will not be built just because people gather in one place. Hence, a teacher needs to create a classroom with the atmosphere of spirit, safety, and mutual respect intentionally to make a cohesive group. With this in mind, I often adopt activities to facilitate interaction between learners in pairs or groups, thereby making opportunities for self-expression and peer-scaffolding. I sometimes have students move around in class, changing seats and partners so students can know about each other and learn from various perspectives. In a cohesive language classroom, learners can effectively learn not from a teacher but even from their peers. http://www2.hawaii.edu/~yukikoy/teaching_philosophy.html

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Excerpts from Teaching Philosophies from Other Universities p.2

I thoroughly enjoy being an instructor of a heritage language because I get to play an active roll helping my students discover and make connections with their ancestry and to develop their cultural identity as well. . . . Language can never be separated from the context of culture, specifically within a heritage language learning environment. A majority of my students come with various experiences and perceptions of Norway from their experience in Norwegian-America. My role is to affirm their past experience with the heritage culture, to refresh their memory by constantly having them apply their knowledge, but also to expand their background knowledge. I believe that authentic cultural contexts and connections deepens language acquisition. <http://www.stolaf.edu/people/lie/philos.html>

Teaching is an exciting adventure in which both the teacher and the students participate. Learning means questioning and repositioning. That is why I refrain from pure lecturing, even when I have large undergraduate classes like in Arabic 372 (Modern Arabic Literature in Translation). In this course, which attracts a large number of students from various disciplines, I work hard to kindle a spark of intellectual curiosity to stimulate their interest and get them genuinely involved in the process of learning. Students are urged to actively participate in the class in several ways. Every student, for example, is asked to give a class presentation followed by lively discussion. This experience, often dreaded by students, has proved to be beneficial not only as a learning endeavor, but also as an activity which enhances the students' self confidence and helps them far beyond the scope of class. http://ucatsu.edu/teaching_portfolio/philosophy/zeidan_phil.html

I consider teaching to be a learning activity. Interactions with my students and their questions often lead to valuable insights and better understanding of some linguistic problems. In addition, I reflect upon my teaching evaluations every semester and make notes on my students' experiences in class. Occasionally, I make modifications of the course taking into account students' commentaries or their requests. For example, in one of my classes students had problems with participles and gerunds in Russian, and although it was not a part of our curriculum we spent some time reviewing and practicing formation and usage of these constructions. <http://web.gsc.edu/fs/othomason/personal%20info/personal%20info.htm>

The students are, of course, the real purpose for the existence of institutions of higher learning. Several years ago, I made an observation that firmly cemented this notion for me: in Italian, the verb "to teach," *insegnare*, is a dative verb, meaning that it requires an indirect object; you teach something *to someone*. Put simply, at its core teaching is an act of communication between two human beings. It is fundamentally an interpersonal interaction between someone who has dedicated her / his life to study (i.e., the professor) and those who have just embarked on that journey (i.e., the students). . . . Teaching is really about connecting with the students, about making the sometimes arcane material relevant to them and their lives. Instruction requires inspiring interest in the material, whether by illustrating its complexity or by discussing its applicability. It is about demonstrating that what occurs in the classroom during a semester is only a small part of a life-long interest in a topic. However it may be manifested, only when the connection between intelligent human beings takes place in a classroom does the profession of teaching take on a deeper significance. <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~alfie/philosophy.dwt>

In my quest to develop independent thinkers, I also strive to promote cross-cultural awareness and appreciation. A native of Argentina, I try to bring as much of my culture into the classroom as possible. For example, students are introduced to Argentina's national drink, el mate, and learn the ritual way to enjoy it as a group, drinking from the same vessel using the same straw. I represent only one person from my country, however, and for this reason I have turned to technology to allow students to experience other aspects of my culture for themselves. I developed a WebQuest activity . . . to let the students become responsible for their own education and interact with the Argentine culture via the internet. With less reliance on me the teacher and more emphasis on group participation and collaboration, the WebQuest allows the students to come up with their own questions and conclusions about the culture as they navigate online chats with live Argentines, read current newspapers, and listen to popular music, all of their own choice. At the end of the quarter, students role play a skit, imitating a traditional Argentine family using the knowledge and understanding they have accrued with their own critical thinking. The results are often amazing, showing a unique perspective of my culture that I can always recognize as my own. http://ucatsu.edu/teaching_portfolio/philosophy/ruggiero.html

