

Here is an older, informal document that will give you a good sense of me generally. I have just begun my jobsearch and am creating a portfolio website that will be populated by Friday, May 3.

Educational Philosophy 2018

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.- John Dewey

A wisely ordered secondary school should aim at education and not merely preparation, should have an eye on life and not simply on college- *Daniel Abercrombie, WA Headmaster*

I begin with a quote from one of our great philosophers of education (and fellow UVM grad, class of 1869) because I think it encapsulates, in the broadest sense, a reality about the essence of education. Distinctions between “the real world” and the “educational world” seem arbitrary and unhelpful to me, especially if we conceive of education as a lifelong process that goes beyond the confines of the classically academic or an idea of an endpoint to be reached.

Teacher Engagement: One aspect of my educational philosophy that has developed and deepened over time is my observation of the central importance of TEACHER engagement. Perhaps it sounds like a strange concept, and indeed I find it completely underrepresented in professional learning communities such as conferences. There are many sessions about raising student engagement, which is essential, but I think there is a direct link between teacher engagement and student engagement that is not often explored. There seems to be a bias that teachers are automatically highly engaged in the process and students may or may not be. Or that we must focus only on what we think is good for the students. However, this is not necessarily the case. Both in my work as department chair and in my teaching I have noticed there are ebbs and flows to the process. But what is clear to me is that I (and those who I have observed) are at their best when they are learning along with the students, changing and evolving their courses to make sure that there is growth in it for them as well. Although I was never a person who would be inclined to simply repeat lessons in a rote fashion year after year, over the last 5 years I have actively chosen formats for student work and engagement which provide me with a dynamic and interesting role as a co-learner. I can cite many examples in this regard, but I think the work to create the Latino’s of Worcester Academy presentation and our work with various community organizations is the clearest.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhd56czLoeGryl1_BltHwZznrdyFeQlFv

Joy: Related to this is the concept of joy (sometimes called fun). When students (and teachers) are enjoying the class, much more is possible and the natural motivation of the dopamine system reinforces and enriches our learning. I try to get at things from as many angles as possible because different people find different things enjoyable. We will do drama, literature, debate, games, cinema, grammar, etc. Games are one of the most engaging and inherently motivating aspects in my classes, though they are used judiciously. It still astounds me how

highly engaged students become with a long vocabulary list when it is presented as a Quizlet.live session. Students who sometimes seem sleepy or uninterested turn into ‘monsters’ of competition. Kahoot can do the same thing for very tricky grammar concepts. One of my favorites is called lyricstraining.com and it plays video of songs and students have to listen and fill in the blanks. This one is always a crowd pleaser and it deftly integrates just about everything that I am working with them on: culture, grammar, reading, listening, vocabulary etc. Of course students do not ‘notice’ that they have explored all of these components, which is one of the best things about it! This kind of activity also goes back to my previous comments on teacher engagement; I get to listen to music, often new to me, and explore it right along with the students. Here is a good example of this. It is a clip of my class and I singing villancicos together at the holiday (check out the Santa!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVZLv2IN6xk>

Creativity/Choice: I also see joy when students get to use their own creativity. Students love to create and are often hungry for opportunities to express themselves. When they have a choice it is even better. In a recent project that was the “test” for a chapter on Personality, I gave the students a very open-ended prompt to see what they would come up with. I told them to write a scene for the theater that explored some aspect of personality. Each pair created their original work, memorized, and performed it at the Performing Arts Center with an invited audience (which included the headmaster) as well as a private posting to Youtube for parents and family who could not attend. They were phenomenal pieces of art that were infused with language, including the grammar we had been practicing. Allowing choice and creativity almost always ups the perceived relevance of the material for the students, which is a key element. Finding a way to make material relevant (or for them to see the relevance, really) is one of the most important tasks for any teacher.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhd56czLoeGrRaPSOjcD_el2s2ZILTIN

Another example of this is in a running project that I created that I simply call “Themes”. Although I am a fan of free conversation to start or end the class, I also think it is good to have some structure and diversity to the topics to encourage greater intellectual breadth and more challenging language than the standard quotidian fare. Every month the students come up with their own “Theme,” which consists of 5 well-formed discussion questions about any topic. The audience is the class and the students have created part of the class content that they should find engaging, in addition to practicing forming questions, expanding vocabulary, and hammering correct grammar use.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1m39AH0ly-w0FKxUCGykuUhTNv8k3pO7q>

At the AP level, when we look deeply into each culture there is always an assignment or assessment that asks students to bring their own questions, interests, and passions to the subject of study. My job is to provide structural components, help them connect, and give feedback. Then I step out of the way and see what they can do. Here are two strong examples of that kind of work. In the second one the student wrote and played the music in the film to illustrate examples of his explanations.

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1KLQ3Q0hQYxCgN-492M_7Q2-m4x9NY6la
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1I1v5WEug2sfa4DkSZEYqoyJdsx-lxL1T>

Audience/Cause: Another way to instantaneously make work more relevant is to give it an authentic audience. When the “audience” is no longer simply the teacher with his red pen, something very interesting happens. To see me students engaged in work with the Worcester Latino History project has been magical in that regard. We have transcribed a number of interviews now, which are such intimate engagement with all of the cultural, social, historical, and linguistic topics I would like them to explore. Some have been heartwrenching like the last one we did. She had come from the Dominican Republic because her daughter was brought to the US by her father and was abused by that family. She came in on humanitarian visa to help her daughter through the court system, but of course she could not work and had to live in a shelter. As she established herself more she experienced racism, mostly from other Latinos. She has worked hard and now her daughter is heading to Union College and wants to be an immigration lawyer. I have never read literature more engaging than her story and the students really responded. Similarly, when my 3H knows that the animation video they create to explore the concept of Magical Realism will be posted to a video competition that gets votes from all over the world, their engagement and motivation really grows.

