The Teaching Philosophy Framework: Learning, Leading, and Growing

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A teaching philosophy statement is a powerful framework for exploring one's beliefs about student learning, classroom leadership, assessment, teaching and learning styles, and programmatic development. Developing a teaching philosophy statement, however, can be a daunting task. Librarians may find that having a statement is necessary (e.g., promotion dossier) and/or desirable (e.g., personal reflection). The interactive workshop during the LOEX conference explored a structured and scaffolded approach to drafting a philosophy statement as the framework for a teaching portfolio. This chapter provides the conceptual foundation for understanding what a teaching philosophy is and its many possible roles as well as providing guidance for those who might wish to conduct a similar workshop at their own institution or assess the quality of teaching philosophy statements.

Definition and Role of the Teaching Philosophy Statement

Put simply – a teaching philosophy states what an individual believes about teaching and learning. Writing a teaching philosophy statement is often an exploratory process through which one comes to better understand one's own thinking and may even discover areas of dissonance between one's beliefs and actions. In other words, though the statement itself may appear to be a summative one, the process of writing it is often formative.

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Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesen and Taylor provide a more formal definition of a teaching philosophy as "a systematic and critical rationale that focuses on the important components defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and/or institutional context" (2002, p. 84). Topics included in a teaching philosophy statement typically include beliefs about student learning, classroom leadership, assessment, teaching and learning styles, and programmatic development, among others. In addition to beliefs, one might address goals, methods and processes, teaching and learning contexts, and professional growth as a teacher over time. Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesen and Taylor (2002) also present the idea of using a metaphor or a critical incident about teaching as framing devices for a teaching philosophy statement.

Librarians may find that having a teaching philosophy statement is necessary, e.g., for a promotion dossier or for a job application, and/or desirable for personal reflection and professional growth. One may also be required for certain teaching awards. Search committees looking for instruction and information literacy librarian positions may also request a statement of teaching philosophy from applicants. Often, though, librarians use teaching philosophy statements to help them focus their attention, get to know their own goals and values as teachers, and document their accomplishments, in addition to any external factors requiring them. As one participant quipped during the LOEX workshop – "maybe that I have one?" when asked what one might learn through writing a philosophy statement.

Brainstorming: Who Inspired You?

For librarians or new library school graduates who do not have much teaching experience, or who have not particularly thought of themselves as teachers, it can be helpful to consider

the teaching philosophy statement from the perspective of their experiences as students and what did or did not work in those environments. Thinking about the effectiveness of the great teachers who inspired them may help in thinking about one's personal opinions of teaching and learning. This can also be a useful creative thinking exercise for those who have a great deal of experience teaching. The LOEX workshop included an example approach to brainstorming in this way and the prompting directions and results from the discussion are included here as examples.

Directions: Tell a story of a teacher who influenced your thinking. What are the qualities of the teacher that inspired you?

Qualities Mentioned:

- passion for subject

- engaging

- relevant

- challenging

- connecting with individuals

- patience

- student-centered

- well-prepared

- has back-up plans

- encouraged discovery

- responsive

- deep subject knowledge

- involved with students outside classroom

- engagement in community

- facilitating discovering alongside

- approachable

- develops a long-term relationship

- confidence in student's ability to learn

- presence

- adaptable

- makes connections and provides contexts for connecting local to global

- motivating

BRAINSTORMING: WHAT'S YOUR METAPHOR?

A metaphor is a figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities. The online Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines metaphor as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor). By using the image of something different, metaphors help us make sense of something complex through visualization and description. Since teaching is very complex, metaphors can help one create images for others of what one's personal beliefs about teaching are. For example, Parker Palmer uses the metaphor of the teacher as a sheep dog. According to Palmer, a sheepdog has four vital functions: "It maintains a space where the sheep can graze and feed themselves; holds the sheep together in that space, constantly bringing back strays; it protects the boundaries of the space to keep dangerous predators out; and when the grazing ground is depleted, it moves with the sheep to another space where they can get the food they need" (1998, p. 148). This metaphor is incredibly rich in illuminating his beliefs about his role and responsibilities to his students in creating a safe environment for exploration of the subject.