Teaching Statement

Background

I was born in France, educated in three different countries (France, Ireland and the United States) and my experience with the teaching of French spans over 18 years. After having completed a dissertation in French literature at Yale University, I taught as a Lecturer in the Modern Languages Department at Carnegie Mellon University. I joined the Department of French and Romance Philology at Columbia University as a full-time lecturer in the fall of 2007. So far, I have taught French at the intermediate and advanced levels of the undergraduate curriculum.

Goals

In each of my classes, I have tried my best to carry out the following goals:

Provide language proficiency to our students by using a communicative approach and placing the student at the center of the classroom. Whatever level I teach, my classes have as the primary goal accuracy in oral, aural, reading and writing skills. My in-class settings are highly interactive, with emphasis on speaking and listening, and engagement in student-centered activities, often involving work in pairs or small groups.

To give an example from my Intermediate French I class, instead of “teaching” the vocabulary for travels to my students, I ask them to bring and describe pictures of their own vacations. The personalization of the exercise results in a lively discussion in class where I am practically removed from the conversation except for occasional interventions to provide feedback on the use of the grammatical point of the day or to rephrase a student’s sentence if it was not understandable to other students.

For that exercise (as for many others), I rely on modeling. The night before the exercise, I send an example of my own vacation (a picture with a short description using the new vocabulary and grammar) so students can apply it in their own paragraphs. The reproduction of models gives students self-confidence in their learning: they rely on their own intelligence, not my explanations.

Excel pedagogically through close personal contact and interaction with students. My students know that I am always available whether via e-mail or in person in my office. In class, I try to assess the students’ four language skills as quickly as possible not only to see if they are in the right class level but also in order to focus on the skills they need to develop. In order for my students to track their progress, I post their grades on Courseworks by mid-semester, and I send them their average grade along with comments on what to improve for the rest of the semester. Although I am not practicing differentiation *per se* in my classrooms, I do demand more from stronger students in their compositions for instance, or modify an assignment for a weaker student. Close personal interaction means also circulating between groups during pair group activities (instead of staying at my desk) in order to give feedback and assess level.

Emphasize critical issues related to language and cultural analysis. At all levels, classes should provide students with an in-depth study of the French-speaking world through the study of cultural phenomena and through language itself. For instance in my intermediate I class, while reading an excerpt of Georges Pérec’s *Deux cent quarante-trois cartes postales en*

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couleurs véritables, my students rightly noticed how the cards were all signed off with “Baisers” when their English counterpart would show “Love”. This simple remark sparked a conversation on how the French describe the act of love whereas the Americans state the feeling itself. This was a small yet noticeable moment of cultural awareness.

Incorporate appropriate technologies in our teaching. In their evaluations, students often mention their appreciation for the variety of media and cultural documents. Although a good class doesn’t always depend on technology, the use of films, songs, newspapers, TV programs and pertinent internet sites not only diversifies the rhythm of the course but, mostly, it offers a broader and more authentic image of a given culture.

Expose students to diverse cultures and develop mutual understanding among the world’s peoples. I try to serve as a link between students, their community and the Francophone world. As often as I can, I entice my students to attend French cultural events at our outside Columbia. A recent example: Each spring, a preparatory class from France comes to New York City. The professor who organizes the journey, M. Albert, asks Lecturers from the Department of French to welcome his students in their classes. This year I decided to organize mini-groups and asked my students to prepare questions for the French visitors related to the topic of the day. The experience went better than anticipated. That same night, my students went out with the visitors and came back the following Monday with plans to study in Paris. I am aware that my classes will never be able to reproduce an authentic French or Francophone experience, but if I can just expose my students to something different and encourage them to study abroad, then I have done my job as a teacher; for they will come back enriched with a truly humanistic education.

