Activating a Teaching–Learning Philosophy

A Practical Guide for Educators

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Introduction and Purpose of the Book

T his how-to manual provides a structured framework for developing a comprehensive teaching–learning philosophy from articulation through implementation to evaluation and then, reactivation. Using professional literature and our teaching–learning experiences, we provide pragmatic steps for using a grounded philosophy to inform, engage, and assess teaching and learning. We advocate an integrated teaching–learning philosophy to promote ongoing commitment, engaged competency, and meaningful purpose in our practice as educators.

Although this book provides a substantive resource, its tone is collegial and conversational. As we wrote the book, we drew from the many conversations we

have had over the years with each other as coauthors and with other colleagues. These conversations include the countless presenters and authors we have learned from. We imagined sitting with you, the reader, over an informal cup of coffee or in a collegial faculty development seminar in person or online. We intend for this book to serve as the resource we wish we had when we first ventured into the teaching role and, indeed, throughout a career trajectory.

We have been developing the ideas and building blocks for this book for several years. We bring an informed approach and diverse perspectives to this project. We work in varied settings and are at different points in our career development as educators. Jay Miller, teaches at a large, public Research I university; Erlene Grise-Owens taught for more than two decades in small, private university settings; and Larry Owens, teaches on a branch campus of a midsize state university. Likewise, Miller is assistant professor, Grise-Owens achieved tenured full professor rank, and Larry Owens is a tenured associate professor. We have taught in adjunct, visiting, and full-time capacities. Also, we bring a range of practice experience in community and agency roles. In addition, in writing the book, we gleaned input from educators at varying points in their careers, from their doctoral studies to across the span of their careers. Throughout the book, we explore differing perspectives and progress (along with challenges) with activating a teaching–learning philosophy. These complementary variations in perspective and experience provide examples and information that encompass the career trajectories of a range of educators.

Overview of Contents

After this introductory chapter delineating the purpose and structure, the book leads you through the process of activating a teaching–learning philosophy. First, we want to clarify terminology. In our practice, we use the term *teaching–learning philosophy* to convey attention to teaching and learning alike. Congruent with many others (Fox, 2013; hooks, 2003; Roche et al., 1999), our philosophies emphasize that student and faculty are roles, not people. That is, the student and teacher roles are complementary and even interchangeable. Those in the formal faculty role must also be learners, and those in the formal student role must also be teachers. Thus, the teaching–learning process inherently engages all participants in the process of teaching and learning. The literature uses both terms (*teaching philosophy* and *teaching–learning philosophy*). In this book, for brevity, we primarily use teaching philosophy or simply, *philosophy*.

We use the term *activating* to convey the process of taking a teaching philosophy from its conception (i.e., articulation) to putting it into practice (i.e., implementation) and assessing that practice (i.e., evaluation). Then, we emphasize that the philosophy is only meaningful and sustainable through an iterative, intentional reactivation. That is, the implementation and evaluation of a philosophy refines the initial articulation, which then repeats the activation cycle.

We echo Weinstein, Meyer, Husman, Van Mater Stone, and McKeachie's (2006)

caution to "be careful not to overemphasize one stage of learning" (p. 282). That is, the essence of the framework in this book is that an activated teaching philosophy is holistic. Activating and reactivating a philosophy requires equal, integrated, and ongoing attention to the facets of articulation, implementation, and evaluation (as shown in the figure on the opening page of this chapter).

In developing this holistic approach, we propose the image of a globe as a metaphor. As we clarify in Chapter 2, a teaching philosophy statement is typically a static product used for a stated purpose (such as a job interview). Thus, as Ratnapradipa and Abrams (2012) said, it can be compared to a road map. However, typically, that road map takes you from Point A (job search) to Point B (job secured), then the map is put aside.

In contrast, having an activated teaching philosophy is a dynamic process, and as such, rather than a road map, is akin to a globe. That is, an activated philosophy is a worldview. Like traveling the globe, an activated philosophy expands your horizons, challenges your perceptions, and deepens your understanding. Ultimately, this approach solidifies connections, enriches your effectiveness, and sustains your professional spirit.

Chapter 2 establishes a theoretical grounding and pragmatic purpose for activating a teaching–learning philosophy. This chapter sets the foundation for understanding how to engage in the process of activation, that is, articulating, implementing, and evaluating and then reactivating. In this chapter, we clarify the important distinction between a teaching philosophy statement (i.e., static product) and an activated philosophy (i.e., dynamic process). This clarification explicates our earlier comparison of the statement as a road map (with limited function) and an activated philosophy as a globe or as an expansive worldview. Then, we emphasize the role of theory in informing an activated philosophy and offer a succinct synthesis of overarching paradigms that can inform theories. From this foundation, we discuss the pragmatic reasons for having a teaching philosophy statement and emphasize using the statement as a starting point for organic activation.

