Philosophy of Teaching Statement

In the spirit of inquiry that informs academic scholarship, I envision the overarching goal of education and teaching to be that of encouraging a cyclic practice of reflective, learner focused pedagogy. I have absolute confidence in the belief that an interest in and questions about the way students learn best engenders the identification of dichotomies between assumptions and practice, which in turn results in pedagogical innovation.

As a teenager and younger adult, I was a national champion in cycling and a member of the pre-Olympic team, and there was a time that my competitive spirit made me feel as if I was better than anybody else due to my athletic performance. Now, hoping that I am more mature and a little bit wiser, I want to urge my students to compete against their best selves, and constantly beseech that better self and behavior. I have long realized that teaching is my true calling in life, and that physical well being and moderation in all aspects of life is a lesson that can be taught through physical education, in the form of physical activity, either in a gym or in the outdoors. I see Physical education as quintessential to education, and believe that it comprises the ultimate form of education and pedagogy.

Since growth does not happen automatically, everybody needs to be challenged so that they may become better and grow, and so my role as an educator is to contribute to this process through leading my students towards the pursuit of a perfect balance between their competencies or abilities and challenges from assigned tasks. Their objective should be to reach a status of self-actualization. Through the experiential learning cycle and through an understanding of the fundamentals about learning by experiencing I see an avenue full of potential for student learning.

I indefatigably try to become a better person through reflecting on the everyday lessons of life. There is not a day that passes by in which I fail to remind my self to ask this crucial question: “Would I enjoy being a student of my own teaching?” Hence, reflection in my teaching occurs effortlessly and constantly. I also see this process happening naturally, in the same way that learning is constructed by experience. I use Socrates’ dialectic method, in which I am trying to get to my point by posing questions to my students. A characteristic form of question that I pose is “Can you describe your feelings after the activity that you just experienced?”, or “In what ways can you apply this learning in your everyday life either in your other classes or outside the campus?” Another more specific question that I use is “What muscle groups in your body did you feel participating in the skill that you just practiced?” in a way to help my students conceptualize the movements kinesthetically. After posing each question, I always wait for at least (or even more) than 5 seconds, before moving on.

Updated January 25th, 2012
In this way, I am encouraging my students to not hesitate to think before answering and I also show them that I do respect them and care deeply about their answers. After the students respond, I usually reiterate what is being said, and then I also add some things that might have been omitted. Sometimes I will ask them to elaborate more on what they are answering, and in this way they are being challenged to go more in depth in whatever their argument may be.

Personal integrity, honesty, faith, love for scholarship, love for people, and love for life are among the values that drive my every day presence, behaviors and actions in this world.

Personal Credo:

“To constantly create a trusting environment where the teaching of the love of being active in life and the seeking of adventure and personal challenge may function as a channel through which the people I interact with may naturally flow towards experiential learning”.

The element of risk and adventure is essential in learning by doing, and this is something that I see inherent in my teaching style. Experiential learning theory defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the metamorphosis of experience. Therefore, knowledge stems from the combination of grasping and transforming experience. I believe that my teaching following the above theory has its intellectual origins in the experiential works of Dewey, and Piaget. Taken together, Dewey's philosophical pragmatism and Piaget’s cognitive-developmental epistemology form a unique perspective on learning and development. An example of experiential learning can be an instructional task that begins with a brief or a way to introduce the students to the activity that will follow (a short story on team dynamics), the activity itself which will be a challenge or a task that they will explore (Sherpa walk), and finally the debrief which will be the connection between what was learned from this experience and how this can be applied to the students' lives (headlines or think, pair, and share and group discussion on comments).

Assessment

But how do I know that (all) my students learned? Are they really achieving? I never believed in standardized tests, or in the traditional midterm and final exam. I always want to give many options to my students in order to both be challenged and accommodated in the best way possible for each one individually. Group work and presentations, individual assignments and projects, reflections on activities and
readings, application of learned objectives in practice and movie reviews are a representative sample of the assignments a student in my class may encounter.

Here is an example from a formative assessment in teaching the game of tennis. Rather than just looking at raw performance or numeric/quantitative outcomes, I will look at the student’s gains in performance or the performance of critical skills and the ability to engage in activity demonstrating an understanding of the game, its rules and tactics. An example of my philosophy for taking an online quiz, even if this might be in a multiple choice or true/false format, is the fact that I always allow two attempts -or even more in that matter, with instant feedback based on the response- so that the student can have the chance to learn from the experience of taking the quiz, even at the time of the exam, and even from a potential mistake during that time. This can still be a valuable learning experience! And I am always flexible with allowing time and opportunities for making up missed classes, assignments or exams. I just trust my students, and I can guarantee that if a teacher does that wholeheartedly, the students will trust him back!

The point is to never penalize a student, but exemplify paternal love and care for every student so that s/he may cultivate critical thinking skills and a critical consciousness. Compounding with a development of a level of personal and social responsibility, students can progress to their knowledge in the subject matter -sooner or later- together with the development of a special love for scholarship, the achievement of a balanced life among spirit, mind and body, a healthy lifestyle and a pursuit of excellence.

Personal Philosophy:

Loving life and being grateful for having endless possibilities to change everything by changing ourselves, loving others unconditionally, being empathetic, and modeling what I teach in order for the final outcome of my teaching to be the construction of learning as a social phenomenon, I see my mission as a visionary leader, a teacher educator and coach, a social servant who preaches and exemplifies the beauty of being active in spirit, mind, and body. I also see myself as one who motivates by encouraging people to reach their full potential through challenging themselves. This is best practiced while seizing every opportunity, in every moment of our lives as we learn by doing, fully experiencing the lessons of life in viewing this as a circular process.

Credo in Action (I strive to):

➢ Teach with the belief that there should be a more natural way to learn
➢ Lead by example and exemplify love for teaching and for the students

➢ Waken interest and kindle enthusiasm

➢ Share a common vision and the fact that learning can best happen through experience

➢ Seek the full potential out of everyone that I have the pleasure to interact with

➢ Show my students a path on which they will design their course and live fully and longer

➢ Establish a learning environment that is physically and emotionally safe for ALL

At the end of the day, no award or nomination for teaching excellence makes me more proud of my teaching outcomes and effectiveness than an honest thank you from a student who has appreciated physical activity and is led to engage in a physically active lifestyle and see her life change as a result of my class. Or the student who had serious fear of heights and was dreading anything that included climbing but was eventually able to climb all different routes within the climbing center and pursue a part time employment as a climbing instructor. These are the reasons why I feel that what I am doing is not just a task, let alone a profession. My teaching is a calling, my teaching is my life; it is social service, the enactment of pedagogy as a privilege for changing people’s lives.

Teachers... have to undergo a certain kind of formation of character and values so they become a kind of person to whom we are prepared to entrust the responsibilities of our health system, of our education system, of our souls and of the kind of justice we expect to see pursued in this society. And so a great deal of what’s involved in educating professionals is educating for character. And we all know that you could have the most skilled classroom teacher who understands their subject matter deeply. But if they are not a person of character, there’s something deeply deficient there. And so when we look at professions, we are looking at the challenge of teaching people to understand, to act, and to be integrated into a complex of knowing, doing and being.

-Shulman, 2005 (signature pedagogies)

"a teacher affects eternity—he can never tell where his influence stops."

-Henry Adams