
Dr Linda Westphalen | **Written Statement**

1. Citation

For vibrant and compassionate approaches to teaching and learning, which inspire students' enthusiasm and passion for the profession of teaching.

2. Overview

Many different kinds of students decide to be teachers. When asked why they chose this profession, most responses include such phrases as 'to make a difference' or 'to change a child's life': little do they know what it really entails for that goal to be a reality. As a teacher of teachers, my response is substantially the same: I teach to make a difference. I proceed from the theoretical perspective of feminist philosopher, Nel Noddings (1990): a 'chain of care' is established, extending from me, to the students in my immediate circle, to those kids in classrooms. Students need to learn things, but they also need to feel cared for.

In 25 years of teaching experience, a sense of caring has never backfired. I teach cultural diversity in the Graduate Diploma in Education, where I'm also the Program Coordinator. This is a one-year intensive, a pragmatic program designed to take students from 'bystander' status to teaching in a secondary classroom. A core subject, "Education, Culture and Diversity", focuses on the various differences that teachers encounter in their classrooms: gender, sexuality, race, language and religion. Ironically, the differences that are explored in the subject are reflected in the 250 students who sit in the lecture theatre. They're scientists, computer geeks, Shakespeare lovers, historians... age: adult; ethnicity: any; socio-economic status: lots; gender: yes. This is a huge attraction, but it also creates some of the biggest challenges: How to teach Diversity to this diversity?

As a teacher educator, my role is three-fold: passing on content knowledge, modelling teaching 'best practice', and as a Program and Course leader, taking the time to care for students. This last one is often overlooked in teacher education and universities. Yet a chain of care is, arguably, how effective social systems function, and it is an aspect of my teaching that students invariably respond to:

Dr Westphalen displayed an extraordinary amount of compassion, empathy and decisiveness. As a result, I was able to graduate with my peers... and embark on a new career path. (Letter received May 2012, from a student whose family had experienced a tragedy in the exam period of the previous year).

I cannot find words to express the thanks that I have to you toward the support that you gave me while I was doing the grad dip. ...Whenever I think of what I have achieved, I think of you. I feel lucky to have you as one of the teachers in my life. (unsolicited email from a 2009 GDE student, writing in 2010)

I found Linda to be an extremely caring and dedicated teacher and feel that she enriches the quality of this Graduate Diploma. Always positive and supportive, her humour and objective, honest opinions on any topic enabled me to deal with issues on my practicum that I found confronting and that I initially viewed as being insurmountable. (GDE student, 2010)

"Linda is a good role model for the type of teacher I may want to become... a true passion that is infectious." (SELT report, 2010)

Piaget and Vygotsky argue that people learn by experiencing knowledge at fundamentally emotional and cognitive levels: they don't learn because a lecturer prattles. Enthusiasm, care and passion are essential for all teachers, whether in a university or in a school, since this makes the student experience (in the lecture theatre and in the cranium) enjoyable and satisfying. Student experience is considered an imperative in universities these days. Unless university teachers care, this imperative is nothing more than fluffy rhetoric. More importantly, this pedagogy ensures that students learn actively and retain knowledge. They go from frightened novice to confident professional in one scant year, and that's a learning curve of almost vertical proportions. The curve doesn't flatten if we care, but it gives students in trouble the confidence of knowing that they matter.

3. Approaches to the support of learning and teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn

Enthusiasm When pre-service teachers experience a teaching model that demonstrates both the fun and the effectiveness of a lively and positive learning space, then they, the schools in which they will become teachers, and the students they will teach can't help but benefit. And that's the crux of it. Humour and intrigue play straight into learning theory: a happy 'switched on' brain learns better than a sleepy bored brain. Teaching with humour means that students are more attentive, feel less threatened by novel ideas and concepts and are less resistant to change. Critical faculties are sharpened and there is an increased level of comprehension (Garner, 2005). When teachers demonstrate enthusiasm for their students, their subjects and learning, they become a driving force, generating an infectious energy that gets passed on to their students (Roche and Marsh, 2007). We begin a chain of care that starts in the uni and extends to a secondary school – and beyond. One of the great rewards of my teaching are the many emails I receive from past students letting me know how they're now getting on as teachers:

You were with me in bed last night as I re-played your lecture on public speaking before my very first lesson - on public speaking. ... Re-listening to your delivery gave me inspiration for my own which, despite an utterly sleepiness night, went really well. What a relief and thank you for your inspirational lecture (Unsolicited email 2012 GDE student).

I'm just writing to thank you for the heads up on what to do if a student confides in you that they are gay (from the gender tute last yr) :) Had my first experience with it today (who would have thought, two terms in as a first year teacher?!), and I instantly thought back to that tute, took your advice, and it worked out pretty well! (unsolicited email from a 2009 Bachelor of Teaching student, writing in her first teaching year)

Leadership Students go to lectures and tutorials to learn, reflect and critique, but it's not always easy to get up into the higher levels of learning, from mere remembering and reproducing to creating, critiquing and synthesising. Students don't have to agree, because in the deeply shaded grey area of cultural studies, agreement is secondary to what we learn from the discussion. What is important is that they accept the challenge of being questioned. They have to: their teenage students are going to do the same, sometimes with emphatic words and hand gestures.