Metaphors are richer if they examine not only one's view of oneself as a teacher, but also explore beliefs about students, the act of teaching and the act of learning. Thinking of a metaphor is often a good start to beginning your teaching philosophy statement. The LOEX workshop also included an example approach to thinking creatively in this way and the prompting directions and results from the discussion are included here as examples.

Directions: Consider this question. "When you think about yourself as a teacher, what metaphor illuminates your perspective?"

Metaphors Discussed: Participants offered a variety of metaphors. One participant offered the metaphor of the teacher as a safari guide. Safari guides have four main major roles: to educate, to point out interesting things people might not notice, to keep the participants safe, and to protect and curate the environment.

Other metaphors and key features of the metaphor included:

- Translator - diversity of students, know their language/experience and language of Information Literacy, translate back and forth

- Bread Baker - have to take care of the yeast (student is yeast/active ingredient)

- Crutch - student does most of the work, teacher supports

- Map – provides a lot of information, need goal first to be useful

- Penzeys Spice Catalog – provides what used for/recipe, don't make it for you

- Caterer - get one dish, buffet, healthy or not

- Experienced co-traveler - both have some knowledge, participatory

- Country doctor - faculty house calls

- Fuel/Fuel pump - resources for energy, student is the engine

Other often-cited metaphors for teaching include: cooking, gardening, coaching, and directing an orchestra. A birthing coach, or doula, was an additional suggestion. Individuals interested in further exploration of the use of metaphors in teaching are encouraged to read Judith Yero's *Teaching in Mind*, particularly chapters three and four.

BRAINSTORMING: WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Developing a teaching philosophy statement can be a daunting task given the number of topics to discuss and the complexity of each and their interplay. Matt Kaplan, associate director of the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan, suggests that the abstract question of "What's my philosophy?" can be overwhelming, and suggests focusing on concrete questions (as quoted in Montell, 2003). Examples include:

- What do you believe about teaching? Why?

- What do you believe about learning? Why?

- How is that played out in your classroom?

- How does student identity and background make a difference in how you teach?

- What do you still struggle with in terms of teaching and student learning

The LOEX workshop also included an example approach to thinking in this way using a "quick-write" exercise. The "quick-write" prompts are listed below and workshop participants were given only about 15 minutes to respond to the prompts. The goal is to document as many ideas as possible in a short period of time and not become distracted by details or self-correction. After brainstorming, one can review the ideas and refine them in a more reflective way.

The "Quick-Write" prompts are as follows:

I believe that:

- as a teacher my role is to…..

- knowledge is…..

- learning is…..

- the role of the student is to…..

- students are motivated by…..

- students thinking should be….

- when students do…., I know they have learned.

- my role relative to content is….

- good interactions with students are…..

- the best teaching strategies are…

After responding to the "quick-write" prompts, participants were eager to discuss their thoughts. Given the limited amount of time available during the workshop, the discussion was limited to three areas: student roles, student-teacher interactions, and teacher roles relative to content.

Participant ideas related to student roles included beliefs that it is the role of the student to:

- come with willingness to learn

- understand that learning is lifelong

- to do 50% of the work—active participation

- push back and question

- act on knowledge and extend knowledge gained

- let the teacher know when they are not learning

- produce content

- be creative

- contribute and create

- respect expertise

- discover how to be a critical thinker

- play with "mind tools"

- be playful

- construct knowledge

Participant ideas related to student-teacher interactions included beliefs that good interactions with students are:

- mutually beneficial

- symbiotic

- based on real dialogue

- respectful and efficient

- inclusion of shared listening

- focused on student getting what they need from the teacher in order to self-generate answers

- focused on helping students hone their own ideas

Participant ideas related to teacher roles relative to content included beliefs that one's role relative to content is:

- to raise awareness

- to provide framework/context

- evaluative/comparative

- based in a productive tension between process/content

- providing the why and how

- as a guide

- to create connection

- be a model learner

- to inspire

Somewhat surprisingly, none of the participants talked about their relationship to content as a teacher as being an expert, even though deep subject knowledge and expertise in the field were noted as qualities of the teachers that inspired them.

