Teaching Philosophy Statement – Laura McNabb

Core Beliefs About Learning and Teaching

While the adages "learning is a lifelong endeavor" and "lessons are repeated until they are learned" resonate deeply with me, my teaching philosophy extends beyond these familiar truths. Through my extensive experience as an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructor, I have come to understand that meaningful learning often fails to occur not because students lack motivation or ability, but because they either fail to recognize the lesson embedded within an experience or lack a systematic approach to learning that would allow new knowledge to take root without displacing previously acquired understanding.

This realization has shaped my understanding of my dual role as an educator: first, to help learners identify and articulate the lessons present in their academic experiences, and second, to guide them in developing robust personal learning systems that serve them throughout their lives. As an EAP specialist, I have the unique privilege of helping students hone these metacognitive skills while simultaneously developing their academic English proficiency, creating a powerful synergy between content mastery and learning process development.

Communication forms a cornerstone of all meaningful learning. Whether students are receiving information or expressing their understanding, the two-way interaction that characterizes effective communication is what transforms information into knowledge. In my teaching context, English serves not merely as the subject matter but as the medium through which students develop their learning systems. This dual focus challenges me to ensure that students not only master specific content but also internalize strategies for continued learning in English across diverse academic contexts.

My theoretical foundation draws heavily from several influential educational theorists. Hymes' concept of communicative competence informs my approach to language instruction, ensuring that students develop not just linguistic accuracy but also the pragmatic skills necessary for academic success. Vygotsky's social learning theory guides my emphasis on collaborative learning experiences, while project-based learning methodologies provide the framework for authentic, meaningful engagement with content. The transformative educational philosophies of Paulo Freire and bell hooks inspire my commitment to teaching that empowers students to become critical thinkers and agents of change in their own learning journeys.

Learning Environment and Assessment Philosophy

I conceptualize the classroom as a simulation space for real-life learning, where students can experiment, fail safely, and receive constructive feedback without the high stakes of professional or academic failure in industry. This perspective transforms assessment from a punitive measure into a valuable feedback mechanism that helps students gauge their preparedness for future challenges. Whether formative or summative, assessments in my courses serve as structured opportunities for students to understand their current capabilities and identify areas requiring further development.

The formal classroom environment provides essential structure through its presentation-practice-production sequence, which some students need to organize their learning effectively. However, I recognize that informal learning environments offer equally valuable opportunities for knowledge construction. My role includes helping students identify and process these informal learning experiences and developing their ability to extract meaningful lessons from diverse contexts through analysis and reflection.

Creating an inclusive learning environment requires intentional design and ongoing attention. I promote inclusivity through small group work that allows students to share perspectives safely, deliberate incorporation of multiple viewpoints while watching for bias and logic fallacies, and direct elicitation that ensures all voices are heard during class discussions. This approach acknowledges that learning is enhanced when students can see their own experiences reflected and valued within the academic discourse.

Teaching Strategies and Professional Strengths

My approach to course design begins with clearly articulated learning objectives that balance content knowledge with essential communicative skills. In our information-rich era, my role has evolved from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," helping students navigate vast amounts of available information to identify credible, relevant sources. This shift allows me to focus on developing students' critical evaluation skills while honoring their autonomy as learners.

I deliberately incorporate choice into my course design because learning belongs to the student. When students can select from meaningful options that align with their personal goals and learning preferences, they develop greater ownership of their educational experience. This approach requires careful scaffolding to ensure that choices are educationally sound while remaining responsive to individual needs.

My teaching strategies center on active learning principles, recognizing that meaningful education occurs when students engage actively with content rather than passively receiving information. Project-based learning facilitates the social interaction that Vygotsky identified as crucial for cognitive development while providing authentic contexts for communication practice. Inquiry-based learning develops the critical thinking skills and intellectual curiosity that serve students throughout their academic and professional careers.

What distinguishes me from other instructors in my field is the unique combination of my disciplinary expertise, additional certifications, and philosophical approach to teaching that stems from my own learning experiences. My deep love for English and a background in literature allow me to appreciate both the language's accessible simplicity and its nuanced complexity. As a certified life coach, I bring trained listening skills and the ability to meet students where they are developmentally, providing "just-in-time" teaching that addresses immediate learning needs. My certification as a yoga instructor has taught me to design multi-level learning experiences with readily available modifications, skills that translate directly into differentiated instruction practices.

These diverse qualifications converge in my ability to remain calm and adaptive when lessons require real-time adjustments. With years of experience, I no longer view unexpected classroom developments as stressful obstacles but as opportunities to demonstrate responsive teaching. I am comfortable allowing learning to be messy and imperfect because authentic learning rarely follows neat, predetermined paths.

Hence, the current focus on GenAI and LLMs does not stress me, but instead challenges me to assist learners as they adjust and implement these tools in their learning strategies. Even with numerous available learning tools, I have observed too often when one student is given full rein while the others merely accept the output. Recently, I conducted further investigation to determine why students may not achieve elevated creativity and collaboration that capitalizes on their diverse cultural backgrounds. And I am keen to implement GenAI where it can be helpful and useful to learning.

Impact and Continuous Growth

The impact of my teaching extends beyond immediate classroom outcomes. Through my teaching practice, I have become a more organized lifelong learner who embraces uncertainty as a natural part of the learning process. This personal growth reduces my classroom stress while modeling the very learning behaviours I hope to cultivate in my students. Students consistently demonstrate improved English communication skills, increased content knowledge, and most importantly, enhanced confidence in their academic abilities. Their voluntary enrollment in additional courses and unsolicited expressions of gratitude provide evidence of meaningful learning experiences.

My educational leadership activities include providing professional development presentations for colleagues, mentoring early-career teachers, and fostering team-based decision-making processes. I have successfully developed and convened various course modules, including a sustainability course for first-year university students, demonstrating my ability to translate educational vision into practical curricular innovation.

Student feedback plays a crucial role in my continuous improvement as an educator. Because I enjoy discovery and inquiry-based learning, I initially assumed all students shared this preference. Through systematic feedback collection and peer observation, I learned to provide clearer learning signposts and stronger scaffolding while maintaining the engaging, exploratory elements that make learning meaningful. This adaptation exemplifies my commitment to responsive teaching that serves diverse learning styles.

Future Aspirations

Moving forward, my professional development focuses on enhancing course development and instructional design capabilities. I am particularly interested in expanding differentiated instruction options and implementing more comprehensive universal design principles to make courses accessible to the widest possible range of learners. This goal aligns with my fundamental belief that education should empower all students to succeed, regardless of their starting point or learning profile.

My teaching philosophy ultimately rests on the conviction that education is transformative when it develops both content knowledge and learning capacity. By helping students recognize lessons embedded in their experiences and develop systematic approaches to learning, I prepare them not just for immediate academic success but for lifelong intellectual growth. In the post-secondary context, where students transition from dependent to independent learners, my role involves providing sufficient guidance to support this development without creating dependency. Through this balanced approach, I strive to graduate students who are not merely knowledgeable in specific content areas but are also equipped with the metacognitive skills necessary for continued learning throughout their personal and professional lives.