Philosophy of Teaching Statement

Dr. Karey Perkins

> *"Here in St. Cloud's, I have come to understand that promises are rarely kept, that the battle isn't so much against evil as ignorance, and that being successful can't hold a candle to being 'of use.'"*[1]

Dr. Wilbur Larch opens John Irving's award-winning screenplay, based on Irving's contemporary American novel, *Cider House Rules*. Larch iterates his philosophy to be "of use" throughout the movie as well as the novel. It is one that says abstracted ideology and superficial status are far less important than the reality of the present moment, the urgency of those in need, and our duty to serve them. That to live, not in our heady ideals, but embodied in the here-and-now of the physical world answering the demands of others, is where our true lives, loves, and values are experienced and manifested. For each of us, our exhortation, our calling, our best-lived life, is to be "of use"—and in doing so, our lives have meaning. We are in turn fulfilled. Others' happiness, their success, is our reward.

Being "of use" differs from individual to individual, depending on personal skills, talents, and interests. That translates for me into serving others through my teaching, my research, and my writing. A teacher is a servant empowering students to learn and gifting them with new views of their world and the skills to encounter and navigate that world. A researcher is a servant to knowledge and must subsume her desires for a preferred experimental outcome to the truth while advancing insights in her field. As a practitioner, a writer creates the best work she can for the enjoyment and edification of others. None of this occurs in isolation. Academic disciplines are not static and solipstic; they are a dynamic and integral part of the fabric of the world. Through interaction with colleagues and with culture and society as a whole, academicians stay current and connected. Researching, writing, and presenting or publishing in both academic and professional venues maintain relevance and expertise—and feeds directly into the classroom.

My teaching philosophy and practices are eclectic and include a combination of cognitivism, constructivism, and social learning theory. Above all, my teaching is student-centered and employs a variety of learning experiences from whole class discussion to small groups to think-pair-share activities. Fostering good relationships through trust and respect is paramount as engagement, enthusiasm, and commitment to the educational endeavor intrinsically motivates students—and such engagement is contagious. Students learn best by doing, so I try to provide active experiences for them to engage with the material whenever possible. I also use such tools as mapping, scaffolding, spiraling, modeling, and guided practice when I teach. I try to engage many aspects of students' mental processes, including teaching for all levels of Bloom's taxonomy: not just remembering and understanding, but applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. A teacher can encourage a dynamic educational atmosphere by actively involving students in the learning process. When students participate with the material, they internalize it. Passive learning such as listening to a lecture or reading a book is strengthened and reinforced once a student engages with the content—discussing it, experiencing it by "doing," or teaching it to someone else. Praxis enlivens the lesson, embeds it in students' minds more fully, and stimulates and challenges them to learn at all cognitive levels. Timely feedback and good record-keeping allow students to feel comfortable with their progress in the class and allow both myself and the students to adjust in the learning process if needed.

As a military dependent who was raised around the world, exposed to many different cultures in different countries as well as the multi-cultural atmosphere of the military, I feel at home in diverse environments. In addition, as an adult, for the past thirty years I have taught diverse college student populations in variety of places, including the military in Europe and the Middle East, through my technical college employment and as a full professor at the University of Maryland University College, Europe, which offers on-base college courses and degrees to enlisted U.S. military troops deployed overseas. I currently serve as Associate Professor of English at South Carolina State University, South Carolina's only public HBCU. My life and professional experience have prepared me to well to serve today's college students' needs.

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[1] John Irving, *Cider House Rules: A Screenplay* (New York: Hyperion, 1999), 2.