Curriculum Development

Elementary Level: French Online

Before coming to Columbia in the fall 2007, I was a lecturer at Carnegie Mellon University where I taught, developed and co-authored the French Online project (<http://www.cmu.edu/oli/courses/french/index.shtml>) which received the 2007 Access to Language Education Award for best publicly available on-line instructional materials for language. French Online is a two-semester course at the elementary level. It is web-based and can be adapted for a blended learning and teaching system (in class and/or on-line). Hallmarks of the course include a highly interactive presentation of French language and culture, and a media-rich course environment including new video shot in France with professional actors. French Online is now being used institutionally at many institutions such as the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, and University of Michigan.

Intermediate level: French for SIPA (W1201)

In fall 2008, I taught and developed an intermediate French I class targeted to students of the School of International Public Affairs (see the syllabus in sample materials). This class sets the same linguistic goals as its traditional counterpart. However, more than just adding a SIPA “flavor” to it, I organized the topics and the vocabulary around what the students needed after I asked them in class what their concentration and interests were. Unfortunately a French manual for SIPA students does not exist. What I did instead was to adapt *Sur le vif*, the manual we use in our regular Intermediate French I class, to SIPA themes and offer supplementary vocabulary. For instance, I taught chapter 9 first (on international affairs) in conjunction with

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chapter 1 (Studies) to give my students the necessary vocabulary to talk about their area of studies and future work plans. For chapter 5 on travels, we focused on Africa, which was the students' main area of interest; I eliminated chapter 7 on fairy tales. Instead, we spent more time on chapter 6 (media) and chapter 8 (family). Students did presentations on problems within the media for chapter 6 and we read extensively on gender roles and human rights in chapter 8. I also modified tests and compositions' subjects to accommodate SIPA students who are generally more professionalized (see example of exam in sample materials).

Plans for the coming three-year term

Introducing and teaching French Online to Columbia

I am very much looking forward to teaching more classes at all levels in order to have a good grasp of the articulation of the French undergraduate program in my department and to extend my field of knowledge and competences. I would also like to introduce and teach French Online to the Columbia community. Years of experience teaching French Online at Carnegie Mellon have shown me that the most successful students for this web-environment are graduate students and independent learners who have a strong motivation to learn French and who are comfortable with technology. That is why I think French Online might appeal to the mature public of the School of Journalism, the Law School, the Business School or the School of General Studies and/or Continuing Education.

Teaching Philosophy Statement

Laura Hahn

My philosophy of teaching is based on my understanding of how people learn. I believe that people learn best when they connect, engage, express, and enjoy:

- Connect Learning happens when students can connect new ideas with old, and when they can connect the new concepts and skills to their lives and to contexts that are relevant to them.
- Engage Learning happens when students get dynamically involved with the content; recycle and review material on a regular basis; and explicitly develop strategies to learn in ways that best suit them as individuals.
- Express Learning happens when students create their own interpretations of the material; engage in cooperative-learning activities with others; and have opportunities to express their own personalities, values, and ideas.
- Enjoy Learning happens when students enjoy the learning process. Humor, enthusiasm, and strong group rapport contribute to enjoyment.

Therefore my teaching philosophy entails finding ways to foster these processes in the curricula, syllabi, lesson plans, and materials I develop. Following are some examples of how I do that.

In order to help students make connections, it is important for me to understand who they are and what their needs are. I get to know them as individuals, and try to provide topics, assignments, and examples relevant to their contexts and needs. I also help students connect with the material by organizing it (in the syllabus, lesson plans, and materials) in a logical and cohesive way. This helps students relate new ideas and skills to structures they already have.

