

## ***Teaching Philosophy***

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From my experience as both a tutor and teacher, I have noticed that learning is enhanced when it is personal and intimate. In the classroom, I seek to make learning personal, in that students find the material engaging and relevant to their lives; and intimate, such that students feel comfortable enough to ask questions and communicate what they do not understand. It is also important to be adaptive in the classroom, so that learning can be made personal and intimate as often as possible. Given students' different learning styles and responses to material, I try to be flexible in the classroom to meet the learning needs of all my students.

The ways in which learning is made personal depends on the type of material being covered. In language classes, for example, culture can be incorporated to make learning interesting, fun and engaging. In these classes, I request that students submit personal information regarding their interests at the beginning of the semester. This allows me to tailor certain activities around the topics that interest them most. For example, when many students in my classes have been interested in music, I have played popular Latin and Spanish music and created activities that focus students' attention to certain cultural or grammatical elements. In fact, I always incorporate music into language classes at opportune moments throughout the course because most students enjoy music and can relate to it. On one occasion when many of my students were majoring in business, I had students work in groups to propose business models for a new restaurant in State College. This allowed the students to talk about different types of food as well as about business topics relevant to them in Spanish, offering them excellent communicative practice that they enjoyed. I also incorporate culture in the classroom by sharing and making activities from my own experiences abroad, and I encourage others who have gone abroad to discuss their experiences as well. I do this because I have noticed that students find cultural descriptions more meaningful when they include or are accompanied by concrete, first-hand accounts.

In linguistics courses, given that concepts can seem abstract and difficult in early stages, it is important to not overwhelm students, but to show that language is interesting in ways that most students have never imagined. For this reason, linguistic courses must also be made personal and relevant to students. This can be done by helping students find relationships between the material and their own linguistic experiences. For example, when discussing the idea of grammaticality in language in an introductory course on Hispanic linguistics, I once pointed out to the students, since most of them were from Pennsylvania, that some of them say *something needs to be done* while others say *something needs done*. This incited much interest among the students about their dialects and helped them grasp the otherwise confusing concept of grammaticality.

For learning to take place, in addition to finding material interesting and relevant, students must feel comfortable enough to ask questions and speak up when something is not clear. This requires an intimate learning experience in which students believe the teacher has a genuine interest in their learning. For this reason, I promote a relaxed atmosphere and encourage discussion in my classes. I also utilize small-group activities so that students can learn from one another. The use of small-group activities also allows me to give students more individualized attention, as I have noticed that many students will not ask questions to the whole class but will in small groups. Addressing students in small groups, however, does not offer them one-on-one attention, so I encourage students to see me outside of class when they need help. One semester, I specifically met with a second-semester Spanish student in my office the Sunday evening before an exam. I was able to clarify a lot of the material that he did not understand, and he continued to utilize my help and do well in the course. In the end, he thanked me for my help and for my interest in his learning success.

In the future, I will use new teaching experiences to continue to adapt to students' learning needs and to implement the tenants mentioned above in new ways. For example, I want to integrate the use of instant messaging in my office hours so that students can contact me in a way with which they are likely more comfortable. As a teacher, I am most gratified when I know that my students feel confident about what they have learned and are eager to learn more. Consequently, I will strive to incorporate these strategies in all courses I teach, be them lower or higher level language courses, or courses in linguistics at the undergraduate or graduate level.