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**Reflective Teaching Portfolio**

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1. **Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

There I am. In front of a classroom with 20+ students on the first day of classes. Nervous, not knowing very well how to stand in front of them, all eyes on me. I feel I am getting ready for a performative act, in a stage, audience in front of you. I know the material for the course, I know I will improve it and make changes from previous semesters and, I am confident about my expertise for the course content. However, my main question on that first day, the one that kept me up the night before and nervous while getting ready to face my students for the first time is: will I be able to make a connection with my students; will I we be able to engage them on that first day in a way that could open the door for a positive learning environment for the duration of the course? Will we be able to become active participants? Will we be able to be both performers and audience?

Teaching is my passion and it is an activity in which I have been truly committed for most of my professional life. I see myself as a facilitator of students’ learning, and the classroom as a space in which ideas are exchanged and views formed. I value student-teacher interaction; in all my classes, including lecture courses, I emphasize student participation and development of verbal and writing skills. While I hope that students will remember all we have covered during the semester, I mostly want them to leave my courses, with long-lasting skills: writing, critical thinking, and the ability to responsibly further their knowledge. In my language courses, I emphasize the understanding of structure – what I call the “behavior” of the Spanish language, in hopes that they could further their knowledge on their own should they want or need to. In other words, that the language will no longer be “foreign” to them. For this, I use a variety of strategies and techniques that include technology, television, cultural tours, writing exercises, role playing and the like.

I am continuously looking for engaging activities. At FIT I teach Spanish at various levels and in synchronous and asynchronous courses. I also teach content courses in Literature, Film and Social Sciences in other institutions. The activities should not only reflect the material to be learned but also should include elements with which the students can make connections meaningful to them and spark their interest. At FIT, for example, I choose activities related to the student’s course of study. At FIT, my students are often involved in hands on projects for their majors in Textiles, Fine Arts, Trade, Fashion, etc. Many are also applying skills in internships organized by FIT. Because of their active participation in their fields of study, I make an effort to include in my classes vocabulary related to their future professions, and create content aimed at comprehension in real time speed to help them improve their professional and academic competence in Spanish.

1. **A Successful Lesson That Has Also Failed**

In order to engage students in the class and to help them improve their comprehension skills I often include a television series. Most recently I have been including the Spanish series *Grand Hotel*. This is an upstairs – downstairs drama set at the beginning of the 20th century with the arrival of electricity in a luxury hotel. It’s a melodrama that clearly distinguishes between *los ricos/the rich* upstairs and, *los pobres/ the poor* downstairs working as cooks, waiters, waitresses, etc. The show has been praised not only by the engaging story line but also by its costume and set design. For FIT students, the show is a wonderful opportunity to learn vocabulary about fashion through the introduction of memorable characters. I use the show as a way of giving context to the grammar and vocabulary lessons studied in the assigned textbook for the class.

The lesson: Who said it, to whom and where? consists in presenting the students with several quotes from the show. I do not expect students to understand every word but since they are so engaged they immediately recognize conversations from different episodes. They need to use a structure in the past tense, something that they will not see until the end of the semester and will perfect in the second part of the course. However, it is a structure that Spanish speakers use often: ¿Quién lo dijo? ¿A quién se lo dijo? ¿Dónde se lo dijo?

The student is to answer: *Lo dijo (character) . Se lo dijo (character) en (place)*.

Students will identify characters, prove their comprehension of the show, and identify places in the hotel: garden, kitchen, bedroom, hallways etc. thus practicing vocabulary.

This lesson has been very successful. The students continue using this structure throughout the semester and when lessons about pronouns are introduce, students are already familiarized with their positioning and uses.

The lesson has a second part in where the students choose quotes from the show themselves, present them to the class and other students respond using the assigned structure of *Who said what, to whom and where*. With this I make sure the student goes back to the show, find the quote in Spanish and present it to the class. When I am presenting this lesson in person I can control the order and it has always been successful.

The first part of this lesson has always been successful and students are absolutely engaged in the process. The second part of the exercise has been successful but only in the classroom setting. In the online setting the exercise did not work as expected.

