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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I am guided by Alfred North Whitehead's *The Aims of Education* where he writes about the different objectives of learning. In my introductory class, I try to impart what Whitehead calls "romance" as an important goal: to get students passionate about what excites you about the field and light the spark of knowledge. In upper year courses, I think "precision" is entirely appropriate as learning is about refinement of those basic building blocks. When I teach a graduate course I am interested in precision, of course, but also "generalization". At this level students, confident in their mastery, can make new connections and create new knowledge. Throughout it all, I seek to impart a sense of critical awareness of political problems, a healthy skepticism of conventional wisdom and a recognition that learning often follows different paths for students. The following are some of the principles that guide my teaching philosophy.

Planned Serendipity

Teaching has a performative quality and like any good performer, one has to be adroit at going off script if the need arises. Spontaneity is important in a class room because it communicates an important sense of play that makes a class room vital and engaging. I have the privilege of teaching political science, a subject that allows me an opportunity to tap into current events, public policy debates or issues that highlight the concepts and ideas we are discussing. It can take the form of using a question that was asked to unpack its assumptions or it can be about integrating today's newspaper headline in the lecture.

But occasionally a question will be serendipitous and allow for a lengthier discussion after class. In 2010, when I related data about the percentage of Americans who believe in creationism, I conducted a clicker poll around how many first year students also believed in it. The results shocked me (25% said they did) and led to an opportunity to discuss this in the context of the course material on theory, evidence and empiricism. The optional, extra class I held to continue this conversation was attended by over 100 students and went much longer than the hour I had planned.

Other times my serendipity is planned or to paraphrase Rod Stewart's line, "My ad lib lines are well rehearsed." In 2009, after the Federal Court of Canada ruled that Omar Khadr's Charter rights were violated by being detained in Guantanamo Bay, it allowed me to use this in our discussion of the Canadian Charter of Rights. Sensing students' interests in the complexity of this case, I held an extra curricular class to moderate a very thoughtful and nuanced discussion by interested students. Many told me that the respect that everyone showed each other in an impassioned discussion was one of the important things they would remember from the course. The fact that again the room was overflowing and that discussion went on without regard for time reminded me that meaningful learning occurs when students' natural curiosity is engaged.

Modeling Curiosity & Teaching without a Net

These moments of serendipity – planned or otherwise – are like bolts of lightning. They temporarily energize and focus a class. In order to maintain that momentum of engagement, I communicate my wonder, passion and enthusiasm for the material I'm teaching through my own curiosity. I begin all my classes reminding students that collectively we are all students learning together. As a professor, I know that students appreciate that the ideas we are discussing still excite me. I try to communicate that as I know that feeds their own curiosity.

Modeling behaviour is an important part of my teaching. Being prepared for lectures, well organized, passionate about the material and to have a sense of wonder is the best way I know to communicate what it takes to be a good student. When I am facilitating conversation in my upper year seminars or grad class about a contentious debate, I know that students are also learning norms of the profession and codes of academic conduct. That's often as important as the material itself.

To teach without a net is to take risks in the classroom. There is a certain kind of electricity when I tell students that I'm trying something new and am not sure how it will go. In all cases, preparation and maintaining a sense of control is essential. Risk taking can be as specific as reading a Dr. Seuss book to teach about equality or having students write letters to themselves to be returned by me at the end of the course. All these techniques that teaching, like learning, is sometimes best achieved by pushing boundaries.

Learning by Doing

Most of us learn a skill through practice. Students are no different in how they learn. In social sciences we expect students to learn critical reading and writing but, because of class size, give students few opportunities to practice writing in a class. Recently, I have been persuaded that we need to give students more opportunities to work at this skill. Indeed, a key to mastery is simply to practice.