Other writing exercises are described in the "Developers' Diary: Developing Fractal Patterns III," which includes 25 items for self-reflection (Nuhfer, Krest, & Handelsman, 2003). Grundman (2006) includes five sequential exercises intended to provide an organized process for writing a teaching philosophy statement. Additionally, five excellent exercises, namely the four-paragraph model, the critical moments exercise, the self-reflective interview exercise, the teaching cube, and the teaching philosophy matrix are available from the Center for Teaching Excellence at Duquesene University (2009).

Assessing the Teaching Philosophy Statement

Brainstorming exercises provide information with which to compose a teaching philosophy statement in a more formal narrative format. The limited time in the workshop did not allow for the construction of personal narratives and instead the final part of the workshop discussed the iterative process of writing the philosophy statement in that it may never truly be finalized. As one grows and develops as a teacher, one will revise, expand and edit the statement to reflect current and evolving thinking and beliefs. Participants also reviewed a rubric that can assist in assessing the quality of a teaching philosophy statement. The rubric (Appendix 1) is based on the work of Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesen and Taylor and is intended to be a starting point to help teachers developing philosophy statements to identify ideas that should be included in statements and the degree to which these ideas should be developed.

Conducting This Workshop

Many participants requested permission to repeat the LOEX workshop at their own institutions. Permission is granted to use these materials with attributions and a suggested outline is included in this chapter (Appendix 2).

Selected Resources

Angelo, T. A. & Cross, P. K.. (1993). *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers,* 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Arnold, J. M. and Pearson, K. B. (1996). Using the Teaching Portfolio to Define and Improve the Instructional Role of the Academic Library. In L. Shirato & R. Fowler (Eds.), *Change in reference and BI: How much help and how?: Papers and session materials presented at the twenty-second national LOEX library instruction conference held in Ypsilanti, Michigan, 13 to 14 May 1994* (pp. 29-42). Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

Austin, R. N. (2006). Writing the teaching statement. Science Careers, *Science Magazine*. http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~angelakn/ScienceTeachingStatement.pdf

Coppola, B. P. (2002). Writing a statement of teaching philosophy: Fashioning a framework for your classroom. *Journal of College Science Teaching, 31*(7), 448-453.

Duquesne University. Center for Teaching Excellence. (2009). *The Statement of Teaching Philosophy.* http://www.sites.duq.edu/cte/academic-careers/teaching-philosophy.cfm

Goodyear, G. E. & Allchin, D. (1998). Statements of teaching philosophy. In M. Kaplan (Ed.), *To Improve the Academy, 17,* 103-122. http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/private/pdfs/statements_of_teaching_phil.pdf

Grundman, H. G. (2006). Writing a teaching philosophy statement. *Notices of the American Mathematical Society, 53*(11), 1329-1333. http://www.ams.org/notices/200611/comm-grundman.pdf

Kaplan, M., Meizlish, D. S., O'Neal, C., & Wright, M. C. (2007). A research-based rubric for developing statements of teaching philosophy. In Douglas Reimondo Robertson and Linda B. Nilson (Eds.), *To Improve the Academy, 26,* 242-262.

McDonald, J. (2008). *Developing a Philosophy Statement and Teaching Dossier.* http://www.wlu.ca/documents/15431/Teaching_Dossier_Package_-_revised_February_2008.pdf

Meizlish, D., & Kaplan, M. (2008). Valuing and evaluating teaching in academic hiring: A multidisciplinary, cross-institutional study. *Journal of Higher Education, 79*(5): 489-512.

Montell, G. (2003). How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy. Chronicle Careers, *Chronicle of Higher Education.* http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133

Nuhfer, E., Krest, M., & Handelsman, M. M. (2003). Developers' Diary: Developing in fractal patterns III: A guide for composing teaching philosophies. *The National Teaching and Learning Forum, 12*(5), 10-11.

