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14 Dec 2019

Teaching Statement

I have been fortunate enough as a graduate student, to have been given the opportunity to both assist and teach at the University of Colorado Boulder in a variety of different courses. In the past five years, I have been both Instructor of Record and Teaching Assistant on sociolinguistics/linguistic anthropology classes across all divisions, as well as Instructor of Record in first-year writing classes at the Program for Writing and Rhetoric. Over the years, my experiences interacting with students and developing syllabi have culminated in two main tenets that guide my teaching beliefs and decisions. They are

1. the essential role "affective labor" (Lamos 2016: 364) plays in effective teaching; and
2. the pedagogical necessity of writing theory in designing assignments for students in linguistics.

Steve Lamos defines affective labor as "the kind of labor required of writing teachers to create the affective conditions in which […] teaching […] can occur" (2016: 364). More often than not, these efforts have been (unfairly) dismissed as gendered work performed mainly by women—a form of emotional labor focused on cultivating supportive and comfortable environments in which students are motivated to learn. In especially writing-heavy fields like composition (and to a similar extent, linguistic anthropology), Lamos also argues, citing Byron Hawk, that in order for successful writing to occur, extra work needs to be done on the part of the instructor, to "seduce" students into the study of rhetoric beyond just attention to writing processes themselves (Hawk 2007: 218-219, as cited in Lamos 2016). I have found that my most successful classes result from developing a close relationship with all of my students, whether in smaller seminars, or larger lectures of more than a hundred students. These efforts have not gone unnoticed by students, and I have received multiple student feedback that point specifically to the importance of a positive classroom environment and a kind and engaged instructor.

> "I can't say enough nice things about Velda. She's probably the best professor I've had throughout my 4 years at CU. She always showed up to class emitting positivity through the way she lectured the somewhat dull and sterile subject matter that a student is inevitably exposed to in an introductory course. Velda was able to, in my opinion, make the class incredibly engaging and interesting by making the classroom environment a comfortable, safe space where controversial thoughts and ideas could be shared without the fear or judgment that follows the politically correct culture that has consumed the world of today. She was also incredibly helpful in answering any of the questions I had when I visited her office hours (wish I went to more of them in retrospect). Thank you Velda for making this such a memorable and enjoyable experience that I'll never forget it." (CU Boulder Faculty Course Questionnaire, Spring 2019)

Research has shown that extensive faculty/student interactions can lead to positive increases in students' "interests, passions, and motivations for learning", and their "academic self-confidence" (Kezar & Maxey 2014: 33). I believe strongly in being accessible to my students, either in office hours, or in the classroom, and I have seen first-hand how "high-impact teaching practices" (2014: 35) like these have directly led to students developing higher enthusiasm for the subjects-at-hand.

My cross-department experiences teaching first-year writing has also impacted positively my approach to using writing as an assessing tool. As a sociolinguistics/linguistic anthropology instructor, I have long used writing to assess student progress and their grasp of content, but have never had any cause to consider the pedagogical implications of assigning writing projects. In recent years, however, with more training in the teaching of rhetoric and composition, I have been seriously considering how understanding the writing *process* contributes to a student's understanding of the field itself. I provide an example of this from an upper-division linguistics anthropology class I have taught, LING 3545 World Language Policies. This class has a wide focus on official and unofficial language policies and discusses their influences on speech communities at international, national, and local levels. It draws for its main content academic journal articles and readings within the field, and is mostly made up of juniors and seniors majoring in linguistics and international relations, where it fulfills major requirements.

Nancy Sommers' seminal piece on revision strategies compares the revision processes of two separate groups she labels as "student writers" and "experienced adult writers" (1980: 380). She identifies dissonance, or the gap between "intention and execution", as a core revision principle with which the expert writers navigate their work, something that is lacking in the approaches of less advanced writers (Sommers 1980: 385). This finding raises an interesting question: How, then, do novice student writers "learn" to recognize dissonance? The pedagogical implication of such a comparative study is clear: instructors need to examine how they direct students' progressions from novices to experts. In particular, for LING 3545, students are in an extraordinary position of being neither novices nor experts, but rank somewhere along the continuum. Being upperclassmen, they can be classified as student writers of a more advanced level—having completed freshmen writing courses as well as spent more than 1-2 academic years within their majors—yet not advanced enough where they are given free rein to attain the goals of the course on their own. With these considerations in mind, how can the instructor use a writing assignment effectively to assess and grade students' levels of proficiency? The goals of an advanced linguistic anthropology class can be complicated and difficult to achieve. Students are asked to perform competency in several main areas: (1) their skills in the in-depth reading on language policy topics; (2) the analysis and synthesis of theoretical issues in language planning and policy making; and lastly (3) the application and presentation of knowledge gained to critique real-world situations and case studies.

My solution has been to design assignments that are sequenced in ways to help students progress effectively from simple analysis to more complex synthesis and critique of theories and case studies (Gottschalk & Hjortshoj 2004). Throughout the course of a semester, I scaffold assignments that require students to demonstrate their mastery in one skill (self-conducted research, for example), before moving on to another related skill (analysis of data). Through this process, students experience first-hand the processual methodologies involved in a linguistic anthropological study, and learn that collecting and summarizing data are essential skills they need to demonstrate before they can move on to more complex critical writing. This integration of writing practices in a linguistic anthropology class, I believe, will lead to stronger student submissions, as well provide support students need in order to achieve eventual independence as an advanced writer and researcher.

References

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