Chapters 3 through 6 guide you through the iterative phases of activating a teaching–learning philosophy. The appendixes of the book contain additional resources, including examples of teaching–learning philosophies, selected resources for writing philosophy statements, and model linkages between professional competencies and a teaching philosophy.

Chapter 3 shows you how to describe and develop a teaching–learning philosophy, using guiding questions such as (a) What do you believe are essential elements for effective teaching–learning? and (b) What is the evidence for these essential elements? This self-reflection and examination toward articulating a teaching philosophy includes the key elements of (a) identifying core values and beliefs about teaching–learning roles and purposes, (b) interpreting inductive experiences in teaching and learning, (c) incorporating the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), and (d) elucidating goodness of fit between teaching

philosophy and context, as well as the institutional and personal missions.

Foundational information about this initial phase of articulating a teaching philosophy by writing a philosophy statement is accessible online and from other resources. This chapter provides preliminary examples of resources and instructions on how to find additional resources for writing a teaching philosophy statement. We end Chapter 3 with reflections on our own process of articulating our philosophy. Recognizing the role of stories in the learning process, we offer our different examples to illustrate how to articulate a philosophy.

Next, Chapter 4 describes the implementation phase, how it relates to articulation and evaluation, and the value of this phase. This chapter shows you how to pragmatically link an articulated philosophy with concrete practice. Similar to Chapter 3, this chapter uses guiding questions such as, What in my actual teaching demonstrates or tests my articulated philosophy, that is, which class assignments, classroom activities, syllabus construction, learning environment expectations and norms, and so forth? Practically, this phase involves moving beyond articulating a teaching philosophy to putting the philosophy into praxis. Key elements in this phase include (a) sharing the teaching philosophy with colleagues and students, (b) designing and developing a classroom culture or learning environment that is congruent with the teaching philosophy, (c) identifying specific assignments and activities that demonstrate the teaching philosophy, and (d) selecting modes of assessment congruent with the teaching philosophy.

Chapter 5 provides an array of strategies for linking evaluative components to a teaching philosophy, including formative and ongoing evaluation methods. This chapter focuses on an often-neglected component of the teaching philosophy: evaluation. We discuss four key elements of evaluation (a) valuing evaluation, (b) conceptualizing your evaluation approach, (c) executing your evaluation approach, and (d) responding to and using feedback. This chapter also discusses how this evaluation should be shared with constituents, including students, and how to use this evaluation as material for building a SoTL research agenda. We explain how to pragmatically connect this evaluation to promotion and tenure processes.

In Chapter 6, the book concludes with a discussion about the synergistic effect of continual reactivation of a teaching philosophy statement through attention to the interlocking phases of articulating, implementing, and evaluating. Emphasizing the organic and iterative nature of an activated philosophy, this chapter discusses ways to sustain a teaching–learning philosophy and the benefits of doing so throughout a career. We provide key elements of reactivation, including (a) taking a synergistic approach to the faculty role, (b) fostering a teaching–learning culture, (c) connecting with structural considerations, and (d) sustaining an activated philosophy.

Then we provide our three stories of sustaining our philosophies. Just as we did in Chapter 3, we offer our varied examples to illustrate the importance and impact of an activated philosophy. In our stories, we recount the ways, at various career points, that we sustain a viable philosophy through reactivation. We emphasize

the exponential impact that an activated philosophy has in revitalization across a career trajectory. We conclude the book with an invitation for you to activate your philosophy and continue the conversation.

As noted previously, this book is intended as a collegial conversation using an accessible format to provide substantive information and practical strategies. It is an organic resource that educators can continue to use throughout their careers and can be used by any individual faculty member for career development, regardless of the individual's career point. The book is also an ideal text for programs that aim to prepare educators and is an excellent resource for faculty development purposes at the departmental, university, or even broader level. It is a relevant resource that addresses the pertinent need for educators to activate a teaching philosophy.

Here we clarify briefly what this book is not. In our teaching, we strive to offer foundational information, but we focus on teaching students how to critique and apply information and how to think, not just what to think (Brookfield, 2015; Fox, 2013; Paul & Elder, 2004; Weinstein, et al., 1999). This approach prepares students for changing environments by developing adaptable and transferable skills for complex and changing environments (Bean, 2001; Fink, 2003; Lang, 2017; Roche et al., 1999; Vella, 2002).

