Elements of a Teaching Philosophy

Teaching philosophies are creative expressions, and as such have no universally recognized components. But the five below are in some way addressed in most teaching philosophies.

1. How will your students be changed?

In SCT, we have referred to this as learning goals for your students. These goals will by necessity be general, because at this point we are writing an overall statement, but you can add some specificity by identifying the population of students you are addressing, such as majors in the discipline. Consider not only content knowledge goals, but also methodological or process goals, personal or social goals, and career goals.

> **Example** *"All my students should develop a broad knowledge of the area in question, and students in the major should have the skills necessary to successfully investigate deeply any topic."*

2. What will you do to make that change happen for all students?

Tie specific strategies to the goals you develop. How do you make the myriad decisions about content to include or leave out, resources to use or require, in-class instructional strategies, out of class activities? What do you do to recognize and attend to the diversity of your students, and how do you make sure all students are included and successful?

> **Example** *"My in class instruction will stress a survey of the field with an emphasis on common themes and principles which connect them. Course projects will require all students, for a specific defined area, to go beyond this conceptual level of detail to a level of understanding held by experts in that field."*

3. How will you know if it did?

Assessment and feedback to students should address the goals and be appropriate in relation to the instructional strategies. Tell how your students will know if they have met the goals and how you will know. Are multiple measures possible?

> **Example** *"My examinations are opportunities for students to display their understanding of the patterns and organization of the factual content, and to apply common principles. Because students benefit from timely feedback, most tests will be graded in class, or will be accompanied by a key so students can assess their own learning."*

4. Why is doing this important to you?

Tell why teaching is important, or at least important to you. Indicate what draws you to teaching, and what return you receive for your efforts. Note how you contribute through teaching or as a teacher, or how you make a difference.

> **Example** *"Teaching is simply fun for me. I really like to be with students and share my knowledge and experience."*

5. How will you grow and change?

Tell what your goals are as a teacher, and how you see yourself improving over time. Indicate how you go about making yourself a better instructor?

> **Example** *"Student evaluations are valuable but insufficient for the providing information I want. I also..."*

When developing your teaching philosophy...

Do...

1. Write concisely. Two pages should be the maximum under most circumstances.
2. Use simple organizational structure and short paragraphs to enhance readability.
3. Use active voice language.
4. Use first person style – it is your teaching philosophy.
5. Include metaphors, similes and specific examples if they help to make a point.
6. Acknowledge student diversity.
7. Make sure your comments are in-line with expectations in your discipline and appropriate for the type of institution, or recognize and acknowledge that you are bucking the trend.

Don't...

1. Use words or phrases you don't understand.
2. Use words or phrases you understand but nobody else understands.
3. Be wildly creative, such as writing in haiku or rap, without recognizing the risk (see #7 of the do's).
4. Submit your philosophy without having others read it first.
5. Assume your philosophy is ever final and complete.

Some of those words or phrases

portfolio assessment
constructivism / positivism
constructivist teaching
transmissionist teaching
experiential learning
critical thinking skills
discovery
inquiry
guided inquiry
hands-on minds-on
scientific literacy
grading rubrics
on task
performative exams
writing groups
peer critique groups
concept based learning
facilitated learning
self paced learning
directed learning
didactic

hands-on learning
metacognition
learning portals
Carnegie classification
Bloom's taxonomy
learning communities
classroom management
   techniques
assessment
group think
peer teaching
learning styles
interactive teaching
active learning
passive learning
Socratic method
distance learning
cooperative learning
   environment
web-based learning
collaborative learning

scaffolding
fading
cognitive apprenticeship
situated learning
dramatic devices
quick write
kinesthetic learner
andragogy
brainstorm
declarative knowledge
procedural knowledge
inflict narcissistic injury

Compiled Spring 2000 by querying less than a dozen experienced graduate student instructors at UC Davis.

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