

## Teaching Philosophy Statements

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**Abstract:** This article examines the rationale for my teaching philosophy. Using a personal perspective, I explain my objectives, mission, and vision in writing my philosophy of teaching statements. This article also creates a road map and reference points for educators who want to write their own teaching philosophy statements to help them make informed decisions when teaching their students. In my teaching philosophy, I apply the constructivist approach of teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Constructivism, Class assessment, Education, learning, Teaching philosophy.

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### I. Introduction

My teaching philosophy statements are the culmination of many years of teaching experience in the field of information and communication technology. As experience is the best teacher, I have come to the conclusion that, generally, the current teaching methods and styles need to be changed to produce not only more effective learners, but also to make the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful. Constructing my philosophy statements has helped me identify individual styles, priorities as well as objectives in guiding my students. I believe that my teaching philosophy statements will set a strong foundation for my teaching goals. By using the following guidelines, I hope you too will be able to formulate your own teaching philosophy statements and take pride in your profession.

When writing your teaching philosophy statements, never use the word *you* or *we*. Teaching is an art and different individuals have various artistic styles of teaching and learning. So when writing your philosophy statements, always use the pronouns *I* or *my*. Each teacher has his or her own creative and artistic way of teaching. Hence, teaching philosophy statements are unique to the individual.

My own education philosophy statements are embodied within the Constructivism framework. Constructivism is a paradigm of learning that describes the process of knowledge formation. In constructivist learning, students learn actively rather than wait passively for the teacher to spoon-feed them with information (Ellison & Wu, 2008).

Constructivists believe that one has to adapt to the environment to acquire knowledge. In the process, one reshapes the acquired knowledge and creates new knowledge (Sternberg, 2008). Constructivist learners acquire knowledge by blending their present and the past experiences to make new discoveries (Mayer, 2003). To learn the constructivist's way, the learner should make sense of things instead of accepting information at its face value. Indeed, learners are encouraged to internalize and reshape information, transforming it through active observation (Liaw, 2004). The information transformation must be meaningful. By activating his cognitive processing system, the learner will be able to organize his thoughts into logical representation by bridging the newly learnt knowledge with that already acquired or prior knowledge (Mayer, 1999).

According to constructivists, learning is a mental construction which takes place collectively. In the constructivist classroom, learning is facilitated by collaboration (Hughes & Golan, 2008). It is all about interaction to find solutions to a given problem. Studies have found that learners who have been taught using a constructivist approach are very motivated and they enjoy learning much more compared to their counterparts in traditional classrooms (Gabriel, 2004).

Hence, prior to constructing my philosophy of teaching, I posed the following questions to myself:

1. How does the human brain function?
2. How do people learn?
3. How should I teach?
4. How do I motivate the unmotivated learner?
5. What is my role as a teacher?
6. What is the role of my students?
7. What are my prime objectives as the leader in the class?
8. What are the viable concepts and styles of my teaching?
9. What learning outcomes can I anticipate?
10. How do I measure the success of my students?

Since teaching, learning, information, education, teacher, and knowledge are key words in this discussion, I need to define them briefly before proceeding any further.

### 1.1 What Is Learning?

Learning is defined as a process that brings about behavioral changes to a person. It is a skill that must be acquired by individuals as students, and later, as working adults. People learn differently based on their individual unique styles of learning (Qais, 2011). Learning is also defined as a *change* in human behavior as a result of an experience or information input. It can also be considered as an outcome or a visible process.

The most crucial aspect of learning is change. Learning is also achieved through individual experimentations whereby past knowledge is integrated with present knowledge to create new knowledge. According to Dannis, (2008), learning can be viewed “*as a quantitative increase in knowledge. Learning is acquiring information or ‘knowing’. Learning is storing information that can be reproduced. Learning is acquiring facts, skills, and methods that can be retained and used when necessary. Learning involves relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world.* Hence it can be seen that learning is an external as well as an internal force to the learner. Learning may also happen automatically or after instruction. Every day when we are exposed to new knowledge and it becomes internalized, it becomes our possession.

