

Teaching Statement

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During my last year at Columbia's Philosophy Department I was asked to speak at a workshop for Teaching Assistants (TAs) on how to teach as an international student with English as a second language (ESL). I suggested using humor and transforming an apparent weakness into a strength; by playfully joking about my own accent I allowed students, especially introverts and ESL ones, to feel more comfortable about speaking up. This was also an opportunity to think more broadly about my goals and strengths as a teacher. I usually open my classes by telling students my two main goals in philosophical teaching: Not only to engage with material that will clarify and broaden their ideas, but also to learn *how* to think and express themselves verbally and in writing. My greatest strengths in this respect are my ability to cover a wide range of content - from Symbolic Logic to Social and Political Philosophy, to transfer diverse skills like formal proving and philosophical conversation and argumentation, and navigating complex classroom environments. I began teaching as a Teaching Assistant at the University of Buenos Aires in 2011, and in 2013 I started teaching at Columbia University as a graduate student. The past few years I participated in an outreach program that works with disadvantaged populations, and I visited several universities as a student. I will now articulate how some of these experiences shaped my teaching.

In the Fall of 2017 I joined Columbia's Core Curriculum instructor body by teaching *Contemporary Civilization*. This one-year course is central to the university's program and identity, and every student in the college is required to take it. It is a discussion-based "great books" formative class that ranges from Plato and the Hebrew Bible to Du Bois and MacKinnon. Since students come from different majors they are variously interested in the material. To cope with this, I am attentive to their interests. For example, in order to discuss censorship in *Republic*, we discussed EU internet regulations. Reflection led students to understand how comedy (in the form of cynical memes) can be detrimental for character building and society in general.

I found that the best way of teaching *Symbolic Logic* is by habituating students to the techniques through regular homework exercises. One recurring challenge for formal courses is that they usually divide the students among those who find them too easy, and those who find them too hard. To navigate this, homeworks include extra credit advanced exercises (ocasionally in the form of a puzzle, sometimes unsolvable) to motivate the former group, and office hours usually helps students in the latter face their fear to formal reasoning and enjoy the challenge that the exercises present.

A separate yet very informative experience has been my involvement with the outreach program *Rethink* (<http://www.philosophyoutreach.com/>). Rethink is a collective based in New York City that aims to promote philosophical engagement outside of traditional academic contexts. We lead philosophical discussion sections with different at risk populations. This experience forced me to face important pedagogical and philosophical challenges. Court-involved youth rarely find philosophy useful for their life challenges, and they have a delicate relation with authority. Furthermore, the subtleties of group and class dynamics are of crucial importance, because unhealthy conflict can spark easily. My experience at Sanctuary for Families taught me the importance of being very careful in articulating thoughts and attitudes in class; victims can get triggered by the wrong choice of words or even by the exercise of authority in a cold manner. Besides teaching skills and content, I believe the labor of a proper teacher involves dealing with psychological and sociological elements like the ones just mentioned.