# PATHWAYS TO GLOBAL COMMUNICATION

# Reflective Portfolio

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**Part I**

**Reflecting on Theory, Practice, and Communication**

* **What is your teaching philosophy.**

Below are parts of my original 'Philosophy of Teaching' essay which I have been revising for many years and currently submit as part of my employment resume packet. Initially it was a paper required for my second MA in "Teaching the Writing of English" completed in 2001 - a decade and a half ago. I thank those Professors for introducing me to this potent tool of self-reflection -- a practical tool to help enhance my teaching effectiveness and techniques.

This quest has been continued throughout the many CET lectures and workshops I have been attending at FIT. I am grateful for the opportunity and encouragement these workshops have provided.

*I have a passion for teaching. Can there be a finer profession than one that empowers people through education? My philosophy of teaching centers around the individual people I teach – respecting their myriad backgrounds and styles of learning. I resist pigeonholing myself into one style of pedagogy since I experiment with so many techniques in endeavoring to reach each, individual student. My Student Teaching Courses and HS accreditation gained in my first MA Degree in Rhetoric and Speech Arts have taught me innumerable, practical techniques* to employ. If one technique *proves unworkable, I’ll keep “punting” until I come up with a better style that relates to the individual. It is time consuming, considering the large roster of classes I teach, (routinely 27 credits per semester at three different universities), but rewarding as well. I have been teaching on the college level for 28 years. I feel I make a difference in the lives of the people I come in contact with. Only yesterday two former students came to me requesting recommendation letters for graduate school and law school. I was so proud of their accomplishments and the small hand I had in helping them reach their goals.*

*At the beginning of each semester I give several lectures about the differences* between *high school and college in general and specifically encourage incoming college students to find* *out where to get help for themselves since, for the most part, in college, they will not be spoon-fed materials. I direct them where to get the coaching help they will need. Every school I teach at has a dedicated writing and math center and peer counseling groups; some even have a good resource center for English as Second Language students. I expect students to use any and all of these facilities to help them throughout the term. I make myself available through office hours (by appointment only), evening phone conferences (‘use it but don’t abuse it’, is the mantra), and email, IM transactions, and even Skype which are useful for simple confirmations as well as interactive support when students are nervous about upcoming oral presentations. For the last fifteen years I have been teaching BL [Blended Learning] courses online through Blackboard and Angel LMS for CUNY, SUNY and LIU University.*

*For Face to Face classes, any lecture material presented is followed up with homework practice and more in-class small group practicums where I can canvas the room to give individual support and answer questions. Small Group work allows students to support each other in perfecting theory and technique.*

*First and foremost I make every effort to set a fun and forgiving tone to my classes (Another mantra: ‘that’s why they have erasers on the ends of pencils’) while setting out a scholastically high bench mark which students must hurdle if they are to get a good grade in the course. The syllabus states:*

*The material we cover in this course is important and practical. I also think it should be enjoyable – if we all ACTIVELY AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY PARTICIPATE and if we ALL FIND THE FUN IN LEARNING. ☺ Let’s try together this term to learn how we can understand ourselves and other people better through communication.*

*Hopefully, by the time I begin critiquing their work in terms of criteria set out in ensuing rhetorical lectures and criteria sheets, students “know where I am coming from”; we joke back and forth and my students know I am available for coaching them. I make an announcement that my criticisms are meant to support and bolster their work and self esteem and if I hurt their feelings or joke in any adverse way, I expect them to come to me and give me a “heads-up” so that I can tailor my* *communication to their needs – so that they will be able to get the best I have to offer. Each criteria sheet, explaining an assignment, and the syllabus itself, contain a caveat at the bottom of the page that states:*

**Take me up on individual coaching invitations ☺**

*Whenever I write comments on student papers I make every effort to discuss what I have written with the student on the day that the material is critiqued in order to minimize value-mode confusion. I accept IMs, emails, phone conversations and Skype, late into the evening to alleviate or at least dilute any misconceptions. I use an array of colored pens to offset the dreaded “red pen errors” syndrome. I utilize happy faces in at least one category of my critique to balance my comments so that there are not a disproportionate number of negative to positive comments. I find my students write back with cute figures and symbols of their own. However, if the material presented is not satisfactory, I generally will not write anything except “please see me” and endeavor, in person, to re-teach the material as well as direct the student to one of the support centers on campus for further help.*

*I am willing to work with student schedules and individual problems; however, I am ‘elastic’ only to a certain point. One or two of my assignments are sacrosanct and non-negotiable. I require that students answer in as little words as possible, in full sentences, questions at the end of each chapter of their textbook. I assume a college level student should be able to navigate the cleanly worded materials in a particular text and be prepared to share questions or problems concerning that material. In accordance with the Writing Across the Curriculum CUNY mandate, as students submit individual chapters, I check it for content and correct general grammatical errors, again with disclaimers such as “your ideation is great here, let’s pick at the grammar a bit to perfect your message.” I am alluding to simple grammatical errors of subject/verb agreement or tense agreement. This assignment will give me a fairly clear idea of the level of the student’s writing ability. I can, then, refer the student to the proper support group for further coaching and assistance that I do not have time to allocate during class time.*