### 1.2 What Is Teaching?

Teaching, on the other hand, denotes a process to facilitate learning. Teaching also refers to the presentation of knowledge, and demonstration of ability or skills. Effective teaching enables students to make connections of the old and the new knowledge to form new ideas. That is why competent teachers have such a crucial role in the advancement of the community.

### 1.3 What Is Education?

Formal education is a process whereby systematic instruction is provided to learners. Generally, the primary aim of education is to impart the desired knowledge or relevant skills to students. Through the process of education, students are expected to enhance their critical thinking skills and make well-informed decisions. Nevertheless, education is provided not only formally by instructors but also when one learns through experiences in real life.

### 1.4 What Are Data?

Data refer to raw materials that have been gathered for a purpose. Data have no meaning or utility until they are analysed or processed.

### 1.5 What Is Information?

Once data are processed and analysed, they become information. Such information is meaningful and useful for the purpose the data are collected.

### 1.6 What Is Knowledge?

We gain knowledge through experience or education. Facts, information, and skills attained by a person through experience are termed as knowledge. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, knowledge is "*the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association*".

## II. My Vision

1. My students will learn new skills and obtain new knowledge in a comfortable classroom environment where they can express themselves without fear.
2. My students will be imbued with the love of learning. They will be trained to be active, constructive and goal-oriented learners.
3. My students will be treated as individuals and will be given due respect and also learn to respect the views of their peers. I will take note that each student is a unique learner who deserves my love, attention, and respect.
4. Other instructors will be inspired by my passion to adopt a constructivist approach to learning so that their classroom too will be an active, fun-filled, and creative environment where every student has a chance to excel in his or her own unique way.

## III. MY MISSION

1. To promote a learning environment that is active, constructive, collaborative, goal-oriented, investigative, and meaningful.

2. To encourage student-centered learning by allowing students to construct knowledge through their own investigations.
3. To establish a strong foundation for stimulating learning as a life-long process.
4. To promote analytical and critical thinking so that learners will acquire meaningful knowledge, not merely remember facts. New information is created when my students make a personal discovery. So I will allow my students to undertake their own investigations to improve their understanding.
5. To promote active engagement and meaningful dialogue to guide learners whenever necessary.

#### IV. My Objectives in Writing Teaching Philosophy Statements

To me, teaching is an art. Teaching and learning are facets of a creative and artistic performance. Each teacher has his or her own idea about how to facilitate learning. I believe that teaching is an *amanah* (trust) and a responsibility on my shoulders. As a computer scientist, I need to keep my students updated with the latest developments in computer sciences, especially information and communication technology.

My task is to enable my students to have the necessary skills and knowledge so that they can make informed decisions and take the necessary action in real life situations. Moreover, I want my students to share my enthusiasm for learning so that new skills and knowledge can be put to good use to improve the community. Thus, writing my teaching philosophy statements is my way of sharing the joy and rewards of being an educator and, hopefully, fellow teachers would feel likewise.

##### 4.1 Objective One

I want my students to understand the significance and relevance of ICT in their everyday lives. To achieve this objective, I discuss the latest advancements in computer sciences so that my students are able to apply state of the art technology in solving problems and sharing their knowledge with their friends. I also aim to encourage input and feedback from my students regarding my course contents. In this way, I can make the necessary changes so that my teaching becomes relevant and meaningful to my students.

##### 4.2 Objective Two

I am here to help my students make effective search in the electronic media so that they can access information easily and without frustration. Furthermore, I show them the techniques of evaluating online information. I also challenge them to critically evaluate and investigate current issues regarding computer science developments. Essentially, I provide my students with opportunities to acquire new skills in information and communication technology, and also to apply the needed information in their everyday lives.

##### 4.3 Objective Three

I will help my students to understand that ICT is interconnected with their everyday lives, economically, culturally, and politically. I train them to use ICT as a platform to prepare themselves for future careers. I conduct classes in the industrial field so that they can apply what they have acquired in the classroom and get hands-on experience.

##### 4.4 Objective Four

I believe that learning is a process in which my students must be actively engaged. They will be given the opportunity to express themselves positively, fearlessly, and cooperatively so that free exchange of ideas can take place.

