

Reflective Teaching Portfolio

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- **Teaching Philosophy**

If I were required to summarize in one word my understanding of teaching I would propose the word “performance.” The several meanings and multiple interpretations that this term elicits reflect adequately my approach to education. No other word can express more eloquently the connection I have always sought to establish between the class environment and my own personal experience of everyday life. Over the past years I have been able to confirm its significance when looking at the evaluations of my students. A good number of my students’ comments describe my teaching as passionate, energetic, and engaging, and they emphasize that those qualities were meaningful in each case to the learning process. When teaching a language, performance entails a holistic conception of learning that points to my didactic abilities to aptly convey information and encourage the student to integrate it to his or her own personal experience as part of a learning team. Learning becomes an active interaction for each student to respond creatively with his or her own outcome. Each new course represents the reenactment of a rehearsal intended to achieve a pre-established goal that performance transforms into a unique experience. To analyze a literary piece or an essay or to examine a work of art follows a similar method: the student learns how the instructor performs a subject matter and reacts to the information being provided -- how do I deal with its complexities or manage my own enthusiasm or hesitation towards it.

In teaching, performance entails mimesis, creative imitation and reproduction, compliment and parody. Success is attained when through the mimetic process the student finds its own voice, a moment of achievement that can only be realized through the mediation of his or her peers. This crucial aspect is directly related to the sense of

community that I seek to develop either in the classroom or when using alternative technologies. The learning of a grammar rule or the understanding of a cultural feature is based on cooperation between the members of the learning team, which depends on an excellent interaction and interdependence among all members including the instructor.

This mimetic aspect of performance is closely related to my own experience as an immigrant from Venezuela living in the United States since 1989. Performing and commanding diverse roles and duties has been critical to undertake the significant changes and adjustments indispensable to adapt to new challenges both in my formal education and my personal life. It has also encouraged me to embrace this city's extraordinary cultural diversity. This experience has naturally contributed to expand my professional interests as an educator, enhancing my appreciation of the crucial role played by constant exchange and cooperation when teaching the Spanish language or Latin American culture within a constantly changing educational environment.

My conception of teaching naturally entails the use of technology since it demands the active participation of the students and the instructor and, most important, provides all members of the learning team to maintain a constant participation inside and outside the classroom and to have a significant impact in the development of the course, being a face to face, an online or a hybrid course. Particularly in my field, technology has become an essential pedagogical tool. In a globalized world driven by immediate communication and production of information the teaching of languages and culture faces new challenges that require from the instructor to keep a crucial balance between the use of technology and her or his irreplaceable presence.

- **Most Successful Experience**

The change in the title from the most successful lesson to the most successful experience reveals how significant the use of diverse technological formats has been for my professional development in the last academic year, as I adapted one of the courses I have created for the Department of Languages and cultures to be taught online. The course titled “Revolution as Spectacle: Mexico”, focuses on the artistic and intellectual production related to the Mexican Revolution, before, during and after the conclusion of this significant historic event.

I completed the workshop to adapt a course online and it was very informative, but real challenges appeared in the process of actually designing the online course a year after. I was fortunate to meet the right people at the right time. José Díaz, the Online Learning Manager and a very patient and resourceful professional introduced me to technological formats that allowed me to redesign my original face-to-face course of study into a complete new online course. In my particular case, and since the course has to be embedded in the Blackboard shell I was able to expand my knowledge of this system and other related learning tools like Voicethread.