O'Neal, C., Meizlish, D., & Kaplan, M.. (2007). *Writing a statement of teaching philosophy for the academic job search*. CRLT Occasional Papers, 23. Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. http://sitemaker.umich.edu/um.gtc/files/crlt_no23.pdf

Palmer, P. (1998). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schönwetter, D. J., Sokal, L., Friesen, M., & Taylor, K. L. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *The International Journal for Academic Development, 7*(1), pp. 83-97.

Seldin, P. (2004). The Teaching Portfolio: *A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions, 3rd edition.* Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Van Note Chism, N. (1998). Developing a philosophy of teaching statement. *Essays on Teaching Excellence: Toward the Best in the Academy, 9,* 3. http://www.cofc.edu/~cetl/Essays/DevelopingaPhilosophyofTeaching.html

Yero, J. L. (2002). *Teaching in Mind: How Teacher Thinking Shapes Education.* Hamilton, MT: MindFlight Publishing.

APPENDIX 1: RUBRIC FOR ASSESSING THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Note: This rubric is adapted with permission from: Schönwetter, Deiter J., Sokal, Laura, Friesen, Marcia, & Taylor, K. Lynn. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *The International Journal for Academic Development, 7*(1), pp. 83-97.

Topic Area	Needs Work	Emerging	Successful
Definitions of teaching and learning			
Definition of Teaching	Does not define or discuss the term *teaching*	Defines and discusses the term *teaching*	Clearly and personally defines and discusses the term *teaching*
Definition of Learning	Does not define or discuss the term *learning*	Defines and discusses the term *learning*	clearly and personally defines and discusses the term *learning*
Relationship between teaching and learning	Does not discuss the relationship between *teaching* and *learning.*	Discusses the relationship between *teaching* and *learning.*	Clearly discusses the relationship between teaching and learning.
Knowledge of literature	Does not ground the discussion within knowledge of literature.	Grounds the discussion within some knowledge of literature	Grounds the discussion within an extensive knowledge of literature.
Use of Examples	Examples and reflection on experiences with others are missing or irrelevant.	Some relevant examples and reflection on experiences with others are discussed	Extensive and relevant examples and reflection on experiences with others are discussed.
View of the learner			
Articulation of the view of the learner	Fails to articulate view of the learner within the classroom or other learning environment.	Articulates view of the learner within the classroom or other learning environment.	Clearly articulates view of the learner within the classroom or other learning environment.
Knowledge of literature	View shows little or no knowledge of literature.	View is grounded within some knowledge of literature.	Grounded view within an extensive knowledge of literature
Knowledge of learner characteristics	Demonstrates no understanding of the learners' characteristics and their influence on success in the learning environment.	Demonstrates some understanding of the learners' characteristics and their influence on success in the learning environment	Demonstrates extensive understanding of the learners' characteristics and their influence on success in the learning environment.

Goals and expectations of the student – teacher relationship

Relationship between teachers and students	Discussion shows no consistency with definitions of teaching and learning and view of the learner.	Discussion shows some consistency with definitions of teaching and learning and view of the learner.	Discussion is consistent with definitions of teaching and learning and view of the learner.
Examples and reflections	Examples and reflections are not used to illustrate the nature of the student/teacher interactions nor the critical elements of the relationship,	Examples and reflections illustrate either the nature of the student-teacher interactions or the identified critical elements of the relationship.	Examples and reflections strongly illustrate both the nature of the student-teacher interactions as well as the identified critical elements of the relationship
Knowledge of literature	Shows no grounding in literature	Grounded in some knowledge of literature	Grounded in an extensive knowledge of literature