In order to help students get engaged, I develop activities that get them to use the material, rather than simply listen to it. Through writing, talking, drawing, creating charts, solving problems, etc., students strengthen and deepen their skills and knowledge. In the classroom, it is also important for me to provide students with a great deal of practice material and feedback. Reviewing and recycling are crucial to learning, and in many cases I prefer to “do more with less,” rather than covering many things at a superficial level. I also try to teach inductively whenever possible. When students are engaged in discovering a pattern or a principle rather than having it explained to them, not only do they remember it better, but they also see the logic or the problem-solving process behind the concept, which can foster metacognition and independent learning.

In order to help students express themselves, I provide assignments and activities that allow them to practice verbalizing and demonstrating what they know – and the process is just as important as the product. I value providing a variety (individual and group, speaking and writing, etc.) of these activities and assessment techniques in order

to accommodate different learning styles. However, I do favor informal group work that encourages students to explain things to each other. I also prefer projects rather than pencil-and-paper tests because they can allow students to become involved with the subject in more creative ways. Of course, second- and foreign-language classes are ideal venues for personal expression, because so many practice activities can encourage students to describe and explore their own personalities, styles, and lives. In other classes I teach this is more of a challenge, and often happens on a more informal basis.

In order to help students enjoy learning, I develop a positive classroom environment. I would describe my classrooms as informal and relaxed – places where students are comfortable asking questions and getting to know me and other students (this can only happen when I model respect and authenticity). I use humor whenever possible, provide a great deal of positive reinforcement, continually show my passion for the subject matter – from the intriguing details to the ‘big ideas’ and ‘big questions’ the subject addresses. My students in my applied phonology classes hear personal stories and jokes about pronunciation mis-steps, get updates on developments in the field, and even laugh about my ‘schwa’ key-chain. I love inspiring students to consider how exciting a field of academic inquiry can be (whether or not it is phonology!).

Beyond these four dimensions, there are other, perhaps broader, components of effective teaching that I value:

Knowledge of the subject matter. I have high standards for myself in this regard. It helps me to prioritize content, develop clear explanations, and foresee potential problems students may have in learning.

Knowledge of theories, approaches, and principles for teaching in the discipline. It is important to be aware of how the content and skills in a discipline are learned. While this ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ is standard in the field of language teaching, there is some tension over a perceived gap between theory (and theorists) and practice (and practitioners). I believe this gap can be narrowed through increased communication, creative ways of helping teachers connect theory and practice, and use of meaningful research methods to investigate the ‘realities’ of teachers and students in the classroom.

Professionalism. Effective instructors pursue opportunities for professional development. They can keep up with new ideas in their field, attend professional conferences, keep teaching journals, and solicit feedback from their students and peers. They know their strengths and weaknesses. Effective instructors also maintain ethical standards in their teaching. They are fair, honest, responsible, and maintain high standards.

In writing this philosophy I am struck by the interrelatedness of components I have incorporated into my philosophy. For example, when I use active learning exercises to help students think, I also get feedback about them as learners, which I use to modify further lessons and materials to better suit their needs. Professional development endeavors spark my enthusiasm for teaching, which contributes to a positive classroom environment. These interconnections reflect the rich, complex, and challenging nature of teaching.



Errol M. O'Neill
STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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The uniqueness of the student-teacher relationship, particularly in the field of second language learning, lies in the fact that its dynamics are constantly evolving. It's a cliché to say that every student is unique; it is safe to say that every teacher is as well. What I have come to realize though is that what matters most in the teacher-student relationship is how students and teachers change each other, learning and growing together as a course progresses.

I believe that first and foremost, teachers must establish a relationship with their students that strikes a balance between professionalism and a personal touch. If students are going to get anything meaningful out of a course, they need to feel that they themselves are meaningful to the teacher. Once the proper tone is set for the class, then class management issues can become secondary to the main goal of the class: facilitating students' learning of the target language and culture(s). A delicate balance must be struck so that students both respect the teacher and their peers while maintaining their interest and active participation in the class.