*My approach is obviously eclectic. I am formal in my objectives for my students while employing very “touchy-feely”, warm, supportive practices, employing humor ala Susan Jarrett’s article on “Teaching Across and Within Differences” within a rhetorically persuasive environment that encourages what Donald Lazere terms “modes of critical thinking that are a pre-requisite to studies in other disciplines . . . and to students’ lifelong roles as citizens”, encouraging students to develop the “felt sense” that Sandra Perl discusses in her article on “Understanding Composing” in " The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook.*

*I do believe that rules, regulations, and specifically drawn standards are necessary and ultimately helpful to our communications effort and materials must be learned in an organized way. For example, at one university I teach at, the students must pass an Exit Exam to complete a Fundamentals of Oral Communication course. In conjunction with the learning of rhetorical theory, students must demonstrate ability to create a practical, logical outline and annotated bibliography in the APA style. Some students “get it” in the first lecture while others find outlining a difficult concept to control. My written remarks and diagrams confused one of my students, named Robert. Our follow-up oral discussion helped Robert understand and practice the concepts as well as in the additional class time I incorporated to do group practicums. This allowed the student to learn the material while not being singled out for lack of knowledge.*

*My most important mission, as a teacher, is to develop the student’s capacity for critical thinking – the ability to analyze and create for oneself. Lazere’s idea of preparing lifelong citizens is uppermost in my mind. Lazere’s philosophy has classic Greek overtones of training citizens to interact in a democracy, with the ability to function and sustain a democratic culture and style. When discussing the research phase of preparing for their Famous Civil Rights Leader/Speaker Informative Speech, I explain, to my students, that they are to choose a role model, someone they can emulate, with a particular eye toward the dissemination of her/his ideas, eventually aiming to have the student help replace this Famous Orator’s place in forging and re-energizing our democratic society. This is expressionistic in philosophy. As an individual, I may not agree with their philosophy or politics but we, as a society, need that influx of new ideation to nurture and grow – without it we, as a society, stagnate and regress. I try to instill in my students that they are the intelligentsia of this society. If they do not take an active hand in supporting and empowering ‘just’ ideas, as they deem an idea to be “just”, then we, as a society, are doomed.*

*The above may sound dogmatic however I believe it, and my success with my students, shows it makes a difference to them as well; their feedback demonstrates that they feel they are being treated with respect regarding their personal and unfolding philosophical ideas.*

*Just yesterday morning while going to my LIU classes I met another former student who, in the course of our conversation, complained about her confusion in assimilating the materials in several of her current classes. However, she said, I’m doing well in my English class thanks to your Speech course. I now know how to do research and your outlining exercises really helped me organize my thinking. Only this past semester, as well, a former FIT EN241 student shared that she had gotten a job employing the techniques she practiced in our class and thanked me "for all your help in preparing us for the real world!"*

*Those comments buoyed me for the entire week – after all what else are we teaching for if not to support and “make a difference” with each, individual student.*

*Corbett, Edward P. J., Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate. The Writing Teacher's Source Book. New York. Oxford UP, 2000. Print.*

* ***What do you see as the benefits and/or challenges to having culturally and linguistically diverse students in your class?***

***When you’re through changing, you’re through.***

Bruce Barton

The NEA workshops we attended were geared to multi culturalism. From the beginning years of my teaching, I have been a specialist in the ESL or courses designed for the International population. I would teach the same course for the native speaking students and then another with the letter X attached for the sections geared to 'ESL' students. Initially I enjoyed having this division. The ESL sections limited the number of participants in the course, which allowed me extended, individual coaching time with a smaller group of students.

Over the years I have come to think that the best method is a combined class catering to the strengths of each. Since my concentration is in oral communication, **all** participants are nervous and a tat unsure of themselves. They are just nervous for slightly differing reasons. Often, as discussed in the NEA workshops as well, we assume that the International student has inferior written skills, when, many times they have better grammatical tools than the native speakers do. The native speakers, usually, have more comfort and facility with the language and cultural interactions. I enjoy pairing students who choose each other because they think they are 'opposites' - for whatever reason they may glean. Generally they bond with one another for the term, supporting each other through each of the ongoing assignments.

Frankly, I also find most of the International students most respectful and courteous to the Professor. Therefore, it makes for a nice harmony of respect and energy; there is that 'hum in the room' during group exercises while still allowing me to interject comments and responses to ongoing questions - for the whole class.

Of course a challenge to having culturally and linguistically diverse students in one class is the speed of sharing lecture material. My student teaching Professor, Grace Watling, used to say that you need to teach to both the highest and the lowest level in the class - which is, at times, not an easy feat to accomplish. Then, again, using small groups, I find that the native speakers are very supportive of International Students' development and understanding.

I make two announcements at the beginning of the semester. Firstly we discuss the fact that International students need to give themselves kudos for their bravery and resilience in coming to a different country with different cultural norms and certainly different language. I mention that though, as a professional Opera Singer, I sing in eight languages, I could not take a college level course in another language. I would still be trying to figure out the grammatical structure and definitions of what is being said without ever getting to the level of understanding and assimilating the actual information. Most of the class nod in agreement. It seems to set a cozy, warm tone to the class environment for both the International student as well as the native speaker.