Teaching methods and evaluation

Ability to use variety of teaching and assessment strategies	No evidence of consideration for discipline-specific expectations and learner characteristics and fails to demonstrate evidence of ability to use a variety of teaching and assessment strategies.	Articulates discipline-specific expectations and learner characteristics, and demonstrates evidence of ability to use a variety of teaching and assessment strategies.	Articulates discipline-specific expectations and learner characteristics, and clearly demonstrates evidence of ability to use a wide variety of teaching and assessment strategies.
Knowledge of literature	Shows no knowledge of the literature on teaching methods and assessment.	Shows knowledge of either literature on teaching methods or assessment, but not both.	Shows extensive knowledge of both literature on teaching methods and assessment.
Ties strategies to definitions	Selection of specific strategies are not tied to definitions of teaching and learning, views of the learner and understanding of the student-teacher relationship.	Selection of specific strategies are inconsistent with definitions of teaching and learning, views of the learner and understanding of the student-teacher relationship.	Selection of specific strategies are consistent with definitions of teaching and learning, views of the learner and understanding of the student-teacher relationship.

Personal context of teaching			
Institutional climate	Illustrates no knowledge of general or specific institutional climates and fails to articulate how teaching fits into these types of settings.	Illustrates both his and her knowledge of general institutional climates and articulates how teaching fits into these types of settings.	Clearly illustrates both an extensive knowledge of a specific institutional climate and articulates how teaching fits into that setting.
Context of teaching addressed	Consideration of the context of teaching is not evident.	Consideration of the context of teaching is evident in some of the components of the teaching philosophy statement.	Considerations are evident in all components of the teaching philosophy statement.
Balance between personal and institutional goals	Does not address any balance of personal vs. institutional goals and style.	Reflects some balance of personal vs. institutional goals and style	Reflects an appropriate balance of personal vs. institutional goals and style.
Organization			
Use of metaphor	Has not framed the statement within a metaphor or critical incident that demonstrates links to the various components.	Has framed the statement within a metaphor or critical incident that demonstrates some links to the various components of the teaching philosophy statement.	Has framed the statement within a highly illustrative metaphor or critical incident that demonstrates many links to the various components of the teaching philosophy statement.
Progression through beliefs, actions and goals	Fails to present a consistent progression throughout beliefs, actions and goal dimensions.	Presents a consistent progression throughout beliefs, practice, and goal dimensions.	For each component of the model, presents a consistent progression throughout beliefs, practice, and goal dimensions.
Reflection	Reflection as well as examples are lacking in articulation of beliefs, actions and goals	Reflection as well as some examples are in evidence in articulation of beliefs, actions and goals	Critical and reflective thinking as well as specific examples are in evidence in articulation of beliefs, actions and goals

Timeframe: 1 hour (fast-paced)

5 minutes	Welcome and introductions
5 minutes	The Teaching Philosophy What is a teaching philosophy? Why would you want to create a teaching philosophy statement? Mini-lecture and/or discussion
10 minutes	Who Inspired You? Ask participants to "Think of a story of a teacher who inspired you." Pair up and share this story with another person. Think about the qualities in these stories, and share these qualities with the group. The facilitator records these on a flip chart or white board.
10 minutes	What's your metaphor? Ask participants "When you think about yourself as a teacher, what metaphor illuminates your perspective?" Give them 5 minutes to think on their own. Ask participants to share their own metaphors. The facilitator records these on a flip chart or white board.
20 minutes	Developing the Teaching Philosophy Statement Using the "I believe…" quick write exercise, participants jot down immediate responses to the prompts. Encourage individuals to jot down their fleeting thoughts and not worry too much about complete thoughts or even sentences. Leave enough time to discuss a few of the prompts as a group, as this may help someone to expand their view, or go in another direction. Alternatively, ask participants to complete the quick write or other more complicated writing prompts ahead of time and use the time for further discussion.
10 minutes	Rubrics/Resources Congratulate participants on completing the first (very) rough draft of their teaching philosophy through the quick write and talk about the iterative process of writing the statement. Refer to either the rubric in Appendix 1 or similar materials in the resources. If this is the first of several workshops aimed at developing a teaching portfolio, it may be useful to talk about how the teaching statement is used in the portfolio.