At the beginning of each semester, I ask students to fill out an index card with information about their previous studies and interests not only for administrative reasons, but also so I can get to know them better. Throughout the semester, I tailor activities and contexts as much as possible based on what interests students in the course. This can range from including sample sentences that mention the past weekend's basketball game, to having a class discussion about films they've seen, to a more in-depth comparison of how their university life in the U.S. compares to that in France.

Nearly every semester I've taught, I've made an activity that focuses specifically on the interests of the students. For example, for a first semester French course, I do an activity where students talk about their favorite activities. For this, I list for each section I teach all of the activities students wrote down on their information cards to supplement the vocabulary in the textbook. This way, they can talk about hobbies, sports, and other interests that they enjoy the most and compare them with activities their classmates do. This serves as a good exercise in describing preferences with infinitives and definite articles while also being enjoyable for students to have a list of expressions that is personalized to their class and which they can use to communicate not only for the current semester, but beyond.

When activities are designed with students' preferences in mind, I still make it clear, either explicitly or through example, that the goal of the exercise is to practice numbers, use the subjunctive, compare cultural attitudes, etc. This way students can see that it is possible to accomplish the general goal of learning the target language or culture (the more business-like side of the equation) while still discussing things of

interest to students (the more personal side), and that the two actually are quite compatible.

In my opinion, the personal-professional balance also must be kept in communications outside the classroom. I always make it a point during class and at the end of emails I send out, whether to individual students or to the class, to let them know they can contact me with any questions or problems, not only in office hours but online as well (via email or Twitter for example). I also keep a detailed archive online every semester of sheets and important course information for students to access on my site, <http://autrefois.org>, allowing them to check up on important sheets or exercises they may have missed while absent (and thus having them take responsibility for obtaining these materials and keeping up-to-date with what they missed before their return).

An important aspect of the professional side of the teacher-student relationship is allowing for a variety of different learner styles and preferences. I personally believe that the majority of students get the most out of interactive exercises in class such as pair or group work, but I am also aware of the fact that some students are more comfortable or feel they get more out of individual exercises as well. I try to balance every lesson with a combination of self-practice and work with partners. Similarly, a typical day's activities vary from more discrete-point practice of forms to more open-ended discussions. I try to include culture whenever possible as part of the vocabulary or grammar activities we do. The exact balance is not set in stone, and throughout the semester I can gauge which types of activities students prefer in a given class and incorporate these more when possible.

This leads into what I feel is one of my strengths, my adaptability both in class and across semesters. Even though I write detailed lesson plans, I can adjust activities based on how well students are doing or any questions they have. If I see that some students are having a harder-than-expected time with a particular form, we will do more additional practice such as more manipulative exercises to help them get the grammar point down. If they pick up very quickly on a given structure, we will spend more time on open-ended activities I've prepared or from elsewhere in the textbook. I frequently include relevant asides on the spot; for example if the subject of cats come up and students have not learned the word for cat yet, I might talk about my family's cat and draw a stick figure of a cat on the board so students get the idea. I also adapt my lessons across semesters and very rarely use the exact same lesson plan twice. I often write grammar sheets of my own to supplement the explanations in the textbook and constantly revise them based on what seems to work best or what might be better tailored to student needs.

I learn a lot from my students in terms of what they as second language learners are thinking and what helps them understand the material better. I believe that this combination of striving for adaptability and striking a balance between professionalism and a personal touch in my teaching help define how I view myself as a teacher. No two classes I've ever taught have been the same—different students have different needs and different preferences. The more I teach, the more I feel I've learned about teaching, and the more I want to learn about teaching. I don't think there is such a thing as a perfect teacher—in order to be effective, teachers must also constantly be learners. Teaching is learning how to build a relationship with students in a given class in order to create an environment where they are most willing and best able to learn.