##### 4.5 Objective Five

While my course contents are a tool to guide my students and make the teaching-learning process a mutually enjoyable one, my teaching techniques must also make students want to learn. I want to arouse my students' curiosity and motivate them by surprising them with new things every time I enter my class. In this way they are not bored but are motivated instead. Whenever I see their eager faces, I too am motivated as an instructor. I have practised this teaching methods successfully with my undergraduate and post graduate students. It is a mutually rewarding experience.

#### V. What is a Teaching Philosophy Statement?

Each teacher has his or her own set of beliefs and concepts of what teaching and learning should be. It is important that the teacher's philosophical stand be carefully deliberated on so that useful ideas can be translated into practice in the classroom. The main purpose of a teaching philosophy statement is two-fold. From the perspective of the academician, it is important that the teacher understands and selects suitable theories and guidelines for teaching; it is equally important to state clearly his own philosophy as an educator so that his actions in the classroom reflect his beliefs.

In generating my teaching philosophy statements, I keep in mind the following three important basic guidelines:

1. **Brainstorming** of ideas to reflect my beliefs, knowledge, values and attitude towards creating an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning.
2. **Creating a road map** based on my personal beliefs, values, and attitudes that are clearly illustrated by practical examples.
3. **Making a final revision** of my road map before I swing into action so that important points can be added or irrelevant points deleted. I always bear in mind that my teaching philosophy grows with my understanding of what true teaching means.

## VI. Fundamental Components of My Teaching Philosophy Statements

### A. CLEAR START-UP STRATEGY

1. I ask myself: What do I want to do for my students? How do I start and end my lessons?
2. My teaching philosophy statements should evoke positive responses from fellow teachers. I shall articulate my teaching philosophy statements with enthusiasm so that my passion will be contagious. Then fellow teachers will be inspired to share my ideas and beliefs to improve the teaching and learning process.
3. I will document my teaching philosophy statements with pride. The statements should reflect creativity, innovation, and a positive tone.

### B. HONESTY AND ATTITUDE

1. Who am I? I will be honest to myself.
2. What is my identity as a teacher?
3. What am I going to do in the class?
4. I will strive to share my teaching philosophy statements with fellow teachers.

### C. ORGANIZING MY THOUGHTS

1. I take my time to write my philosophy of teaching.
2. I don't rush. I write for the right audience.
3. I ask myself who my target groups are.
4. I use the word *I* in writing my statement because every individual is different. I don't generalise. The statements I make must be specific and to the point. I believe teaching is a personal experience as every teacher will use his or her own strategy or technique to help students.

### D. I WRITE AS I AM A LEADER

1. I shall write my statements with confidence.
2. I shall be like a parent who constantly guides his children.
3. I shall accept constructive criticism. I shall consult my seniors and value their input.

## VII. My Teaching Philosophy Statements

When writing my teaching philosophy statements, I always maintain the following five acts of fairness and justice:

1. I ensure that understanding is facilitated for all students as they have different styles of learning. It is my duty to assist and respect each individual in his or her endeavour to learn. So to facilitate learning, I will conduct a research on their background to assess the level of prior knowledge. I start with simple concepts before progressing to the more complex. I divide my learners in groups of 10. In each group, I add one or two better students so that the disadvantaged students can learn from them.
2. I make sure that my students understand and internalize the knowledge gained in the class, otherwise such knowledge will neither be meaningful nor of applicability in their real lives.
3. I always challenge my students to put in their best effort to produce quality work. The achievement of each individual student will be recognised and he or she will be able to stand out from the crowd. In this way, I boost their confidence and improve their survival skills to cope in the real world.
4. I advocate and facilitate critical thinking and cooperative learning in my class. I also provide opportunities to improve writing skills and oral presentation because it is vital that learners are able to communicate their ideas effectively.
5. I promote active, cooperative, and creative learning. It is my passion to help my students enjoy the learning process. I place great emphasis on giving recognition to different styles of learning that exist among students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. I respect my students' cultural and religious values.