Similarly, this book does not provide a one-size-fits-all teaching philosophy statement. Rather, it gives you a structure and resources to develop your own activated philosophy much beyond the initial exercise of writing a statement. Also, the book is not a treatise on teaching–learning or educational theories nor on which theories to use. Rather, we discuss the role of theory in activating a philosophy and offer guidance in finding your theoretical base. Finally, this book does not attempt to cover the most recent changes in teaching and learning, such as technological advances and online teaching. Rather, we guide you in developing an activated philosophy that is grounded in core principles but adaptable to emerging information and changing environments. Thus, although informed by current literature, this book provides a framework that can be used across the course of your career.

Why This Book?

Teaching–learning philosophies are increasingly needed to (a) promote an informed and grounded foundation for new educators; (b) provide a framework for educators to use for ongoing development and accountability to various constituents, including accreditors, funders, and public supports; and (c) produce scholarship that informs, documents, and enriches the viable and valuable profession of education (Anastas, 2010; Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesen, & Taylor, 2002; Teater, 2011). Ultimately, an activated philosophy can be an invaluable means of helping seasoned faculty sustain themselves. This resource handbook offers educators ways to enhance skills, knowledge, and values for effective, accountable, and meaningful teaching and learning throughout a career.

Increasingly, statements of teaching philosophy are required for faculty

What Is a Teaching Philosophy and Why Do I Need One?

Some of you may have articulated a philosophy in a concrete way; others are operating from a philosophy even though it may be unconscious. Whether or not you have a product (e.g., a written statement), you have certain beliefs and values about teaching and learning that you incorporate into your work or that guide your conception of teaching and learning. Depending on where you are in conceptualizing your philosophy, you may experience incongruence in your work because some of those values and perspectives are not consistently implemented in your teaching–learning practice. This unconsciousness and incongruence can cause particular frustration and confusion for educators. Effective teaching and learning requires an activated philosophy.

This chapter sets the foundation for understanding how to engage in the process of activation, that is, articulating, implementing, evaluating, and then reactivating. In this chapter, we clarify the important distinction between a teaching philosophy statement (i.e., static product) and an activated philosophy (i.e., dynamic process). This clarification expands on our earlier comparison of the statement as a road map, with limited function, and an activated philosophy as a globe, or an expansive worldview. This distinction leads to emphasizing the value of ongoing critical reflection. We emphasize the role of theory in informing an activated philosophy and offer a succinct synthesis of overarching paradigms that can inform theories. From this foundation, we discuss the pragmatic reasons for having a teaching philosophy statement and emphasize using the statement as a starting point for organic activation.

Distinguishing Product From Process

Much of the literature associated with teaching philosophies or statements has focused on the activity of writing down the teaching philosophy statement. The literature is replete with frameworks and exercises associated with this task, and scores of online resources are available for designing teaching statements (see Appendix A). Yet, challenges and misnomers persist. In fact, for some, the prospect of having to write a teaching statement, no matter the reason, is maligned. In one of the prominent works about teaching philosophies, Chism (1998) described the process of writing a teaching philosophy statement as "irritating" (p. 1). This irritation may be attributed, at least in part, to the lack of engaged, conceptual thinking through of one's philosophy.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative to draw a distinction between a teaching philosophy and a teaching philosophy statement. These terms are often used interchangeably in the educational nomenclature. Occasionally the term *teaching portfolio* even becomes confused with these terms. Understanding the difference will help you more adeptly conceptualize the framework for building your philosophy and your statement. Simply put, clarity comes in distinguishing between product and process. To clarify, a teaching portfolio is typically the written product presented in a promotion and tenure process to document your teaching. The portfolio contains your teaching statement (product). Notably, in the digital era, that product can be produced and distributed electronically and may include written text, images, audio, and video to convey the philosophy. If constructed in a meaningful and organic fashion, the portfolio contains evidence or your activated philosophy (process). This process can be enlivened through the use of interactive multimedia platforms to update and share the ongoing activation of your teaching philosophy.

The initial and ongoing development of your activated philosophy requires critical analyses of your thoughts about how people teach and learn, and the juxtaposition of the two. Further, you must consider contextual factors that may affect your analyses: What are the institutional norms and mores where you teach? What are the expectations? How are these ideals communicated? Likewise, you must critically and conscientiously traverse broader considerations, such as how teaching and learning occurs in a rapidly changing, culturally diverse environment. Education is affected by consumerism, expected to produce global citizens, and faced with changing political climates. How do you navigate the challenges and opportunities of these considerations?

In the upcoming chapters the core of developing and activating your teaching philosophy is ongoing critical reflection about the known and unknown, what you have experienced and what you have not, educational environments, and so forth. The influential works of Dewey (1938), Schön (1983), Schmier (1995), and others discussed the importance of critical reflection in education. Much of this reflection assuredly revolves around exploring your own experiences as a student and educator. Pragmatically, through all this exploration and reflection, you are provided