Statement of Teaching Philosophy for Kurt Lindemann

I have always found comfort and security in the rituals of teaching and of university life in general, from the daily duties of structuring class lessons to the feeling of excitement that accompanies the start of each semester. Peter McLaren\(^1\) notes, though, that rituals performed in the classroom reproduce larger ideological systems of power.

Having taught a diverse range of students at both urban and rural universities and community colleges for the past 12 years, I have come to realize the utility in a performance of teaching that disrupts the ideological systems that reify the commodification of educational processes and the consumption of information within larger, more “corporate” interests. As a result, I have come to view teaching as: a collaborative process; a performed product; and a personal connection involving the creation of a community in which they feel safe and excited to reflexively engage class material.

**Collaborative Process**

To say that teaching is a *collaborative process* is to critically question power relations in the classroom. When teaching Advanced Critical Methods in Communication (COM 407), in which students are required to volunteer at local non-profit agencies while completing a qualitative study of organizational communication practices, I attempt to balance the standard practices for evaluating knowledge and skills (papers, quizzes, exams) with the experiential education practices of which David Thorton Moore\(^2\) writes,

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highlighting the ways we apply classroom theories to everyday practices at work. In class
discussions led by students, we talk about the fit of theory to practice and the ways in
which their experience is similar to and different from that which we read. Similarly,
after discussing their successful and unsuccessful classroom experiences, I will often ask
students to develop a grading rubric on which they think their class performance should
be judged. In these ways, the classroom rituals of activity and discussion are transformed
into liminal activities that lie somewhere in between the traditional discourse of learning
and students’ own unfiltered experience. Students, then, are prompted to become active
participants in the (co)creation of knowledge, a process that challenges traditional power
relations while still prompting them to critically engage class material.

Performed Product

Teaching is nothing, however, if not a practical consideration of how to get and
keep students’ attention long enough to expose them to theories, concepts, and tools in
the hopes that something that sparks their interest. Acknowledging teaching as a
performed product involves a recognition of the aesthetic skills required to keep the
attention of an audience, the reflexivity to adapt to audience responses, and an
acknowledgment of the fact that students and prospective employers today are often
results-oriented and desire a set of applicable skills. In all the classes I teach, I infuse
lectures and discussions with clips from films and examples from popular culture in an
attempt to meet students where they “are.” Once there, I offer a variety of skill sets to get
to a specified point in understanding class material. In developing and teaching
Performance of Organizational Culture (COM 300-400), I note the ways an embodied
understanding of corporate rituals and stories illuminates class theories as well as results
in the managerial expertise many employers desire. Students learn to demonstrate this knowledge not only in writing but in performed presentations, realizing that what they are called upon to do in my class is not that different from what workers and managers are called upon to do in everyday communication practices.³ In this class, I frame performance as both a method for understanding organizational behavior as well as a way to communicate that knowledge to a desired audience. In turn, students appreciate the connection between theory and practice and the validation of their own embodied experiences.

**Personal Connection**

This notion of a personal connection informs my relationships with students both inside and outside the classroom. When recalling my most rewarding moments as a teacher, I am struck by the fact that just as many of these moments happen outside the classroom as in the classroom. This personal connection is something I value and strive to foster with students. Reading a thank you note from a student for being sensitive to her situation as a single mother or receiving an e-mail in which a student excitedly explains that she received a scholarship for which I wrote a letter of recommendation make me realize that the classroom boundaries of learning are relatively arbitrary and do not serve as bookends for a student’s learning. Rather, the classroom is a liminal, temporal space in which personal, family, and job interests converge for a brief time and interact with texts and other people students might not normally encounter. I am lucky to be able to meet students at this moment, for I believe it is at this place that teaching matters most and is most useful.

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While I still find comfort and security the performed rituals of school and university life, I have learned from my students the benefits of embracing the liminality of the classroom space. Doing so prompts me to collaborate with students in making sense of class material in a way that most benefits them—and me. Interestingly, I have found that this approach does not sacrifice the rigor expected of college class work. Instead, students seem to invest in their own work a sense of pride and integrity. Emphasizing a performed product motivates students and infuses their daily class work with direction and guidance. In this way, traditional relations of power are disrupted, even momentarily, allowing me to forge a personal connection with students within the existing class structure while giving me the freedom to learn from my students.