Teaching Philosophy Statement

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"The thing about improvisation is that it's not about what you say. It's listening to what other people say. It's about what you hear." – Paul Merton

My approach to teaching is best described as prepared improvisation. Because I have limited formal training in educational theory, my teaching practice has formed from years of following my intuition, reflecting on what worked and what failed, and adapting accordingly. Mostly, it has been trial and error. Much of what I do when building a course is to create a scaffold and then allow the details to emerge organically based on the needs of the students. Over time, I have come to understand that my most effective teaching moments arise not from strict adherence to a plan but from the dynamic interplay between structure and responsiveness, being ready but also willing to pivot.

The structure and design of my courses are embodied in the syllabus—a roadmap that clearly outlines where we are going. It gives students a sense of direction while leaving space for exploration. My repertoire consists of professional experience, continuous learning, and a deepening knowledge of my field. Together, these components provide the preparation necessary for meaningful improvisation.

Context, however, is where improvisation becomes truly powerful. It manifests in the ability to be responsive to what is happening in a classroom in the moment. In the classroom or scan lab, no two moments are alike. The same lesson plan can yield entirely different outcomes depending on who is in the room and how they respond. Some of my favorite teaching experiences happen when I ask the students a question and get an entirely unexpected answer. A student will surprise me with a unique perspective that shifts our direction—what I call a "left turn at Albuquerque." These unplanned detours often lead to deeper learning and richer engagement, as long as I remain open to them.

At the heart of my teaching is communication and dialogue. This has become especially challenging and increasingly important as I have moved to teaching mostly asynchronous online courses. One method I like to employ is creating discussion posts where I will provide the topic but one of the students must post a question pertaining to that topic. Then they run with the discussion round robin style using a "Yes, and" technique where they affirm part of the previous person's post and then add a new thought in their response. This improvisational tool encourages active listening and builds collaborative momentum, even in a virtual space.

In person, I bring the same ethos to the scan lab. When students capture an image, I acknowledge what they have done well before asking, "What can you do to optimize this image?" Whether their answer is spot-on or off-track, I respond with encouragement: "Yes,

elaborate on that" or "Yes, that might work—what else?" This approach creates a dialogue that transforms passive learning into an active, exploratory process.

A strategy I frequently use to support student progression is the gradual release of responsibility through a structured approach. I began with "see one, do one, teach one" and modified it into "I do, we do, you do." I begin by modeling the skill or concept, demonstrating not just the how but also the why behind each step. We then move into guided practice, where students apply the skill alongside my support. Finally, students take full ownership, applying the technique independently. This scaffolded method mirrors the improvisational balance between structure and freedom—it provides support early on while encouraging autonomy and critical thinking as confidence builds.

Creating an environment that supports both early success and freedom to fail is central to how I teach. Small wins build confidence; low-stakes failure builds resilience. Many of the skills in Diagnostic Medical Sonography take time and repeated effort to master. I make it clear that failure is expected and even welcomed as part of the journey toward proficiency.

Ultimately, my role as an educator is not just to teach content but to listen deeply—to hear what each student is telling me, both verbally and nonverbally—and to adjust my methods accordingly. In improvisation, responsiveness is everything. It allows me to meet students where they are and to help them move forward, one confident step at a time.

Looking ahead, I am committed to continual professional growth as an educator. As a student in the Master of Health Professions Teaching and Technology (MHPTT) program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, I am engaging in formal study to deepen my understanding of pedagogical theory and evidence-based teaching practices. I also actively participate in communities of practice to foster collaboration, share experiences, and learn from others in health professions education. Through these avenues, I aim to expand my repertoire with a broader range of strategies to promote student learning across diverse modalities. Just as my teaching is shaped by improvisation, my professional identity is also a work in progress, one that I will continue to refine as I grow into an advanced practitioner of improvisational teaching, grounded in both scholarship and responsiveness.