I designed each unit of the online course to function modularly and to have each part of unit to be logically interconnected. By using Adobe Spark - a suite of applications for storytelling, and Padlet –an online virtual wall, I was able to redesign not only the course content but also the assignments and evaluation criteria. Each unit included texts, images, 3D images, video, podcast and external links to related material available online. I am including in this portfolio one of the units I created for the online course Revolution as Spectacle: Mexico: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/4Ak5HVVpscXyo/>

Each unit offered the students the possibility to relate diverse aspects of this historical event. For instance, in the unit included in this portfolio students were able to appreciate the historical, cultural and political antecedents to the outbreak of the Revolution in 1910. Each unit was also designed to interconnect with the others by relating the diverse aesthetic, political and historical aspects presented in each unit to previous ones. As part of the Final Research Project, the students were required to create a video presentation using Adobe Spark, which allowed every student to express her or his personal creativity and, for most of them, to become acquainted with the application. Since each student was in control of every aspect of the video production, each presentation was unique, reflecting the way every individual student related to the assignment and the material being presented. I include one of the students' video presentations in this portfolio. The technological possibilities offered by Adobe Spark and Padlet allowed me to create interactive assignments and evaluations that invite the students to interact with another students and with the instructor. Evaluations encourage students to use their analytical and associative abilities rather than strictly testing their memorization capacity. For instance, students were invited to react before a particular image, video, text or podcast and to express their own critical opinion, contrasting their propositions with those offered by other students. I am including a sample in PDF format of one of these assignment activities from the online version of the course Revolution as Spectacle: Mexico, where each student was required to create her/his own Mexican album. This assignment titled "The Mexican Album" required from the student to connect art pieces, film, texts to create her or his own version of how the Mexican

Revolution was represented by Mexican and foreign artists, filmmakers, writers and intellectuals.

Currently, I am using the previously mentioned technological tools to create lesson presentations and class assignments for my regular face-to-face courses. The pedagogical possibilities offered by Adobe Spark and Padlet and their compatibility with Blackboard allows me to enhance the students' appreciation of the subject being studied in my regular courses. This Spring 2019 I have used Sketchfab, a platform for 3D content, to explore ethnographic artifacts along with my students from a course I am teaching on the Representations of the Caribbean throughout history. We studied artifacts from the Taino, the extinct Arawak culture that inhabited some of the Caribbean islands and from whom we have a very limited number of surviving objects.

For the Spanish conversation course I am currently teaching, I create diverse digital formats for each class using Padlet to encourage the student to participate in a virtual conversation while they prepare for their face-to-face conversation in class. I am including a sample in PDF format of the virtual stream that the students created on their favorite costumes from diverse parts of the world for a class presentation. A week before the class meeting, students were required to post their selections describing the garments and accessories in each case, indicating the occasion people wore the costumes and the country from where the costume belonged. Also, each student was required to choose a costume that she/he likes and compared with her/his own selection. During their presentations students not only described their selected costumes but also contrasted and compared them to those from other students. This activity was design to practice the

vocabulary related to clothing and the grammar structures necessary to produce an effective communicate activity.

For my film course I started creating my class presentations in Adobe Spark that include photographs, images, video clips, films and links to related webpages or sites. Students are able to retrieve the module created for each film that includes the class presentation, a critical journal, a discussion forum and links to retrieve bibliography and filmography relevant to the film. Conceiving the presentation of every film as a module allows the students to retrieve contextual historical, cultural or socioeconomic information related to the film at any time during the course. I am including a sample of the presentation I created to introduce the students to the Golden Age of Mexican cinema and the filmography of its major director, Emilio Fernandez:

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/wYFiDY9AuXQp2/>

I also use Adobe Spark and Padlet to create class presentations and assignments for the course MC301. Imaginary Encounters: Representations of the Caribbean. In a similar way that in the courses mentioned before, these technological formats allow me to interact more efficiently with my students inside and outside the classroom. I am including a sample of a unit that discusses the earlier descriptions of the Caribbean nature and its inhabitants and an assignment related to this unit, where the students are required to interact with an external website, find specific information and adapt it to the specificities of the assignment.