*All of the topics dealt with in Culture Ed have the potential to be controversial. The way you present the topics has really encouraged me to engage in the material and **think about what I think** which I think is really important! I really value the human insight you give and I value that it's equipping us to go into the profession with the foundation of knowing so much more about ourselves and the people we are dealing with. So thanks!* (unsolicited email, Bachelor of Music Education student, 2008)

Really enjoyed your lecture today - incredibly engaging! It must take a great deal of confidence to discuss such a sensitive issue [sexualities] in front of a hall full of young people. (Unsolicited email 2010 Bachelor of Teaching student)

That's where leadership begins: in being confident in your own views. The next step is for proto-teachers to take what they know and transform it via pedagogy into something their students can take on board, so as to lead *them* in creating new knowledge, pathways and understandings. A good teacher uses a variety of ways to get across their point. YouTube, 'Easter Eggs', quizzes, songs, discussion, student leadership and decision-making, humour, role-plays, the Whiteboard Marker of Power and the odd mintie all find their way into lectures. YouTube clips are pretty normal additions to lectures these days: the more relevant point is what clips are shown and why. One of the most difficult concepts for students to think about is the role of schools as re-enforcers of behaviour; but they tend to get a very clear perspective of this once they've seen Pink Floyd's *Wall* music clip, with some pretty disturbing images of children being turned into faceless drones and rows of marching hammers. Very powerful, and not easily forgotten. In contrast, Weird Al Yankovic's *White and Nerdy*—one of those clips that makes you cringe when you watch it—is used to lead into a discussion about race and racism.

Teaching can't be an all singing, all dancing variety show, of course, but is based on an awareness that people learn better when they relax, where appropriate humour arouses a positive environment for learning, where the unexpected power-point slide hidden in a lecture (an Easter Egg) gets them participating in discussions almost without realising it – and keeps their attention, because they learn to look for more. They become electrified by the discussion of the rogue slide and zing with ideas about their future roles and behaviours as teachers. And then they do it with *their* students in schools. Recent research into the brain reveals just how



This is an example of an Easter Egg. The image comes up in the middle of a lecture, with the intention of stimulating student discussion - a talking point rather than a theoretical point. This example is about surveillance and the focus of the discussion is the question "Just how much should we monitor?"

much all of the senses are used to structure experience and learning. In the deeply acronymatic parlance of education, we VAK – we tie in the Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic domains. *Vaking* means taking different directions to get to the same point: the best learning happens when teachers talk *and* move *and* show pictures, because the richer the teaching, the better students engage. Otherwise, the teacher gets bored (very bad), and that's the funeral dirge to great teaching (very, very bad).

Hold on... the Whiteboard Marker of what? (Dear Reader: you just got 'Easter Egged.' Kind Regards, Linda.) Part of being a good teacher is knowing when to *not* lead, and reflective practice has indicated to me that my flaw as a teacher is that I want to lead too much. It turns everything into a lecture – a fun one, but a lecture all the same. So it's during the lively discussions in tutorials that the Whiteboard Marker of Power (WMP) is introduced in mock ominous tones, and then I fade into the background as much as possible. Whoever wields the WMP—and this person is usually chosen at random by playing 'spin the marker'—holds the floor, and the discussion becomes

their responsibility. My inputs are written on the whiteboard and hints and tips are whispered to the leader as the tutorial progresses. Since the students are only weeks from their first five week practicum and most have never stood in front of a group and guided discussion, WMP lessons have great significance. The holder of the WMP learns for the first time what it means to facilitate learning, the necessity of making eye contact, of knowing names and being able to elicit and synthesise many different points of view. Experienced teachers do these things automatically. The inexperienced do not, and WMP lessons are a good initiation into the practicalities and realities of the students' chosen profession. We chat after and they tell their colleagues what worked, what didn't and how it felt. We look at what they wrote with the WMP, but also how they used the medium. And then, when they do get to classrooms, they've done it before.

Linda refuelled my self confidence. ... I often left tutorials and continued with the discussions with other students. The mood Linda created was one where learning was dynamic and exciting and where students felt empowered as learners. ... I will always be indebted to her for allowing me to feel that anything was possible and for allowing me to feel the excitement that comes from real learning (email from a GDE student, 2010).

Pragmatics It's not very helpful for education students to be set a highly formal teaching or cultural studies 'theory' assignment, when what they are really looking for is down-to-earth preparation for teaching culturally diverse school kids in a very short time. "*You keep it real and practical – at the perfect level for pre-service teachers*" writes one of my (now) teacher colleagues (unsolicited email GDE student, 2010). Keeping it real is vital. Many students are overwhelmed by the range of things that are to be covered in their Diversity core course before they go on their maiden practicum in a secondary school, and they are very nervous about their first engagement with high school students in a classroom. Planning for contingencies is all very well, but how do you know what the contingencies are if you've never taught before?