## VIII. How Do I Measure Success In My Class?

Success, in my view, means the achievement of a desirable outcome. When I assess my students' performance, I use the techniques described below and I also observe samples of their behaviour, performance, skills, and knowledge. It is an ongoing process. I also pay attention to their facial expressions in the classroom. If I am satisfied and happy with the outcome, it means my philosophy of teaching is working. Success has different meanings for different people. For me, as long as I have achieved my objectives, as well as fulfilled the mission and vision stipulated in my philosophy of teaching, I have achieved success.

### 8.1 Techniques of assessing students:

#### 1. One Minute Paper and the Half-Sheet Response

A very effective method that I often use in my class to measure success is the *One Minute Paper and the Half-Sheet Response* adapted from Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross (1993). I stop my class just five minutes early and ask some quick questions about my lesson such as: "Who can tell me the most crucial thing you learned today in my class?" In this way I am able to collect speedy responses from my students, either verbally or written on a piece of paper.

#### 2. Muddiest Point

This method of assessing students is one of the easiest ways of collecting feedback from students in real time and it is remarkably effective. I ask my students just one question and ask them to jot down their answer e.g. "What was the funniest point I made in my lecture?"

#### 3. One Sentence Summary (Comprehension)

I ask my students about a point in my lecture and ask them to summarise it in one sentence. This question helps me to evaluate their understanding of the big picture.

#### 4. Problem solving

I always arouse my students' curiosity in class. In fact, I am a problem poser and my students are the solvers. It helps me to evaluate their critical thinking skills and problem solving techniques.

#### 5. Opposing viewpoints

I ask my students to evaluate a particular topic or lecture so that they can critically evaluate the two sides of the issue in the lecture.

#### 6. Student-generated Test Questions

I ask my students to identify the most important issue of the lesson and generate their own questions.

#### 7. Process Analysis

This is to find out how students complete their assignment. Since learning is a process, I always ask my students to think about how they do their work or assignments. In this way, I can find out whether my students understand how a problem is solved and the process that is involved.

#### 8. Group Work Evaluation

I ask my students to give opinions about their group work. They have to critically evaluate what their group has achieved. In the process, they become aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They also obtain new knowledge.

#### 9. Classroom Opinion Poll

When I assess my students, I take the opportunity to assess my own performance as well. I ask my students to give me feedback in writing (without giving their names) about my lecture content and the way it is presented so that I can evaluate myself and make the necessary changes.

## IX. Conclusion

Teaching philosophy statements are solely individualistic as they reflect personal values and artistic preferences. How they are structured also depends on the learning environment and the needs of students. Any motivated instructor who wants to write teaching philosophy statements must consider carefully what he or she actually wants to do and how to accomplish it. Each teacher must have clearly defined ideas about his or her role in the classroom in order to function effectively.

Once we have a clear idea about our objectives, we can set about writing our teaching philosophy statements, and the rest is just a matter of delivery. We should apply state of the art methodology and

appropriate theories of teaching and learning to accomplish our objectives. We make use of various tools to assess the effectiveness of our objectives, mission, and vision. We should strive for the desired outcomes rather than rush to finish the syllabus. It is always useful to design our own evaluation method so that we can include feedback from our learners for self-improvement. We need to ask ourselves questions such as: What have we achieved? What are our rewards? Why are we important to society?

As educators, our noble mission is to inculcate the love of learning in our students so that learning becomes a lifelong process. When they are empowered by knowledge, they can make informed decisions about what they want to achieve in life and how to excel in their chosen path. When our students are passionate about gaining meaningful knowledge and applying it in their lives, we have made a difference. The concept of *one size fits all* can be discarded for good.

As evident from the discussion above, I have developed my teaching philosophy statements based on my own experience, first as an undergraduate student and later as an instructor. I have come to the conclusion that our classroom environment, teaching and learning need a fundamental makeover. Furthermore, I am convinced that educators have the responsibility to reveal to their students their true inner beauty and inculcate in them a sense of pride in whatever they strive to achieve. That's why I have decided to write my teaching philosophy statements so that I can make a difference. I am grateful to be able to use findings from studies on the constructivist paradigm of teaching and learning to bring about fundamental change in the classroom.

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