- **Least Successful Experience**

Teaching is fundamentally performance and every performance is different, some more successful than others, but even those that we consider unsuccessful teach a lesson to the entire learning team. Thus, I should propose that every lesson is successful even when the learning objectives are not fully achieved because the feedback from the students help to introduce the necessary changes to make an activity work based on the learning objectives. Through my personal experience with technology I've learned that when it doesn't improve the learning process it can become counterproductive. Also, using technology has required from me to reconsider my teaching style and to review my strengths and weaknesses within the context of the new teaching environment. When technology "fails" because of a glitch or because the activity doesn't work I am always confronting the same challenge: how to keep my performance at a rhythm that keep my students engaged allowing me to reach my lesson goal. There always should be a "plan b", off course, but more importantly is the presence of the instructor. I always look at situations like these, a learning experience. For me the major challenge is to keep a balance between class activities that require the use of technological formats and those where the presence of the learning team, instructor and students alike, is indispensable. In other words, keeping myself aware of the seductions of technology to avoid transferring the responsibility of the learning process exclusively to the students. For instance, some student evaluations of my online course questioned that sometimes the instructor's reply to their questions were not timely, particularly in the discussion forums and comments on journals. I realized that this problem demanded from me to create a more efficient way of communicating with each student in the diverse activities they were required to

complete. The next time I will teach a course online I will integrate all the students by providing diverse types of feedback addressing the students as a group or individually depending on the nature of the assignment. Most importantly, I will reconsider the amount of material and the nature of the assignments in each unit to avoid taxing the students with unnecessary information or excessive homework.

- **Reasons for introducing and/or expanding the use of technology into teaching**

The fundamental reason to introduce or expand technology into my teaching is to improve my pedagogical strategies to better reach my students, keep their attention and entice their interests within the current technological environment and the new forms of communication required nowadays. In my particular case as instructor of languages and cultures the use of technology offers a myriad of possibilities to focus on an essential aspect when teaching a second language: communicating effectively in the target language using current means of communication and social media. Acquiring a language is also acquiring the culture that uses it and, regarding this aspect, technology also offers the possibility of expanding the students' abilities to approach a specific subject matter from multiple perspectives and therefore to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of a topic. I experienced this improvement first hand when I realized the increase in the quality of the assignments turned in by my students from the online course *Revolution as Spectacle: Mexico compare to those produced by the students when I taught the course face to face*. Technology develops the students' relational and analytical abilities by offering them the opportunity to apprehend diverse types of information simultaneously,

thus it also demands from the instructor to understand and present the material differently. This dynamic not only has arisen my curiosity for other technological formats available to use in my teaching but, most importantly, has made reflect on my own teaching philosophy and how to convey knowledge through a more dynamic and inclusive learning experience.

List of Examples of Technological Formats Used in Courses

Course: OL1. Revolution as Spectacle: Mexico

- Sample of the introductory unit to this course that focused on the cultural production around the Mexican Revolution by both Mexican and foreign artists, writers and intellectuals.
<https://spark.adobe.com/page/4Ak5HVVpscXyo/>
- Sample in PDF format of an assignment titled “The Mexican Album” where students were required to post a series of images, film clips or videos to present their own version of the Mexican Revolution studied throughout the course (see attachment)
- Sample of a **video presentation** created by the students for the course Final Project. Students were responsible for the entire process of putting together the video, including adding sound and editing. The video presentation included focus on the work of Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa.

Course: SP122. Spanish Conversation I

- Sample in PDF format of an assignment titled “Mi traje típico favorito” where students were required to post costumes from diverse countries, describe the garments, materials, accessories and the occasion they are usually worn. Each student also have to select another costume to discuss it during class with other classmates. (see attachment)

Course: FI206 / MC205. Mexican Cinema

- Sample of the presentations I prepare to introduce each film in my Mexican cinema class. This particular presentation introduces the work of director Emilio “Indio” Fernández and cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa, who worked in several films together.

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/wYFiDY9AuXQp2/> -

Course MC301. Imaginary Encounters: Representations of the Caribbean

- Sample of a class presentation I prepared on the earlier descriptions and representations of the Caribbean nature and peoples.

<https://spark.adobe.com/sp/design/page/1b2d29e9-1a62-4936-982c-46b4dcece79f>

- Sample in PDF format of an assignment related to the unit also included in this portfolio where students are required to interact with an external website, find specific information and adapt it to the specificities of the assignment. (see attachment).