<https://lospremioscursi.wordpress.com>

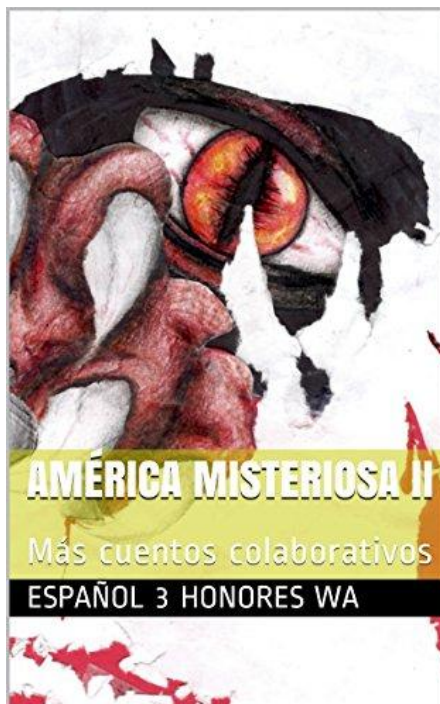
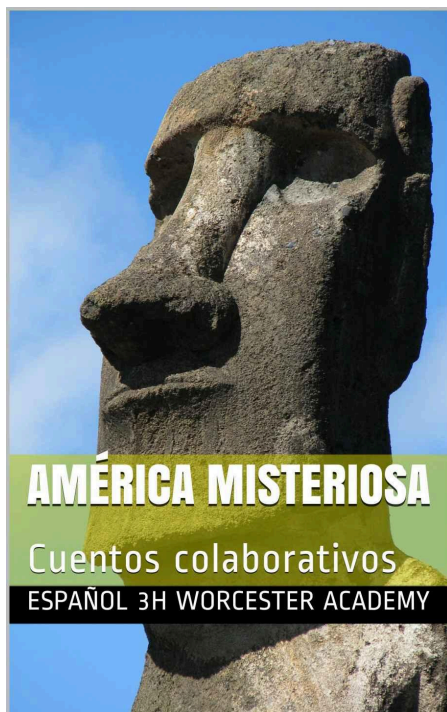
In a similar vein, for students to show all that they have learned during the course of the third year in a natural and global manner, we do a unit on the cultural construct of the Telenovela. We watch a couple of them to get the flavor and scope and dip our toes into the fascinating socially of the phenomenon before allowing them to unleash their ideas in a video competition judged by teachers and other Spanish speakers. Instead of a final exam, we get together during that time in Walker Gallery to have a premiere/lunch/awards ceremony/end-of-the-year celebration of learning and growth. Parents are invited and many come. Students produce exceptional work because they have had agency, a framework, and several real audiences.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfDPcA5C5F6zGYj_IE3tdKK0twSbBS_II



Packed-house of parents and students enjoying almuerzo and film premieres together- May 2018

The digital books that we created and have sold on Amazon for the benefit of the Outreach360 organization we worked with in the Dominican Republic is another good example of this approach which takes it one step further so as to use the project to materially benefit a worthy service-learning program (over \$150 was raised through project.)



https://www.amazon.com/América-misteriosa-Cuentos-colaborativos-Spanish-ebook/dp/B00Y9E3RKI/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1526394945&sr=8-1&keywords=america+misteriosa

https://www.amazon.com/América-misteriosa-II-cuentos-colaborativos-ebook/dp/B01G4N1J0G/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1526394945&sr=8-4&keywords=america+misteriosa

Culture, Contexts, and Connections-

Although we do lots of communication activities, I believe that it is essential to provide much more than a solid set of language skills. Language is ultimately a subset of culture (which informs culture as well). Students need to deeply understand about the cultures that inform and make the language a living, vibrant tool in a more coherent way than the often pastiche-like model of textbooks. I work with the students to learn about the diversity of the Spanish-speaking world, which often chafes at their preconceptions and stereotypes. They also need to see it as part of their very own community: Massachusetts is a spanish-speaking place and has been for many years. One small example of how we do this is with a constant reading of newspapers from different countries around the globe and from the city. There are also frequent projects in which students dive deeply into some very specific aspect of culture and return with a pearl of education to give to the class. Here are but a few examples:

Student led tour of La sagrada familia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdvVCumJ1zE>

Life and times of Manuel Noriega:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhy9BLZhOlo>

One of my very favorite ways of bringing culture, contexts, and connections is by inviting in outside guests to share their particular insights with students. Just this year Dr. Esteban Loustaneau spoke about various issues regarding his home country.

Dr. Loustaneau teaching



Full lecture:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzi3hS9V8oc&t=106s>

Dr. Cuberes lecturing on the Catalan 'problem' and cutting a tortilla I had made:



José Castillo continues to help work with the students around the universe of Latin music. There are others who have helped me in other ways including Dr. Dan Frost.



Feedback-

Respecting student voice and learning from their experiences of the class is incredibly useful to improving practice (beyond the twice a year standard eval.) In the same way that I give student feedback on a consistent basis so that they can be well aware of their strengths and weaknesses, I invite them to do the same for the class (or specific areas in which I feel I want more ideas.)

Here are student comments regarding the Telenovela project. They will help inform any future iterations:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1g6meerwLI4e1-78wm6PRZQd-47A1WfbBvldrzCZsEEs/edit?usp=sharing>