In addition, students can learn from one another. While group work is practiced in faculties that value team learning and collaboration, this is less used in social sciences. Peer evaluation has been a tool I have used to help students learn from one another and write more frequently. Serendipitously, it provides students with an opportunity to learn the norms of the academic profession. I have used double-blind, peer review for short papers to create an opportunity for them to reflect on what good writing should look like. It allows for low stakes, more frequent writing and invests the students in their own learning.

I also practice learning by doing through my scholarship of teaching. I have created a simulation game of the kind of negotiation that occurs at federal-provincial meetings to help students learn by doing. Students role-play cabinet ministers, the media and first ministers over the course of several classes. This has been published by Broadview Press as *The Art of Negotiation* and has been translated into French and Spanish and used around the world. Students tell me that the act of understanding economic and political trade-offs by role playing is far greater than if they had read about it. In a fourth year political communication course, as a way of students learning about political advertising campaigns, I have them design, produce and ‘pitch’ a political ad campaign to the class. Like the simulation exercise, students speak of this experience as a significant amount of work but enormously rewarding.

Temperature taking

My teaching is governed by listening to my students. It’s very important to understand when your students are struggling and when they are not. Equally important is to be able and willing to take the temperature of the class to see if they want more or less; need greater encouragement or less and are able to delve deeper in the material. As instructors, we often forget the challenges of academic puzzles that we’ve long ago mastered. Feedback is not just a buzzword in my courses. It’s an integral component of the curriculum.

These can be very ‘low tech’. In my first year class I use a question box where students place anonymous questions to me and I begin each class with a ‘question of the day’. Each class I will get a half dozen or more random bits of feedback which give me a sense of where problems lie. More comprehensively, at midterm I ask students in all my classes to fill in an index card answering three simple questions: ‘what’s working?’, ‘what’s not working?’ and ‘what needs improvement?’. These give me a sense of how well the course is going, whether the material is resonating and also provide an opportunity for the students to reflect on the course before it’s over.

I also use technology to get feedback. I am a regular user of ‘clickers’ in my large first year course. I use these to review the material and begin the class with a question or two designed to assess students’ understanding of the readings or lectures. More frequently, I use clickers to check-in with students about the pace of material or how well they are comprehending concepts I’m explaining. A very simple *ad hoc* poll provides me with feedback about their comprehension and, equally importantly, allows the student who is struggling to not feel they are the only one. Polling students mid-lecture allows for a break in the lecture and forces me to think about different ways to provide information. In addition to providing feedback, these polls say to the student that we are both invested in their learning – an important part of any teaching.

In the past I have also experimented with digital bulletin boards, where students can post anonymously, focus group sessions where random groups of students are asked for feedback facilitated by other colleagues and peer review – having colleagues sit in on a

class and offer feedback. All provide important and on-going information about how effectively I am communicating.

In conclusion, I give much thought to my teaching and like to think that my actions support my desire for continuous innovation. I won't say that every attempt has been successful, but I try to mirror the kind of learning I expect from students and that means you can't succeed if you don't occasionally fail.

Effective Teaching Strategies:

A good strategy must be closely related to goals and I use a variety of strategies depending on the course level, content and whether I want to focus on skills or knowledge. In all cases, my strategy is guided by the principle that intellectual development is an on-going activity and that we are all students of one sort or another.

The importance of being public

Learning often occurs outside the class. I make a point of being public and accessible by creating learning spaces outside the class room. I have scheduled films on political events, during elections I have held viewing parties in the student café for leaders' debates. I am an active user of social media and encourage my students to use Twitter to communicate. They quickly responded by creating a course 'hash tag' and continue the class discussion long after it is over.

Sometimes it's important to take the class room to the students. I regularly hold exam study sessions in residence common rooms and encourage my first years to drop in and join in the discussion. I have also experimented with 'virtual office hours' which means being accessible by Skype instead of students coming to my office. These techniques remind me that it's not that we ask too much of our students, but we sometimes ask too little of them.

