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Teaching Philosophy Statement

Teaching involves encouraging students to shape the way they think about situations and events that they encounter in their everyday life with what they learn in the classroom. Sometimes, however, students fail to do this because they think that they do not know how to apply abstract class concepts to the real world. A part of my job as a teacher is to help students realize that, oftentimes, they already know how to apply lessons from the classroom to their own experiences. To help students to first learn the concepts in class and then understand how to keep applying them, I approach teaching with the view of communicating underlying concepts through multiple channels. Furthermore, I try to get students to actively think about the class material as they learn it rather than simply memorizing what I tell them. That way students are more likely to realize how the concepts that they learn in class can cross over to their experiences in the outside world.

To encourage active thinking during the learning process and create another channel through which class material would be communicated to students, I created practice problems covering recent lessons in my Microeconomics Principles class. Students worked on these practice problems in randomly assigned small groups during class. These assignments were not graded so students were in a low stakes environment. In a low stakes environment, students would be more willing to truly test themselves even as they may have felt like they were likely to make mistakes. Students can then learn from their mistakes without jeopardizing their standing in the class. Furthermore, by having students work in small groups, students had to think about course concepts like negative externalities as they discussed it with other members of the group. Students got another explanation of the concept from their peers, and students were inherently testing their understanding of it by having to explain how to apply what I taught them to the problems at hand. Moreover, students got a better idea of what they knew how to do and what they did not. This helped students to be more effective in their studying and encouraged them to seek help for those problems they did not understand. In my own classes and in the large classes for which I was a teaching assistant, I also managed online discussion boards. The online discussion boards created an opportunity for students to get answers to their questions from their peers in a similar manner to when students were working in small groups. This way, even for large classes where small group work is typically not feasible, students can benefit from these types of interactions with other students.

When students need additional help from me, I use the idea that students often know more than they realize to their advantage. I get students to first express how much they already know about solving a particular problem by asking them questions about the class concepts they already understand. Through this process, many times, students will see on their own how the concepts they already understand relate to the concepts underlying the problem they are asking me about. If not, I then lead students to the missing links in their knowledge. This way students are an active participant when they are getting the help they need as well as when they are in the process of learning the class material.

To bridge the divide between the classroom and the real world, my strategy is to help students make the connection themselves. One way I did this in my Microeconomic Principles and

Political Economy classes is that I had students bring me news articles that were relevant to the concepts we were covering at the time. We then discussed those articles during class, and if the discussion got a little off topic, I helped students link what they read in their articles more concretely to the day's lesson. While the concepts I taught in class may have seemed a little abstract to students at times, this helped to show how classroom concepts could be applied to the outside world. At the end of every class I teach, I hope that students let what I teach them shape their own understanding of what is going on around them. What they learn in the classroom can help them to better navigate a complex world.