When I presented this two part exercise online I introduced the first part as an assignment and the second one as a Discussion. In the online course, students got confused in the discussion section - many did not complete it confusing it with the first part and where unable to use the structure correctly. Although simple to use, this structure allowed me to introduce other more complex structures during the semester. The fact that students did not complete the exercise precluded me to use it later in the semester.

Adjustments: More examples before presenting the structure and clearly differentiate one section from the other by splitting the exercise into two different weeks/due dates.

Future adjustments: Using Padlet instead of the Discussion forum to create a much more dynamic experience. However, I need to make sure that instructions on both, the exercise and on using the Padlet are clear and give the students more time to complete the exercise.

1. **Technology in the Classroom**

I have always been looking for ways to engage my students in language classes. I first started including internet videos to give my students a sense of real life speaking and to give them strategies for better comprehension. As smart phones entered the scenario, I started to include games in applications like Kahoot to engage the students in the study of grammar. Students loved this kind of applications and I found they interacted more actively with other students in the class and also when they worked in groups.

Then I started teaching online. I had no previous knowledge or training when I started teaching asynchronous courses on Blackboard. In part, this was a blessing in disguise, because I approached the platform in the same way a new student to this technology would. This first experience was with content courses – *Latinos in the US* and *Women in Latin America*. So, I slowly learned to create Assignments and Discussions. I also relied heavily on the Content Section (I still do), reproducing what I had done in an in-person scenario to the Online experience. I soon learned that less is more and, that what sometimes works in a classroom does not necessarily work online. I learned to be extremely organized in the way I presented material and most importantly I discovered the importance of communicating with the students in a consistent manner. For this, I created the *Your Monday Message* – almost like a weekly newsletter where I give them updates, upcoming due dates and reminders about class and administrative matters. I have found that students get used to this weekly communication and look forward to it. I have extended this practice to in-person courses (*Your Wednesday Message).* This is no doubt time consuming, but it keeps the students engaged, avoid confusion, and helps me keep the students in the roster and avoid course withdrawals

Teaching online language courses presented a whole new set of challenges. *The Monday Message* has been crucial in this process and proves that communication is the key to a successful online experience. By then, Blackboard had introduced other features including Bb Collaborate. The Content section continues to be very important in this process but I started relying on the Discussion for more interactive assignments and to promote communication among the students. So, I continue looking for ways to improve the presentation of material to the students, be more creative and, find resources to improve student participation and interaction.

1. **Expanding the Use of Technology**

In this certificate program training I learned to use Padlet. I am developing several lessons to implement on Bb on this coming semester. I will substitute some Discussions by assignments using Padlet. I believe students will be able to better apply knowledge from the class, especially in the introduction of new vocabulary.

Ideas:

1. Clothing. In one of the Discussion assignments students were to identify the clothing used by two characters from the series Gran Hotel. They were to identify their style (ropa elegante, ropa casual, ropa deportiva, atrevida, etc.), and identify items. They would also insert a picture of their characters in the Discussion forum. The student will include grammar structures previously studied (Me gusta, no me gusta, me encanta, me fascina etc.) In this semester, I will substitute this Discussion for Padlet. I believe it enhances the experience of working with vocabulary for clothing and will give them the possibility of being more creative in their approach.
2. The family. Relationships’ tree identifying the connections between characters or, My Family Tree.
3. The Weather. A 7-day forecast from a Spanish speaking country using the vocabulary assigned.
4. Who Said It? To Whom? Where? – Students will identify three quotes from Gran Hotel and will post them on Padlet. The student will include Who Said It? To Whom? Where?

As I prepare these new lessons I am keeping in mind that effective communication and clear instructions for the students is key for these activities to be effective.

1. **Future of Technology**

Now more than ever the use of technology for teaching is proving essential in the field of education. As more institutions are moving their classes to remote or asynchronous teaching, educators have to find ways to improve the student’s learning experience in settings other than the classroom. Trainings, such as the one we did this summer are crucial for educators to engage in new technology and successfully apply it to their courses.