

Statement of Teaching Philosophy for Benjamin Schmeiser

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Throughout my over eleven-year teaching career, I have taught English in three countries abroad and Spanish in four states here in the United States. The youngest students were in a third-grade English course in Spain and the oldest students were in a community college class in Rancho Cordoba, California. With such diverse groups, I have maintained success in teaching by considering the following three points as my foundation: 1) a positive learning environment 2) consistency and 3) a student-centered classroom.

In my opinion, the central goal of a professor is to create a positive learning environment. To do this, I work diligently to ensure tight group cohesion, especially in the beginning. By establishing a positive group identity, the students feel more relaxed and at ease. For example, I enjoy arriving early and chatting with individual students about their classes, hobbies, etc and then incorporating that information into the class lesson or mentioning it in front of the group; whether it is a birthday, birth of a child or a photo of them in the school newspaper, I try to bring attention to the good fortunes and accomplishments of my students in front of the group. For me personally, I think the highest compliment a student can pay is telling (or showing) me that s/he really wants to be in the classroom and looks forward to coming each and every day.

Pertaining to consistency, I refer to two areas. Firstly, I refer to consistency with the target language. If the students are to gain respect for the language learning in general, the target language and the different cultures of the target language, then all facets of the learning process must be done in the target language. By teaching *about* Spanish *in* English, we as promoters of the language are doing our students a disservice. In my class, I always stress the utter importance of a Spanish-speaking atmosphere and the students flourish in it. Furthermore, I include many incentive games throughout the quarter/semester to keep them focused on staying in the target language. I promote office hours and e-mail as avenues through which the students can ask questions or discuss any matter in English, if they wish. Secondly, I refer to the style of instruction of the professor. It is crucial that we teach in a way that reflects our personality. That is, if we give rules we do not enforce or pretend to know things we really do not, the students will be able to detect superficiality and insincerity quite easily. Students always know what to expect and how I carry myself in the classroom. If my students had to categorize me in one word, they would use 'sincere.'

Lastly, I must say that after *observing* many teaching styles throughout the years, I have noticed that many educators suffer from what is called the 'Atlas Complex.' The 'Atlas Complex' occurs when teachers want to put the world on their shoulders and carry the load by keeping the focus on them. Students often become complacent and bored because they want to engage in the language. Students appreciate my courses because I give them as much opportunity as I can for *them* to produce and practice the language.

In conclusion, by promoting a positive learning atmosphere with tight group cohesion, offering consistency and sincerity and promoting a student-centered classroom, students are quite successful in their quest to learn a second language and we, as educators, achieve our pedagogical goals of promoting not just a target language with its people and its culture but also a new perspective on life.