

The Courage to Teach at Valencia College as an Adjunct for 4 Decades

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this article is to let every adjunct be aware of the difficulties and be advised not to spend 4 decades as an adjunct but to try always for a full –time.

DISCOURSE

As I recall my four decades of my teaching career at Valencia College, my best memories were the first 38 years. They were the best because as an adjunct I was valued and respected by the administration and the students. The Dean of the Division of Arts and Humanities back then had granted me a space in an office to share with another Prof; a regular office just like a full-time faculty and kept it for 38 years. This was like an honor to me to meet with students and tutor them before and after class.

Then, all of a sudden, my last 2 years before retirement, a new dean was hired, changed all the rules and threatened to take my office. On a day when I was off, this new Dean stormed this office in 3-222, ripped my name and all the language pictures hung on the door and sent me a threatening notice “Empty this office, you are an adjunct, you are not entitled to have an office, come and see me ASAP”. I was very embarrassed to be treated like this after 40 years in this office. Imagine 40 years of dedication and commitment to teaching at Valencia College as an adjunct with passion and love.

“I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy. When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens up before us, when our experience is illuminated by the lightening-life of the mind—then teaching is the finest work I know.”

I have experienced and learned after 4 decades of teaching that the connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in

their hearts—meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.

I gave all my life, all my time and all my experience in helping students learn the fundamentals in language learning, appreciate other cultures, broaden their minds and to be better educated and better citizens.

This threat from the new Dean broke my heart and touched me deeply. I was humiliated, insulted, heartbroken and very saddened, and not appreciated at all, only because I was an adjunct. Is this abuse, discrimination or what?. “She” the new Dean claimed that this was not her decision but a decision that came from the top.

At the same time, on top of that, she used to assign me classes, and then she cancels them a month before the classes begin because the numbers enrolled were under 10, yet she does not cancel other classes with the same numbers of the newly hired adjuncts. Many of my students about 15 went to the Dean’s office insisting and demanding to continue upper classes with me and their demands were denied.

“She” assigned me just one class for Fall 2016 and 3 for the newly adjuncts. This indicates that my 40 years of seniority means nothing. I make a living on “adjunct teaching”. Within the last 2 years before my retirement, I lost the wages of at least 16 courses.

I feel that adjuncts have no voice, no security, no hope and no seniority under this kind of leadership. Why is that? I know there are some colleges in N.Y, Maryland, Rhode Island & other who hire adjuncts and then a couple of years later, they become full-time. I understand that Valencia College relies a great deal on adjuncts in all fields; the number of adjuncts are in the thousands vs. just a few hundred as full-time.

Why Am I Still an Adjunct after 40 Years?

Because I was frustrated, I rushed directly to the West Campus President to ask her & to find out why she did that to me after 40 years of teaching with the utmost loyalty to Valencia College. We talked and she promised me to investigate this matter thoroughly and to deal with my concerns; unfortunately, there was no satisfactory response I really felt uncomfortable and decided to retire.

Finally, I hate to end my 40 years of service to Valencia College on a sad note, I thought about it and prayed about it; I felt that I had no choice. I wanted to continue teaching for a few more years, but I was forced and could not work under this Dean's leadership. I have decided to follow my heart and say goodbye to all my Valencia friends and colleagues who have been so important to my life and very dear to my heart. The "Dean", of course, refused to meet me and say goodbye!!! **Is this what I deserve after 40 years of honest & loyal service to Valencia College?**

Valencia will always hold 40 years of warm memories for me. As I leave Valencia College in June 2016, feeling sad and heartbroken and since I am a great believer in God, I know that God wants us to live out our faith in love, regardless of others' reactions, I hope that the Lord will show me my purpose in life, and forgive the Dean's unkindness to me.

Growing up I wanted to be a school teacher, a college professor teaching foreign languages. I've always loved to help students how to learn a foreign language, show them the new books sent to me by the publishers, and guide them in learning. I thought there could be nothing better than a room full of young, eager students. That's what I want to do with my life. That's my dream. That's my passion.

