Teaching Statement

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Students can benefit from a professor and advisor with a deep and broad background and knowledge in the content area, and in my experience as a graduate student, such qualities were true of the better professors I’ve had. My background was originally in theoretical and generative linguistics, then in applied linguistics, language teaching, and qualitative and theoretical studies of pragmatics. My later interests took me into cognitive psychology, cognitive approaches to linguistics, experimental psychology, quantitative research methods, statistics, and practical experience from working in and running my advisor’s research lab. Though some modern pedagogical methods emphasize a student-centered approach to instruction (a virtual mantra in language pedagogy circles), I find that this does not work well without the instructor serving as an effective and knowledgeable mentor and facilitator. In the terminology of traditional, sociocognitive, and Vygotskyan approaches (from which modern pedagogies tend to ultimately derive), the instructor is a necessary facilitator who helps “bootstrap” the students to deeper conceptual knowledge and practice. Such requires a knowledgeable and resourceful instructor who can effectively communicate with students and convey content.

As a person with teaching experience and a broad background, over the years I have gained a sense of professionalism and knowledge that permeates my classroom teaching. Even as a student participating in graduate seminar courses, my professionalism and background come across, and I have gained good rapport with my professors as a result. An appropriate student-centeredness comes from a professor who can meet students’ needs for learning and training, who is professional and mature, and who can put the students at ease, establish a comfortable learning environment and working relationship with students, and who balances professionalism with care and concern for students, and even a moderate sense of humor for the sake of a positive learning environment. Over the years as a teacher, graduate student, and lab manager, I have cultivated such qualities. The same qualities would of course apply to mentoring and advising students, particularly graduate students.

As a professor, then, I prefer an informal lecture-discussion format with students, in which students and I interact in a professional but cordial manner. For graduate students specifically, I would of course follow the seminar-style lecture-discussion format that has been typical of my graduate level courses in psychology and educational psychology. The course would consist of presentation and discussion of research articles, with the presentation and discussion being led by me at first, but mostly by graduate students. (Evaluation of students, i.e., grading, typically depends on final research papers, presentations, and class participation.) This kind of format is what I would use in teaching various psycholinguistics courses and other content area course at the graduate or upper undergraduate levels.

One exception to this style that I have witnessed has been in my statistics and research methods courses, which are sometimes entirely lecture based, and some courses have been quite theoretical,
with no practical application of the material to experimental design or interpretation of research. If teaching an introductory statistics or quantitative research methods class, I would present more of an overview of statistical techniques relevant to psycholinguistics research — e.g., rather than merely covering traditional ANOVAs and regression, I would at least introduce them to the basics of logistic regression, hierarchical linear modeling, factor analysis, and principal components analysis, so they could at least interact with more of the research literature and know what kinds of techniques to study further. I would also introduce a practical emphasis to such courses by discussing actual published research and evaluating the statistical methods used, and also by discussing published articles on problems and issues of statistical methods in psycholinguistic research — e.g., articles on adjusted F values for experiments with lexical stimuli, cautions in using ANCOVAs and MANOVAs, different ways of calculating effect size statistics, and choice of appropriate statistical methods for certain types of research.

For graduate students, practical training and lab experience is as important as classroom learning, and an advising professor who properly mentors students, especially neophyte students and lab assistants, is important for their intellectual and professional growth. Working in a lab and meeting unclear expectations of a supervisor or professor can be very stressful for graduate students, especially new students in the field, and ultimately detrimental to their professional training and development, so I wish to be present and properly mentor them. Years ago as a neophyte psycholinguistics researcher in a previous lab, learning an entirely new paradigm with no help or support was very difficult, and although I overcame those obstacles and became a skilled researcher and lab manager, I wish to spare my students such difficulties and instead let them gain from the wisdom I have learned from my experiences.

As a lab research assistant and manager, I am thus able to work well and cordially with labmates. I train fellow graduate students in lab work and research, and I have served as a mentor and helper to fellow students and research assistants in my lab, training them in lab procedures, facilitating their experiments, and helping them with their research. I also train our undergraduate research assistants, who work in the lab for undergraduate course credit, and I make sure they are well trained and supported. My training and professionalism in this domain will carry over into running my own research lab, and to advising graduate students and lab assistants, many of whom will be new students in the field of psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology.

I would be able to teach a number of courses related to my current and past research, e.g., various courses in psycholinguistics (introductory and advanced levels, discourse and sentence processing, lexical processing, L2 psycholinguistics, Chinese psycholinguistics), reading psychology, discourse psychology, research methods, and writing systems. (Sample syllabi are available upon request.) My research would of course benefit my teaching and my advisees, as course work would connect directly with lab work and students’ own research. My previous experience as a teacher, research assistant, and lab manager, along with my research, will naturally translate into being an effective teacher, researcher, and advisor.