Paul Drosnes   April 25, 2014

EAC 539: Final Teaching Philosophy

Motivation

My philosophy of teaching began with a general suggestion to encourage my peers, and it

has been developing constantly throughout the past semester.   Progressing in my teaching

career, my perspective of encouragement has transformed, as well as my concept of peers.

English learners are often highly motivated and I have seen how peer encouragement is

among the best motivators. I treat my students as peers and I purposefully encourage

them to perform at their best.

Delivery

Teaching English to speakers of other languages at the university level, I work with highly

educated and accomplished adults. To have the opportunity to facilitate the expression of

their intellectual contributions in English is an honor. In a sense, I am helping to decode

messages that the English speaking world might otherwise never learn of.

I am fascinated by learning, attention, and cognition and I have been interested in

technologically-assisted learning for years. I am comfortable with the dynamic of online

learning as a student, but as an instructor I recognize the room for constant improvement.

The online environment challenges teachers to appeal to the needs and interests of their

students. I learned about how to select and present course material supplements to reflect

the required skills and mastered concepts. By doing this, I can better connect with students

on a personal level, and keep interactions objective-oriented.

Understanding the Role

The course in teaching in the online environment certainly helped me to understand the multifaceted role of an online educator. I have some experience teaching online, but not at the university level. The readings and assignments throughout the semester enriched my knowledge of the topic and the medium. The exposure and expertise resulting from this course will prove relevant and helpful in the future.

I understand my role as an authoritative source of information, but commit myself to participating in the learning community as a peer among my students. Granted that most of my students are around my same age or older, I seek to establish deferential authority within my classroom and online. My students are but peers who need something priceless from me: assistance expressing thoughts in English. This aligns with constructivist learning theory. Individual learners bring their unique perspectives to the class' shared experiences, and are encouraged to engage in communication exercises to increase their knowledge. Knowledge, in this case, is not just of the English language, but also of the self and of self-expression.

Portfolio

Virtual presence is related to the professional accountability I share with my students. I interact with different learners in different ways and, increasingly, important interactions take place online. I learned in this course that it is just as important to remain conscious of one's virtual presence, and the impressions formed by students. The continued discussion of ways to maintain positive and realistic presence reinforced these ideas for me, and I

have made a conscious effort to incorporate the perspectives of the readings and my peers into the evolution of my teaching philosophy.

One of the most important elements of my online presence is now the virtual portfolio. I dedicated many hours to building the site, and I am proud of the results. I intend for the portfolio to be a resource I continually develop and utilize. In the past, I have struggled to centralize information for students and to keep up with the constant stream of e-mails. I look forward to streamlining my online interactions by using the portfolio page as a communication hub for my students.

Maintaining Integrity

Learning about student and instructor integrity required us to think about unexpected factors in the online environment. I now consider semester timing and the stress factors influencing students' decision-making. I also better understand the extent and utility of automatic data collection in learning management systems. In some of my high-level English classes, performance improves gradually and only with persistent attention and practice. Students dedicated to this level of discourse rarely demonstrate poor judgment. Most exercises, activities, and assignments are enjoyable, informative, and inconsequential. Truly, they could only cheat themselves.

Assessment

The discussion of online assessment caused me to consider the positives and negatives of collaborative learning. Peer forum posts often mentioned the problems arising from groups combining learners of different achievement levels. However, mixed-level learner groups have proven very beneficial for English teaching. In a peer-motivated environment,

learners perform to prove themselves within the group, and groups compete among one another. In most of my classes, I prefer not to grade students. Instead, I base assessment on the students' comfort level with communicating in English in various contexts.

Balance

This semester, I have learned about constructivist approaches to learning that support negotiation among teachers and students.   I am interested in constructivism because the context of adult ESL instruction warrants negotiated meanings in peer-level communications. In an online environment, peers separated by time, space, age and language connect and develop.

As an instructor, an important competency I maintain is a persisting self-perception as a student myself. Although an authority on the topic, my personal passion for learning makes my career all the more rewarding. I constantly seek out new methods, techniques, and strategies to spread the knowledge to others. If the best way to learn something is to teach it to others, I have experienced the truth of this notion firsthand.