

Healy Teaching Philosophy Statement

*“Every student can learn, just not on the same day, or in the same way.”
-George Evans*

My philosophy of teaching is rooted in my philosophy of learning. It is students who hold the power to internalize, synthesize, and create, rather than the teacher’s ability to impart revelation and skills. Thus my responsibility as a professor is to create an environment fertile for growth, and my choices as an instructor are guided by my beliefs about how people learn.

People learn when they feel safe.

I never cease to be amazed at how critical a safe environment is for learning. When people feel safe, they are freed from the fear of failure and criticism, allowing for creative and deep thinking. I create a safe atmosphere in part by being relatable and predictable. During introductions, I include biographic anecdotes that represent me as a resource of knowledge gained through experience and formal training, yet also imperfect and still in progress. When students respond with stories of their own, it indicates they are engaging in the learning community, and feel a level of safety in the class. I refer to their stories later to show my recognition of them as valued individuals. I also contribute to a safe environment by being predictable. As simple as it may seem, explaining expectations clearly and implementing policies unemotionally and consistently greatly alleviates the fear of the unknown. I am happy to share the rationale behind my choices, and when students see that procedures are far from random, a great deal of anxiety is relieved, and they are freer to learn.

People learn that which is personally relevant.

Safety alone does not ensure growth, of course. I find concepts from Vygotsky, Montessori, and other constructivists to be invaluable in creating a learning environment. The relevance of lessons must be apparent, which can present a challenge when pursuing long-term and complex goals. Students in interpreter preparation courses may view critical activities like discourse analysis and self-reflection as unrelated to what they see interpreters do. To address this I present an analogy of athletes preparing their bodies for competitions with exercises they never execute during a game, and then I explain how each activity scaffolds growth as developing interpreters.

I facilitate many small group and class discussions to gauge student interest and paradigms, and we base these dialogues on both our real-life experiences and research findings, seeking to consider ethical and professional decisions with ever-increasing creativity and diversity of views.

People learn what is just beyond their current reach.

Cummins (1984) notes that learning is optimal when activities are challenging to learners and presented with support. I connect with students before the semester to assess their current beliefs and skills, so I can adjust activities accordingly. Each student's progression is unique, so flexibility is a core value for my teaching. One of my favorite assessment activities is Think-Alouds. Students videotape themselves watching their own target text and describe the internal process they remember experiencing as they conducted the interpretation. Students rave about this experience, as it helps them discover their own process. It also gives me insight to which next activity will be just within their reach, and their self-insight informs my ability to pair students together who will be most supportive for each other's learning.

I feel incredibly lucky to support students in their journey, offering vignettes from experience or findings from research to consider, supporting them as they battle up a mountain, or mirroring insights back to them to highlight their own development. I am open to students about the fact that we are in this together, that I do not have all the answers, but that I am ready to support them as they push themselves ever further toward their highest potential. And inevitably every time I facilitate another's learning, I grow in my own knowledge, beliefs, and skills as well, creating a perpetual synergy that keeps me coming back every semester, excitedly anticipating all we will each learn.

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