Analyzing Disciplinary Ways of Talking about Teaching in Teaching Statements

For each of the following teaching statement excerpts, how do instructors successfully represent themselves as members of academic fields who articulate discipline-specific teaching approaches?

**Excerpt 1:** “Inspired by time in the classroom, I have come up with original, innovative activities to complement my lectures. During my time as a Scientist in Residence, I was required to make a lesson plan in my research topic that could be aligned with Texas education standards. There is a small limestone outcrop in a popular park in Austin that shows nice subtidal-intertidal sequences, and I decided to use it to teach the students about sedimentology and stratigraphy, and how geologists can interpret paleoenvironment. Over two days, I took them to the park and in groups they measured the section and together we interpreted the depositional history. In the end, the students create a stratigraphic column and sea level curve based on their group work. The best part of this lesson, though, was while we were discussing as a group how the rocks were eroded and how they probably originally extended much further in all directions. A few students exclaimed that there were rocks behind their cafeteria that looked a lot like the ones we were looking at, and suggested they might be the same. We went and checked out the rocks as well as a geological map and concluded they were the same rocks. It was exciting for me to see them making the connections with what I was teaching them, and really engaging with the material. Even the students that were ‘too cool’ were saying that they were excited to show their friend the fossils in the rocks, and that they would never just look at these as the ‘Frisbee Field rocks’ again. This lesson plan is published and available online.”

**Excerpt 2:** “Another assignment with which I am experimenting is ‘performing ethnography.’ While my initial reaction to Victor Turner’s idea of performing ethnography was quite negative, I also see its potential as a teaching tool. My own ambivalence and curiosity about this technique encouraged me to seek student reactions to it. The goal of this assignment is for students to question and evaluate for themselves the usefulness of a controversial technique. As a result, I hope that students will take a more active role in their own learning. I chose a Judeo-Christian wedding ceremony as our ritual because it is familiar to many American college students. We do this in conjunction with reading Turner’s work. After enacting the ritual, students evaluate their experience looking at the potential benefits and drawbacks of the technique. In this exercise and throughout my course I encourage students to approach material critically, never accepting something just because it was assigned or because of a theorist’s reputation. Based on an informal survey administered after the activity, my initial experiment with this concept had positive results, but could be improved by giving students extended exposure to the ritual through an appropriately selected ethnography. This is an activity I will continue to refine and I anticipate it being the subject of a systematic classroom research study the next time I have the opportunity to teach this class.”

**Excerpt 3:** “By the end of the semester, students have produced and performed German language presentations, dialogs, and videos that tell a story, inform or persuade their classmates. In my first semester course, for example, students produced videos introducing their favorite places on campus. I made sure that the prompt was narrow enough in focus that students could accomplish the task; yet
broad enough that they could work creatively. I then offered individual help with pronunciation and encouraged students to formulate scripts using familiar vocabulary and structures. After the students published their videos in an online classroom environment, I assigned informal peer review. Students posted comments relating to content and linguistic accuracy, thus mediating language use and communication for each other.

**Excerpt 4**: “As an English literary scholar interested in U.S. multiethnic literature and social justice, my courses are designed to teach students how to bring all of their interactions and awareness of and critical thought about the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality and class in public discourse and literary works. In addition to learning how to closely read a text for its formal aspects (i.e. figurative language, diction, genre, etc.) they also learn how to contextualize a text using knowledge of political, social, and cultural history.”

**Excerpt 5**: “One of my favorite methods of teaching is to act as a facilitator for diverse activities. In a course called Mapping Your Life across Time: Life-span Psychology, I created funny quiz show games and led a diverse set of activities at the end of each class, so the students could apply the boring theories they learned that day to their own real lives. For example, in one class I had students draw life curve graphs of their past and hopeful future after they learned about the self, while for the class on “future and career planning” they wrote their future epitaphs and shared them with classmates. These activities helped the students think about how their lives could be explained using psychological concepts such as self-concept, self-schemas, past self, present self, and future/possible self, and how they could plan their futures using existing psychological theories and strategies. So, when they learned about attachment theory, they took a short survey on adult attachment and scored their own answers, to see what attachment category they were in. This activity made the students understand the theory well and recognize it more practically. Another important learning method I make use of is group work, including group discussion, group debates, and group presentations.”

**Excerpt 6**: “One of the ways of creating spaces to develop listening and speaking skills is listening and watching in groups short conversations and descriptions in the target language without any translation. After that students have the opportunity to share their impressions and questions about the main idea, what they learned and what worlds and sounds they did not understand. It is complemented with recording short storytelling by each student and sharing them using a closed social network (Flipgrid) where they have the opportunity to respond to their classmates with suggestions or opinions. Another way is improving reading and writing through reading short paragraphs expressing feelings about difficulties, problems and common reactions according to the context. They complement it by reading short academic essays in the target language. Then, they practice individually writing and reading at home and in class share what they did and compare with classmates before beginning the peer review activity; it allows them to compare their learning and have the opportunity to ask classmates and instructors about their doubts.”