

Teaching Statement

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The most common comment that I hear from people after I tell them I want to be a math professor is: “Oh, I hate math, and I have never been good at it!” This is a challenge for almost everyone who is going to teach a math course. My goal is to instill confidence into every one of my students so that they no longer say they hate math or have never been good at it. Confidence can be obtained in a number of different ways.

Practice is the number one way of getting confidence. I believe in the saying “practice makes perfect.” A student must practice math to become good at it. I believe a student will practice more and harder for someone that cares about them. I make it a point to get to know my students by name. I also let my students know that I am always available for them. Even though I have my set office hours, I let my students know that I am willing and eager to meet with them anytime. To reassure them of this, I make it a point to email them back immediately when they have questions for me. I am always willing to stay after class to address any concerns. I also believe that a student won’t be as willing to practice outside the class if we don’t practice inside the classroom together. This means that I make time in class to do concrete examples so my students can see the process and how it is applied. These examples also answer the common question: “What will I ever use math for?” For example, while teaching Finite Math at Central College, I did an example to show how much money one would need to put into a bank account when a child is born to pay for that child’s education.

Another way to gain confidence is to work with others. I set up my class so that the students can work with each other and learn from one another. I let them know from the first day that it is okay, and actually encouraged, to work with others in the class. To help this along, I will often have in-class assignments or quizzes in groups. This allows the students to get acquainted with one another. Working with others helps raise the students’ comfort level in the classroom. When they have this comfort, they are more apt to ask questions and be active in the class. Students that go on without getting questions asked are often lost for the whole semester, which often leads to them being lost forever in terms of math comprehension. Working together also allows students to learn how others go about solving problems. It also allows me to see how the students teach one another. I believe that one way to evaluate one’s knowledge of a subject is to observe them teaching it to someone else. This method also allows me to watch and listen to the students to see and hear their thought processes. This helps me to understand what students are struggling with and what they comprehend, so that I can address the issues in the next class.

I try to gear my teaching toward the class. I’m not going to teach as much theory to a College Algebra class as I would to an Abstract Algebra class. With my Abstract Algebra course, I would make my students guide me through a proof I was doing at the board so that they were thinking about how a good proof would be written. In Logic of Arithmetic (a class primarily for Elementary Education majors), I had the students come to the board and teach the rest of the class how to do a problem they were working on with a group. This helped the students be more confident with the math they were doing and also gave them some teaching experience. With this approach, I am reassuring the student at the board so that they feel confident there. The students were a little timid to do this at first, but by the end of the semester, they were much more confident with both the math and teaching it.

Overall, I believe confidence is a major factor in succeeding. If I, as a teacher, can give my students confidence in what they are doing, then I am helping them succeed. This may lead to a couple of my students to say that they love math, and hopefully lead most away from hatred.