In response to the need to think beyond the theory to the actual human standing in the spotlight at the front of the classroom, I recall what it felt like to be in that spotlight as a new teacher. Panic. The students (who were teenagers, not adults, so it's trapeze without the safety net) were the **objects** of theory – of stuff I'd learned but had no idea how to apply, and I spent many early days in the profession totally freaked. How to learn from this memory and create an assessment with something meaningful in it for my students?

The Praxis assignment I devised involves a fictional high school class of 30 students. The pre-service teachers only know their names and some characteristic by which fellow students and the student teacher's colleagues would identify them. So, we have Tim, the surfer; Melissa, the chatty girl; George, from Athens; Adam, a Kurna lad, and so on, until we arrive at 30. Given these scant details, students have to build a scenario around who these students are and how they would relate to and teach two of them specifically, relating their teaching to what they have learned in our classes. The exercise encourages the university students to put themselves at the 'chalkface', and enables them to bridge the gap between the theoretical aspects of Diversity

and the practical aspects of teaching in a school. It is an assignment about teaching and about cultures, about students who come to classrooms bringing with them all of their worries, attitudes, opinions, grumps, fears and infatuations. It's teaching the whole person with a baggage of issues, not just the 'bit' that comes to do English or Science. A sense of compassion and an understanding the contexts of children's learning are as fundamental to teaching as knowing one's content and being a rigorous assessor. All teachers, whether they are secondary, tertiary, authoritarian, cuddly bear, lively or sleepwalking, deal with people, sometimes at their most vulnerable.

As outlined above, one of the challenges of the GDE is the diversity of my students. One of the problems this brings is that those students who come from Mathematics and Sciences don't have a lot of formal essay writing experience. The praxis, although still a formal essay requiring research, is pretty alien in the humanities and social sciences as well, and its purpose, context and structure all introduce the pre-service teachers of whatever lineage to other ways of thinking about and approaching their future roles as educators. Teachers have to be creative and literate. They have to think about how to teach all the students in the class - including the ones they wish someone else would teach. Students are quick to see the relevance of the assignment, and this is a strong motivating factor for doing a good job of imagining the personality and contexts of two or three specific students and developing a plan to successfully teach them in a particular subject context. As one student put it, *"The praxis assignment really allowed me to experiment with what I can do"* (SELT report 2010).

4. Impact and Recognition One of my teaching colleagues writes: *'It is obvious from my work with the Edu students that you are DEFINITELY one (of the few??!!) lecturers who explains the task clearly, sets realistic activities, has an 'open-door' policy, etc.'* [sic] (unsolicited email, Learning Centre Academic, 2008). While this email caused some concern (doesn't everyone do this?), it was rewarding to know that my teaching efforts were being recognised outside of the classroom. In 2008, I was acknowledged by not just one colleague, but the Faculty as a whole, when I received the Executive Dean of the Professions' Prize for Excellence in Teaching. I've been nominated again this year. My Student Evaluations from 2009 to 2011 are in the 6.4 to 6.6 (out of a possible 7) range, with the university, Faculty and School of Education averages at 5.8. At an international level, my pedagogical research has been published in *The Canadian Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, the journal of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) and I will be presenting a paper looking at the education value of conferences at the same Conference later this year.

If uni teaching is to be valued, then considering how to improve teaching at the tertiary level with other university lecturers is a crucial part of reflective practice. With this in mind, I'm active in the Education Research Group of Adelaide (ERGA) where I bring my expertise as a teacher to a wider forum – and this includes working with a group of like-minded educators in the organisation of an annual conference. We see ourselves as an education focussed community of practice which brings local education research to the attention of the three universities in Adelaide, as well as a couple interstate.

Teaching with enthusiasm, passion, compassion and with good knowledge of the field means that a teacher can be very influential, impacting on careers. Once they're in their working lives, ex-students don't usually write to lecturers. Mine do, sometimes. We share war stories, give advice, remember debates... we be colleagues. Awards and acknowledgements are all well and good, but the greatest measures of my impact are the ones that come from these colleagues:

Now having almost completed three years of teaching, I can honestly say that Dr Westphalen's enthusiasm is something that I have tried to emulate (2006 GDE student, writing in 2009).

I was able to apply information I gleaned from Linda's lectures to my daily life and even hand it down to my own children, who were still in high school. (Grad Diploma of Education student, 2010)

I enjoyed her classes... so much [that] I found myself raising discussions (based on [her] class foci) at home and in my work place. Dr Westphalen was not at my home during... discussions with my family and was not at school when debating the IB, however [her] instruction served as an inspirational reminder that we have a responsibility to grow and interact as learners, facilitators and members of a Global community. (Masters of Education, 2010)

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