Secondly, I ask the International students to see me at the break so that we may discuss the differences in patterns and methods of pedagogy between their native countries and here in the United States. We discuss what they expect and zone in on the requirements necessary for this Americanized course. I found, this past semester and for the summer class, that I was investing more protracted time in discussing contrasting learning styles as a result of the discussions we have had in these NEA workshops. I have always honored individual learning styles - even amongst native speakers. However, learning more and more of the differences between International, 'rote' learning styles and our demands for critical thinking practice have heightened my awareness of the International student's dilemma. Those workshop practicums were quite helpful in supporting my thinking on this subject.

* **How might the ideas about language, diversity, and cross-cultural communication discussed during the NEA workshops thus far contribute to your classroom practice?**

As mentioned above, our NEA workshops discussions concerning cross-cultural communication have bolstered my class practices. My background in Student Teaching Methods and Practices has always made me more experiential with my tools and techniques. Many times during of NEA workshop discussions, it has been supportive, and just plain conforming, to find out that what I have experimented with is actually a "best practices" approach. It has really buoyed my objective to be more experimental in trying new techniques.

As mentioned in my overall philosophy of teaching, I strongly believe in teaching to the individual. If I find there are several levels of understanding, I will split the class into small groups and give slightly differing tasks to each group. This allows me to give one-on-one coaching within each group, and thus, honoring their level of understanding and comprehension.

**Part 2**

**Moving Theory into Practice: Diversity as Resource**

* **How might the ideas about language, diversity, and cross-cultural communication discussed during the NEA workshops thus far contribute to your classroom practice?**

I find myself being much more aware of including these levels of small groups practice - across the board -- for International students as well as Native Speakers who may be a bit more shy and unresponsive. I think that has been a consistent element to my teaching - my gut reaction - I just am more consciously aware of zoning in on possible cultural differences.

* **How might you change an existing lesson/assignment as a result of participating in the NEA project?**

As mentioned above, I have consistently employed topics that could be useful for a diverse student population. In the past, if I had a predominantly International class, I would ask them to include topics from their culture and background for the Information Speech category. We would make it a party atmosphere where each person would bring some food and drink from his/her culture or background for us to enjoy in between each formal speech. I did this more pointedly in my International class groupings. However, in the past several years, and with the added support of the NEA Pathways discussions, I have used this now in all my EN242 classes. It adds another level of education and rapport for all of the participants. Internationals learn about other cultures, in addition to their own and the American style and vice versa. It is amazing how much meta-learning goes on in between the actual speeches as in the formally prepared and researched versions!

* **What new assignment might you develop that would incorporate lessons learned as a result of the Pathways to Globalization workshops?**

I have been experimenting with broadening the above techniques and possibly doing something culturally oriented as a substitute for their technical final written exam. Maybe going to an International Food Fair or a formal talk about some multi-cultural topic being held around the City and then submitting a paper on the variety of different Non Verbal, Vocal and Verbal styles they see? I think this might be useful for the Fashion Institute of Technology Student who will be traversing the globe or just coming into contact with a host of customers from varying cultures in New York City.

It's an idea that has been starting to ferment in my head lol.

* **When responding to and evaluating student writing and/or presentations, which assessment practices will best inform students' understanding of communicating across cultures?**

Whereas I agree that the 'gist' of what the student is sharing is at the core of their communication, I strongly believe there is an academic standard and that we must adhere to those standards even as they slowly transform over the years. As with any task or technique, you need to learn the rules of the game, be it basketball or ballet - from there you can develop your own trick shot or piece of choreography - but first learn the basic techniques.

Simple grammar is necessary for communication in business as well as in the academic environment. To facilitate students accomplishing these techniques, I consistently allow students to rework/edit materials for all graded assignments - oral and written. It requires more work and attention on my part but I believe this to be useful and practical for the education of any and all college level students!

There is a different standard for written and oral communications. Realizing and assuming that there are different assessment practices across cultures, students are here in an American University to learn American standards and practices which can only add to their arsenal of types, ways and methods of interacting in business and social situations globally. Most of my International students, even more than my native speaking students, come to ask for help and coaching to better their skills and I spend protracted time after class to support their accomplishing this.

**Part 3**

**Teaching Goals Statement**

* **Given the topics discussed in the NEA workshops and your own experiences teaching, please prepare a personal statement describing your teaching goals for the next few years.**

I think I have stated that in my philosophy of teaching segment. I want to continue to experiment and try different approaches and styles of pedagogy utilizing varied backgrounds and cultural referencing more.

I want to invest more time with the 'flipped' approach to classroom learning. This term I have two sections of a Face to Face version of "Voices of the Civil Rights" and one online version. I am experimenting with a fully 'flipped' environment leaving more time for class interaction and student discussion rather than lecture. I have been finding that for all variety of students, more visual elements are more useful and pertinent to the class retaining information.

I am experimenting with each individual student teaching a segment of the course, in addition to my filling in some lecture. I think they retain more since it was their creation and they take ownership of the material.