

Tara Jo Lenertz
Teaching Statement

Education can often be a performative activity where people compare themselves to others and decide how well they are doing based on the successes or downfalls of those around them, as if everyone's learning process was the same, and as a teacher I want to deconstruct this perception for my students. It is important to encourage students to feel confident taking risks in exploring new methods and approaches to their work, because a student's possibilities to succeed are as endless as their efforts. I hope to impress upon them the value of the learning experience, regardless of an institutionally assessed outcome.

The cornerstone of my teaching philosophy is recognizing that learning is a process and that not everyone begins the process from the same starting point. The reason I am so invested in thinking about learning as a process, as well as exercising consideration for each individual during this process, roots from my own experiences as a student. Even as a child, I felt like I was "behind" everyone in class, and this perception shaped the way I approached my education as a student. If a person is told that they are "less" enough, then they will, sadly, start to believe it. It wasn't until I had a teacher in seventh grade who recognized my strengths and encouraged me with a different approach than I had seen before. He encouraged me to try new reading methods and approach assignments from a different angle. It felt risky, because it wasn't what everyone else was doing, but it worked for me and my individual learning style. I will not consider myself successful until I have approached every student's unique needs individually and given them the time, feedback, and instruction they need to grow as a student.

Along with acknowledging that learning is a process comes recognizing the important markers that will help me assess progress within the process. To achieve this, I will observe student engagement in the course, as well as work output, to recognize areas where students may be struggling in their learning process. For example, in the areas of attention and memory, I will design specialized projects that are of relevant interest to the student to increase curiosity and participation while also being mindful of how I convey instructions (written, orally, visually, etc.). It is important to employ this responsive pedagogy to the learning process to track progress, respond to development, and ensure success.

In addition to recognizing the value of each student's experiences, it is important for a teacher to consider how current events can inform and affect students' perspectives throughout the course. Because of this, it is essential to maintain a sense of social consciousness in the classroom that will extend into the students' lives out of the classroom as well as the community. Things happening outside of the classroom continue to affect students when they enter an educational institution. I will remain flexible in adjusting the course schedule or planned daily lesson to reflect the needs of our current social moment. This may come in the form of shifting reading material to address current events or through a classroom discussion about politics, economics, the environment, public health, social responsibility, or any other topic that could lead to a fruitful and productive conversation.

As a non-traditional, first-generation student, I see firsthand the value of an education and want nothing more than to be an effective educator and cheerleader for my students on their academic journey. My education has been a process that cannot be measured by any single product or direct comparison to another person's process, and recognizing this enables me to value my students' unique experiences and academic goals. I will strive to meet my students' needs, wherever they may begin, because if the desire to learn is present, then there is no "right" or "wrong" place to start.