Teaching Philosophy - Ideas into Action
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My teaching philosophy revolves around two terms, student voice and student choice. When I teach, I begin planning by reviewing the overall goals of the course and how I will leverage the unique and diverse background knowledge of my students in the lessons. Next, I consider all the ways that students can show mastery of those goals, and I tailor the class activities that value alternative, creative, and personal modalities for completing the assignments. Because the focus and delivery of my lessons is based on collective experiences, my students' voices are not only valued, but are a necessary component to the curriculum. It is through their diverse experiences, and my guidance as a facilitator, that my students learn the content, connect with the content, and take action using the content in their school settings.

Student Voice

Students learn the curriculum when they share opinions, connect to personal experiences, and engage in questions and debate with other students. In my class, this student voice is valued. My general class time structures include: 1) Every student participates at least once every 10 minutes, 2) I speak less than 20% of the total time, and 3) Small group time is focused, guided, and student-led. I use a variety of pedagogical strategies including collaborative documents (i.e. Google Slides), text box, voice, chat box, and pair-share, along with pedagogical strategies that I found through my research including, Own-A-Space, Tweet-board, Dynamic Math-Talk, and Anonymous Collaborative Response (Wills, 2021). Each of these strategies offer unique advantages, but the commonality between them is that students are able to share their thinking in a variety of modalities.

Student Choice

Students learn the curriculum in many ways, and they can show mastery of their understanding through traditional and non-traditional modalities. In my class, student voice is valued. During class time, my students participate frequently, but through their chosen modality, which can change multiple times during the class. For example, if I ask a question, several

students turn off their mic to begin talking while others are connecting to personal experiences using text boxes on the collaborative slides, and other students are connecting in the chat box. Student choice is also valued in projects. I give my students rubrics and guidelines, but they create the modality for their project. For example, I've had students give traditional papers, videos, excerpts from social media discussions, student-work from children, Google Slides, and non-traditional presentations as creative ways to meet the mastery objectives. Because I value student choice, my students are able to connect with the curriculum through their lived experiences, and show mastery of the curriculum through their chosen modality. The following image is shown at the beginning of every one of my classes to show my commitment to student choice.

My teaching journey at Mason

I began teaching at Mason as an adjunct professor in 2007. I taught in-person classes in mathematics education for K-8 math specialists. I loved the freedoms that Mason offered in innovation, and in 2010, I began my synchronous online teaching journey. I started with a geometry course that was 50% in-person and 50% synchronous online. I completely redesigned the course to include more group investigations, more rich mathematical tasks, and more student voice and student choice. When we met online, I used a lot of small group exploration and

whole class discussions to deliver the curriculum. My focus at that time was on getting more participation from students. As my experience evolved, I used video games to influence my teaching.

As an avid videogamer, it was no surprise to me that students would prefer to participate differently, based on their interest and background knowledge in the topic. In massively multiplayer online games, it is common for dozens of players from around the world to log on at a particular time and complete an objective. These players must work together, communicate effectively, and participate within the social norms of the group. They would return together, time and time again, and persist to complete their goals. When waiting for the objective to begin, players connected to one another on a personal level, to build long lasting friendships. I used video gaming as a framework for how I wanted my online classroom to function. My focus became on engagement, collaboration, persistence, relationships, voice and choice.

In 2012, I began using Google Slides as the main platform for showcasing student thinking. Google slides are simultaneously collaborative, which is another successful quality of video games. That means, that in a video game, you are able to see other players move and the outcomes of their choices. In Google Slides, you are able to see when a student types, or drags an object. This gave my students more voice and choice because they could respond at the same time as viewing the responses of their classmates simultaneously. Other students had the choice to read responses first and then comment after they had time to reflect. Early finishers could bold other students' statements or use emojis to connect. This style of collecting student voice is anonymous, but Google Slides also allowed me to collect student voice through semi-anonymous methods as well. I often used color coded text boxes, where I knew a student's assigned color, but the other students did not. I used accountability strategies such as this to ensure that each of my students were participating and were engaged. With the use of Google Slides, I had more access to viewing my students thinking as it evolved - live.

In 2015, I began studying my online classes in comparison to my in-person classes. I spent the next few semesters teaching a course both online and in-person in the same night. This challenge forced me to ensure that I was not compromising my pedagogy for the convenience of the online modality. What I didn't expect was that I would discover that online teaching has many advantages that could not easily be replicated in the physical classroom, making my online classes a bit better than my in-person classes.

In 2018, I taught all online courses and continued to develop pedagogies that focused on engagement, collaboration, persistence, relationships, voice and choice. I started speaking regularly at the Stearns Center Innovations in Teaching and Learning conference and sharing my research about online teaching with peers.

In 2019, I found myself teaching in-person again, and was challenged with how to bring all the affordances of online learning back into the in-person classroom. This was the start of my concurrent teaching experience. Students used Google Slides in class on laptops while engaging in verbal discussions and hands-on activities. That fall, there was a particularly bad strain of flu that spread to many of my students. Even when my students were home sick, they asked if they could log into the Google Slides and call in to the class to participate. This concurrent model allowed access for all of my students, regardless if they were in the physical classroom or at home to learn.

In 2020, I was teaching both in-person and online courses. Because the concurrent model worked so well the previous semester, I set up my in-person class to run similarly. Little did I know that COVID-19 would shut schools down only a few months later. When it did, my students were able to participate online without missing a beat.

Teaching beyond Mason

My teaching goes beyond my course load at Mason. In the spring of 2020, when the world shut down, I began sharing all that I have learned about online and concurrent teaching and learning. I conducted over 600 hours of professional development to teachers globally about how to teach online. In addition, I spoke at conferences, wrote articles, and was a guest on multiple podcasts. I even wrote a bestselling book, Teaching math at a distance: A practical guide to rich remote instruction. When I sit down at night, and I wonder if I made a difference, I refer to this note that a former student wrote to me in the midst of the pandemic:

Hi Theresa!

How are you? I hope the fall semester is off to a great start!

I wanted to take a moment and thank you for being such an incredible model for online teaching. Back in spring, I felt so well equipped with tools and experience that, while overwhelmed, I never felt anxious. Words cannot express how deeply fortunate I feel for the example you set for me. I still continue to use your website (and share it with my co-workers) because there are just so many valuable resources there.

I truly cannot say this enough- THANK YOU! Your positivity and expertise have helped me SO much to be the teacher that my students deserve.

Sincerely,
Emily Anderson