

Developing a Teaching Philosophy Statement

"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment." --

Ralph Waldo Emerson

When you decided to become a teacher, what did you think about? Ideally, if you have made a personal career choice and if you are passionate about your profession, your thoughts would revolve around making a difference in children's lives, about helping them learn, making them think, molding young minds and 'touching the future'. You probably didn't think about, agitated or disinterested parents, students with behavior problems, piles of paper corrections or the isolation of being alone in a classroom with sixty students and the frustration of managing class discipline. There are no 'one size fits all' solutions in teaching. Teaching is a scholarly activity when it is purposeful, reflective, documented, and shared in an evaluative forum. Like anything worth doing, good teaching takes immense hard work and experience. Just as every student is unique, every class and the classroom practices are unique ---- so is every teacher. Every teacher has a teaching philosophy that is unique, too.

A teaching philosophy statement, articulates one's teaching philosophy and is a 'systematic and critical justification that focuses on the significant constituents defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and or institutional context'. The narrative generally would include; a conception of teaching and learning, a description of how one teaches, and the justification for why one teaches that way. The statement should elucidate evidence of practice, convey reflective practices, and communicate teaching as valued while accommodating differences in student abilities, learning styles and levels.

It is essential that every teacher develops a teaching philosophy since it can be used for four diverse purposes:

Personal purpose: A teaching philosophy reflects why one is doing, what one is doing as a teacher. This gives a sense of direction and purpose.

Political purpose: A teaching philosophy articulates one's expertise, with demonstrations of it being grounded in well crafted beliefs and practices. This helps gain respect as a professional which further aids growth - personally and professionally.

Professional purpose: A teaching philosophy necessitates expression of professional objectives and goals. This helps improve and develop one's professional strengths and give directions to one's professional development initiatives.

Pedagogical purpose: Teaching is about growing and finding new ways to develop coursework and modify methodologies according to the learner needs. A teaching philosophy reveals the effect one has on the students and on their learning, both in the cognitive and affective domains.

Thus, articulating a teaching philosophy provides the foundation by which it is possible to clarify goals, to guide behavior, to seed scholarly dialogue on teaching, and to organize evaluation. It has been recognized by many teachers that the process of identifying a personal philosophy of teaching and continuously examining, testifying, and verifying this philosophy through teaching can lead to change of teaching behaviors and ultimately foster professional and personal growth. Therefore, a clear vision of a teaching philosophy provides stability, continuity, and long-term guidance. A well-defined philosophy can help a practitioner to remain focused on teaching goals and appreciate the personal and professional rewards of teaching. However it should be noted that each academic discipline has its own culture and subcultures. What might be an appropriate tone and prominence for one discipline might be less so for another. Therefore it would be advisable to seek advice and suggestions from one or more colleagues and peers from the discipline to review and further polish one's teaching philosophy statement.

In the western world, teachers and faculty are required to develop a teaching philosophy statement as they approach tenure, promotion and even while applying for a new job. Though this trend has not caught up in the Indian educational scenario, it would be a good practice to follow. Personally, I strongly recommend this interesting practice because my teaching philosophy statement contributes towards constructive improvements in; my teaching practice, to set clear goals and to find effective means to accomplish those goals. Remember a teaching philosophy statement is a dynamic document, one that will change, transform and grow as your

academic development and professional maturity grows. As such it's never really concluded; rather a document that you will revisit periodically, as you reflect upon your teaching practices enriched with your experience and wisdom.