The French program in the last 38 years, before my retirement, was very effective and satisfying. Every semester I teach three classes:

(FRE 1(a beginning course in French), FRE 2, and FRE 3 and in every course I pause at the beginning of the semester with some questions:

- What is language?
- How does it work?
- How do we get started?
- What are the major components of any language study?

- How should college students be taught to speak a foreign language?
- What should they do the first two weeks of classes?
- How do we improve learning?
- Is language a learned behavior?
- How is culture reflected in the language?
- Are there any similarities in sounds, structure, and vocabulary between French and English? For example,

What is an accent? Is it a disease? What are "cognates"? Some "cognates" have completely different meanings. For example, French "assister" means to be present and not to assist

I always believe that an introduction to the nature of language is very important to college students. To understand a language, we must understand its grammar and its vocabulary. Fundamental insights about language should certainly prove valuable to anyone studying or teaching a language. Language is everywhere. It permits our thoughts, mediates our relations with others, and even creeps into our dreams; yet, it is poorly understood. It is mistaken to assume that we know all about a language because we speak it.

First of all, students need to know the answer to these questions before they get started on their journey in foreign language studies. They need to receive instruction on the linguistic aspect of language and the psychology of language learning. The purpose is to start well on a good foundation from day one and work their way up on a path towards language fluency and finish well. Best results will be achieved if they are instructed on the three major components of language:

- Phonology: the study of sounds in a language
- Syntax: the study of relationship of words in a sentence.
- Semantics: the study of meaning.

Secondly, as educators, we all know that in learning a new language, we have to learn a set of words, each of which pairs a meaning and a pronunciation. We have to learn how individual words may be combined to make sentences. Accordingly, we will speak of a language as involving a phonological system, syntactic system, and a semantic system.

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Words of the language have meanings. A language is characterized by a phonological system. English and French do not sound alike. They have different phonological systems, different sets of principles determining the pronunciation of sentences.

I have often compared the learning of a language to the growth of a tree, with roots and branches seen as structures-means of support for leaves and flowers, even as sentence structure supports vocabulary. Language is alive, it possesses all the qualities of life itself, and its learning can only be a process of combined order and dynamism.

Being able to speak French is one of my greatest joys in life. If you're anything like me, you can't learn enough about this beautiful language. I'm truly delighted to have the opportunity to share my knowledge of and love of French with my students at Valencia College since 1976 and UCF since 2006.

My adventures in teaching French have been challenging, fun and rewarding, and I am honored that through hard work and a lot of creative energy, I am able to help students raise their scores in French, and more importantly, their self-esteem. My goal is to ensure that students learn and find personal meaning and value in the material, no matter what level they might be.

Thirdly, in learning a new language, students face challenges. They must abandon their old habits of learning and avoid letting too much time go by between periods of study. They need to avoid trying to complete several lessons in one sitting; the day-to-day contact to develop listening and speaking skills can't be compressed. To meet these challenges, students are urged to learn some basic principles of language learning and apply these principles especially in the beginning stages of their language studies.

Recent research indicates that children learn a foreign language better and faster than adults because of their physical nature. The younger the child the fresher the muscles are. As we get older the muscles get tougher. When a child is born, he or she is equipped with an innate ability to learn a language. A child learns by hearing, listening and imitating sounds from people and the environment. Educators in this field reveal to us that adults should do the same as they begin to learn a new language.

One of the complaints most frequently voiced about foreign language learning methods is that drill, drill, and more drill deadens the interest of the student. That's why we need to recognize our instructional methods and materials so that the intelligence of the student is not insulted. Bright students, though, recognize the need for drill and repetition. Nevertheless, we are still faced with the fact that language study, even at its best, requires time and patience.

Finally, the right path for a learner to become competent in foreign languages at UCF and VC is to see the big picture. Since there is no magic formula, the student must take up a challenge and follow the three "P's" --Practice, Patience, and Persistence.

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