

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Being a Learning Scientist, I carry specific philosophical ideas about how teaching and learning should take place. My experiences so far have led me to be an advocate of situated learning instructional practices. Therefore, I believe that instruction should provide situations where narratives immerse learners into being active participants and construct knowledge in a rather social context. As an instructor, and at the same time as a learner, I am experiencing how interesting and challenging this can be, especially at a university level. The lessons from my instructional experiences indicate that framing content in ways that make sense for the learners leads them to effective learning that can use in their actual teaching environment.

I began teaching pre-service teachers at the end of my second year in my doctorate program. The first challenge for me was that I was going to teach online. At the same time, my instructional approach had to respond to all my students' learning needs, as I was teaching pre-service teachers with multiple majors. It seems to have been an effective approach, as evaluations indicated:

“Professor Solomou was really easy to communicate with throughout this online course. She really knows her stuff. As a non-education major, I wasn't sure I was cut out for the class at first, but the course material turned out to be extremely relevant to my other classes. Professor Solomou is great. This is a well-organized class and I learned a lot.”

I believe that knowing several learning theoretical perspectives helps inform practice. I wanted students to realize and appreciate the importance of combining theories from class with their practice during their field experience. Therefore, I attempted to provide as realistic experiences as possible for students to realize, understand, and make connections between ideas. Two examples of the feedback I received was regarding my personal style of online teaching and online classroom management:

“The reading was fairly interesting. Professor Solomou was incredibly fast at responding to e-mail questions. I could pretty much guarantee that I would get a response within ten minutes of e-mailing her. She was also very willing to help me when I had questions.”

“Regarding the instructor, she was very punctual on responding to any questions and concerns I had throughout the semester. This was my biggest concern when I decided to take an online course, and am glad that it quickly did not grow into anything more than an initial worry.”

The impact of my class on their personal, academic, and professional development seemed to be significant, as their performance became deeper and they were more

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able to connect their experiences with learning theories. My students became well equipped to deal with school situations because they were knowledgeable about learning theories, theories around cognitive development, motivation, as well as assessment and classroom management. Such skills have proven to be important for students in various ways, as they were able to engage more deeply in discussions about their field experiences.

In my online classes I try to contextualize the content by providing short narratives and case studies in the 2D courses taught through Oncourse (the University's platform). I also aim at immersing my students in greater narratives in which they take up roles and try to respond to the simulated school issues by using their theoretical knowledge in the 3D gaming environments where the class takes place. Pre-service teachers need to have coherent theoretical knowledge to inform their teaching practices. Contextualization of that knowledge enables them to use that simulated participation for real life situations. I enjoy it when my students share such experiences with the whole group. It is a great satisfaction for me as an instructor to see that they are becoming more mature and critical thinkers. An indicative report of the instruction through a game from the student evaluations was:

“Because I was a participant in the online game “Quest Atlantis”, several advantages presented themselves through this learning format. As I had to complete missions in the game, I was presented with real-life scenarios that would in turn teach me about the various concepts that was to be presented in this course.”

I consider my role in a class to be the facilitator, whether that is online, or face-to-face. I try to provide as many opportunities for reflection, but at the same time I try to challenge my students through activities that provoke thinking. I always create a safe environment where all ideas are accepted, negotiated and evolved. Student said that *“The instructor was amazing”, “She was a great instructor. I think she did a really effective way of communicating with us”*.

In my first semester of teaching, I used papers and tests to assess their performance. Also, forum posts were part of their online participation. I realized however, that, even though the learning goals were achieved, my students needed some tangible tools to work with and to have them as a compass for their teaching later on. Therefore, I started using portfolios to provide opportunities of organizing knowledge and working on a personal project that promotes personal and academic success. Along with assessing students' participation in a gaming narrative, portfolios helped them to create a basis for their future professional development.

The experiences that I have had so far from teaching online and with the use of virtual worlds have strengthened my belief that learning is better when it is framed in a narrative situation, and I have realized the importance and difference my research can make for education. Focusing on the ways that people learn by using

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all possible resources in their context and by participating in complex narratives that simulate reality really enhances and strengthens the connections between theory and practice. The effectiveness and quality of my teaching is evident, not only through my students' grades, but also from their commentary about the class.

I enjoy teaching, as much as I enjoy conducting research, and researching games in relation to learning. The challenges from trying to provide effective instruction, my students' comments, and at the same time the rewards from experiencing new ideas, push my thinking as an instructor and motivate me to improve further in the ways I provide learning through contemporary mediums like online platforms and gaming environments. I feel prepared to organize an online learning environment that can train prospective teachers towards acquiring the necessary skills for their teaching. Having experienced several teaching environments, I also feel prepared to teach both face-to-face and online courses on other topics, such as technology and education, culture and learning, new media, and design of learning in context. I love teaching because I can make a difference in people's learning. The rewards and challenges from each class are different and will always be part of instruction.