Being public means communicating my passion for teaching in a variety of venues. I have taught a senior citizens' group called "Later Life Learning". I helped organize and deliver a workshop on the future of democracy to a group of citizens in Port Hope. In 2010, I spoke to a group of high school civic teachers from across Ontario; in 2004 addressed a citizen-led initiative to bring the academy to Kingston called Free Queen's. For the last several years, I have served as a *pro bono* advisor and consultant for TVO's Civics 101, which is a website created to teach citizens about democracy. This teaching outreach is not only evidence of my passion for teaching but reminds me of the critical role that university professors have in disseminating knowledge to the wider public.

Recognize that learning takes place in different ways

I am very conscious of the many ways students comprehend the material and try to help them use whatever medium is best suited to them.

Many concepts in political science use metaphors (like the night watchman state, black box of policy making or the veil of ignorance). To accommodate visual learners I integrate one-word slides of these metaphors in my presentations. They provide a mnemonic to the concept we are discussing and hopefully aid in retention. I also video record my lectures and post the lectures on the course website. Students have told me that this allows them to engage in the lecture and material knowing that they can get the details later.

I post my lecture slides as well so that students can make notes on them while I am lecturing. Since lectures are not ideal for all students, I try to make my classes – even my large ones of 350 students – interactive. This is accomplished through discussion aided by class (clicker) polls and planning the lecture to be delivered in several smaller chunks rather than one larger one.

“I used to teach them how to solve problems. Now I teach them how to problem solve”

This quote by Eric Mazur summarizes the importance of empowering students to take charge of their own learning. It’s a skill I learned when in 2006 I had the privilege of being the Academic Director of the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform. This was a provincial government project that gave a random body of citizens power to make policy about how we elect our politicians. A referendum was held on their recommendations in the 2007 provincial election.

When interviewed for the position, I jumped at the opportunity largely for the pedagogical challenges it would provide. I could not resist the challenge of teaching 103 randomly selected citizens from around the province the intricacies of electoral systems, a subject with which many graduate students struggle. I knew that some had university education, others did not. My first inclination was simply to be the university professor I was and give them lectures and tutorials. I was disabused of that when I rehearsed some of my lectures to adult literacy educators in Toronto. They explained how teaching such a diverse group should embody diverse approaches. I re-did many of my original presentations to accommodate visual learners including things such as ‘one word slides’ and using metaphors to convey complexities. I also learned as a political scientist and educator, that citizens have enormous capacity to learn. Provide a venue – virtual or otherwise – and students will invariably teach each other. There’s an argument that they are better at teaching than teachers as they have only recently mastered concepts and understand all too well the conceptual and logical problems that come with mastery.

Research is a valuable teacher

Students are naturally inquisitive and eager to hear about our own research. My research, which is on political communication and mass media, is fertile ground to share with students. Sharing intellectual puzzles that I'm working through reinforces the collective enterprise of learning and reminds students that professors, too are students.

My research can be a trigger for my teaching but sometimes, my teaching is a trigger for a problem that I research. Pedagogical problems have encouraged my scholarship on teaching. I have been awarded several "Principal's Development Fund" (PDF) grants to undertake a publication or study on teaching. When teaching a course on federalism, I wanted to put into practice the importance of active learning. I applied for, and received, a grant to create a simulation exercise called *The Art of Negotiation*. The work, which consisted of a series of 'briefing books', economic and demographic data around a fictional country as well as mock newspaper articles, was designed to support an in-class simulation exercise teaching students about the challenges of elite negotiation in a federal country. It was used by an international think tank called the Forum of Federations and was subsequently published by Broadview Press. I'm happy to say that the book has been translated into French and Spanish as well. More recently my PDF has supported an experiment conducted with a colleague from Kinesiology around peer evaluation. We were interested in knowing whether a) there was a difference in peer evaluation in the sciences vs. social sciences; b) whether students learned from peer evaluation and; c) whether students had ability to evaluate their peers. Our results were shared at a Queen's University Cross Faculty Teaching Forum.