**Teaching Philosophy Statement**

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Communication education found me. As a life-long movie lover, I applied to the RTF program at Syracuse University. Their response was the Department of Speech Communication. I was still determined to be in the film business, but I took SU up on their offer.

Upon graduation, I moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in the business of entertainment. The most powerful takeaway from my degree program at SU was that they had prepared me for the world. My speech communication studies were wrapped around relevant situations I would experience in business, relationships, and family. I have always believed that my SU communication degree gave me an edge over my peers as I worked my way up the corporate entertainment ladder. I was able to think critically, balance numerous personalities, and maintain a healthy work/life balance.

After being tasked with building a scalable recruiting, training, and incentive program for my company, I vividly remember my mentor (our CEO) telling me, “you really are a teacher, you know that, right?” Even though I enjoyed the trappings of working in the entertainment business, where healthy communication skills were considered commodities, the call to teach was my next destination.

Upon relocating to Texas to become a high school communication educator, I was an experienced communication and media professional but lacked pedagogical role models. During the certification program, I gravitated to Dewey, hooks, and Flippen.

I taught and developed curriculum for Communication Applications, Leadership, Public Speaking, Debate, and Teen Counseling. Communication studies and theory excited me. Every year the world around us would change, opening up news windows of discussion and discovery. Each of my school days (and school years) looked different.

The next step for me was to work for an innovative experiential learning company where I interacted with students worldwide. After years of classroom teaching, true immersive experiential education is extremely impactful to the learning experience. There is nothing quite like talking to a group of students about how laws are passed at the federal level, then going to visit the Floor of the House at the US Capitol to sit in the actual chambers and hear from a standing Congressman. Then later, take part in a simulation about how a bill becomes a law! Dewey’s philosophies and my belief in the power of experiential education will always have a place in my classroom.

The most influential new voices so far from my Gonzaga University master’s program have been Sprague’s four goals of education applied to communication (Vangelisti, 1999), and Morrow’s constructivist tactics, specifically that the best teachers are good listeners and that students should be empowered to experiment and take risks (Fernback, 2015). I’ve been a believer in both Sprague and Morrow all along, I just did not know it until now.

**The Why**

I teach to be a thought partner with my students in an engaging and inclusive environment where human communication concepts are challenged and critically applied to relevant, immersive settings. My goal is to build healthy and skillful communicators and launch life-long learners to be the best for the world.

I aspire for my students to feel prepared and confident to communicate effectively, think critically, and successfully contribute to the world outside of the protective bubble of home and school, resulting in the development of a life-time of significant professional and personal relationships.

Reading Dannels has been impactful. Her words ring true for my “why.” Teaching is heart work, and because of this, we can make a difference. Teaching out loud – knowing and bringing your distinct gifts and talents fully to the classroom – can make a difference (Dannels, 2014). Dannels complements the writing of Flippen. His multi-day seminar, *Capturing Kids Hearts*, is a teacher training and strategy course that switched the lightbulb on for me when I was finding my way as a new teacher. “If you have a child’s heart…you have a child’s mind” (Flippen, 2008). It was the simple foundation that I needed. I have also incorporated his teachings about the personal constraints we have in life that hold us back, all of which relate to communication topics such as self-concept, compromise, and interviewing skills.

If you wrap the engaged pedagogy of hooks, which emphasizes the holistic well-being of teachers and students (Dannels, 2014), around Flippen and Dannels, you have a good idea of how I am wired as an educator. With the incorporation of the Ignatian Pedagogy as it seeks to transform how young people look at themselves and other human beings, my philosophy continues to evolve.

Ultimately, I am motivated by the notion that I have made a difference. I am motivated to create a learning environment that will inspire students to want to learn more about the art of communication, while they look back on my classes as some of their most memorable and relevant to their daily lives.

**The Method**

I have always seen myself as more of a facilitator in the classroom. I prefer to present information in a variety of settings for a diverse population of learning styles to find their own answers. Since I do not have a historical academic background in communication, I am fortunate to have a wealth of personal experience in a communication field with a high-interest level from young people. Having the opportunity to listen to stories from a former Hollywood executive often provides me with instant credibility, particularly when applying communication concepts to my experiences. While I can easily wrap those stories into interactive lectures, I prefer Q&A format discussions.

The importance of working in groups is a high priority for me. Other than being able to manage your time wisely on a daily basis, there is nothing more important in a professional setting than being able to work well in a diverse group setting. A portion of classwork and project work will involve group tasks. In addition, an extension of group work is being able to resolve conflict. In all courses, be it public speaking, interpersonal communication, or intro to speech, I plan to include a point/counterpoint, debate-style simulation(s) where both sides of a relevant topic are discussed in a respectful, formal setting.

I enjoy a buffet. I would like to provide a menu of options to my students. Either allowing them to choose from a list of speech topics or to vote as a class on a variety of communication concepts where they would like to take a deeper dive. Maybe it is learning about parliamentary procedure, how to deliver a pitch meeting, or discussing the dynamics of personal relationships. Lastly, introducing guest speakers to the mix, either in-person or from Ted Talk’s can be a valuable new perspective and an alternative to listening to me.

It is important that I am accessible, responsive, and transparent. I want to know my students. While it might be difficult to build that personal connection with a class of 150+, I live by the mantra that “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care” (Roosevelt, n.d.). Looking back to my high school teaching days, I believe I was using a professional teaching version of Social Penetration Theory, as I was supporting the process of developing deeper intimacy with another person(s) through mutual self-disclosure (Griffin, 2012). I still see and keep in touch with many of my students, years after they passed through my classroom doors. I am interested in exploring if this strategy can be applied to higher ed?

**The Impact**

Even though I currently work in curriculum development, coaching, and state testing, I prefer to measure learning in multiple ways. Most importantly, I want to see growth in my students regardless of the level of class. In a public speaking environment, it’s more tangible. In other subjects, I look for the fidelity of the group work to be more robust and the discussions and the level of questioning in class to be more critical. It is fine to ask me during week one what it is like meeting Denzel Washington, as long as you ask by week eight to discuss the process of working with him. Many concepts can be covered in that answer; networking, relationship building, negotiation, group work, project management, conflict management, and integrity.

I believe that multiple tools to assess student learning is more interesting for the student, even if it might require more work for me. I believe in group presentations, projects, and research papers as alternative ways to assess learning. Tests would be primarily written responses, as I believe the art of writing is slowly deteriorating within our general population. While I still have much to learn when it comes to formative assessments at the college-level, I certainly still need help with what is considered the most efficient way to assess groups of 100+.

I am grateful that communication found me. The art of communication allows us to understand our differences and to find common ground between us. The relationships we form throughout our lives are built on the foundation of the communication skills we are able to develop as young adults. I hope to continue to share my experiences and values as we make a difference for the next generation of communicators.

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