DEVELOPERS' DIARY:
Developing in Fractal Patterns III:
A Guide for Composing Teaching Philosophies

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Bob Leamnson in his Thinking about Teaching and Learning... notes that every teacher has a philosophy, whether written or not. Unwritten, a philosophy may be difficult to enact consistently. One's educational practice may resemble efforts to erect a building from an idea, rather than from a blueprint. Faculty teaching philosophies affect oneself, colleagues, peer reviewers, and students, including prospective students, enrolled in specific courses. Beyond these, from a core personal teaching philosophy one may extrapolate one's philosophical posture in other contexts as well.

Unfortunately, some "philosophies" contain little more than lofty statements. Ellen Herteis (POD listserv March 27, 2003) described such documents as "save the world through interpretive dance philosophies."

Some "philosophies" described by Montell (2003) are similar�essays on teaching written to favorably impress prospective employers. But Dunkin and Precians (1992) looked at more solid approaches, finding that highly successful teachers have more sophisticated operational philosophies and use more feedback from assessment practices than do novice teachers. Despite the importance of a teaching philosophy, most popular handbooks for professors offer little guidance in the area. Even references that recognize a personal philosophy as the core of a teaching portfolio are surprisingly thin on discussions of the actual document. Goodyear and Allchin (1998) provide a refreshing exception in their concise, practical advice regarding teaching philosophies. In this column, we present one framework related to the fractal model (described in earlier issues of the Forum) that we use for connecting principles and practices.

Every complex fractal form develops from a basic building block called a generator. In the most recent **DEVELOPER'S DIARY**, we described

a generator that contained six key components with respect to teaching, learning and thinking that a sophisticated practitioner should be aware of and employ in practice. The individually crafted reflective document that presents one's underlying principles of educational practice is the teaching philosophy. It should accurately describe the modus operandi of one's practice and thus should capture the essence of the generator that forms the outcomes of one's efforts.

A sophisticated philosophy informed by sound literature nevertheless remains a uniquely individual document. While it should contain reference to values, goals, pedagogy, assessment and some ideas for improvement, these should be the writer's own. Too much reliance on "an exemplary philosophy" results in voicing others' ideas and aspirations and this in turn results in a disconnect between one's document and one's practice.

The fractal model depends on connections. Philosophies should overtly influence course products such as syllabi and policies, daily lessons, treatment of students, and instruction one offers students. Supposing you already have a written teaching philosophy: are you actually implementing it? Here's a quick test: hand a colleague a copy of one of your syllabi and ask him or her to draft in three sentences the teaching philosophy conveyed in the syllabus. How well the impression reflects your actual philosophy shows the degree to which your philosophy connects to your practice.

The process of developing a personal teaching philosophy varies. However, we have found it useful to start the process with detailed introspection (see http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/suppmat/1205fractal.htm) that participants do prior to an actual workshop. At the workshop, participants share their drafts in small groups where they give and receive feedback so that they can then refine their philosophy statements. The introspection exercise in conjunction with the workshop enhances the ability to produce a very sophisticated philosophy.

Below are twenty-five items we've used for self-reflection. The list is actually a knowledge survey for the introspection exercise at the above web link. Awareness generated from these questions can form the basis of one's philosophy:

Part 1. Knowing myself as a professor

1. I clearly know the two major reasons why I became a college professor.
2. I clearly know two aspects of my work that are most satisfying.

3. I clearly know two aspects of my work that are challenges or frustrations.
4. I can recall a mentor who was a particularly positive influence on my teaching, and the setting in which this memory occurred.
5. I understand the significance of that memory with respect to how I teach today.
6. If a decade from now, a student recalled me as an influential teacher, three traits I would like to be remembered for are _____, ____, and_____.

Part II. Knowing what I want/need to do

7. "Successful teaching" for me means achieving the following outcomes for students with respect to content knowledge:
_____
8. "Successful teaching" for me means achieving the following outcomes for students with respect to students attitudes:
_____
9. "Successful teaching" for me means achieving the following outcomes for students with respect to values:
_____
10. "Successful teaching" for me means providing students with the following experiences:
_____
11. "Successful teaching" for me means achieving the following outcomes for students with respect to levels of thinking:
_____
12. I understand how each of my courses fits into the department/college/university curriculum in regard to what it is supposed to achieve in each of the five areas bold-faced above.

Part III. Understanding the pedagogy I've chosen.
13. I employ the following as my dominant pedagogical method(s) _____ and I chose this (these) method(s) because
_____.
14. When I lecture, I understand that I must do the following to employ the lecture method to achieve maximum success:
_____
15. My favorite non-lecture approaches to teaching are
_____.
16. I know that these chosen non-lecture approaches are effective because _____.
17. I have considered the following non-lecture approach/model and rejected using it because_____.
18. There are several well-established models through which to recognize students' levels of thinking. The model I'm most familiar

with is _____.
19. I've chosen to utilize this particular model in my teaching practice because_____.
20. In each of my courses, I know the general distribution for levels of thinking that I want to emphasize.

Part IV " Understanding how successful I've been
21. When a class session ends, I know the students have understood and achieved what I intended because _____.
22. I know that the pedagogical approach I've chosen is good practice because _____.
23. When a course ends, I know that I've been successful in improving students' mastery of content knowledge and/or skills because_____.
24. If my students were asked: "What are the most valuable experiences that were provided for you in this class?" most would answer_____.
25. If my students were asked: "Aside from factual knowledge or skill proficiency, what was the primary change in your awareness with respect to values and/or attitudes that this class produced?" most would answer_____.

Professors may add sophistication by connecting values and principles with practice and including discussion of their content, pedagogies, thinking and assessments in their philosophies. For example, consider the following assignment, which includes a rubric, based on the fractal generator detailed in the last diary, which is helpful in expanding and reworking the philosophy:

When writing your teaching philosophy, include your core values and principles derived from introspection. Include description of some content you selected for students to learn and the kinds of pedagogies you match to particular content to aid students' learning. Briefly, explain why you chose these pedagogies from among several options. Use a sentence or two to describe the levels of thinking (i.e., Perry model, Reflective Judgment model or other) that you target in your specific classes. Describe any assessment tools that you chose to monitor and/or confirm students' understanding, their intellectual growth and any assessment that you use as a key to help direct your own plans for improvement.

We view a written, sophisticated, comprehensive philosophy as the most important tangible product produced during the Boot Camp for Profs� summer program. As professors grow and develop, the sophistication of their philosophies should improve dramatically. One of the greatest

services any developer can render faculty is to assist individuals in developing thoughtful and informed philosophies that promote success.

The next diary will consider the equivalent of the teaching philosophy at the unit level.

References

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� Goodyear, G. E., and Allchin, D. 1998. "Statements of teaching philosophy," To Improve the Academy, v. 17, pp. 103 - 121.

� Montell, G. 2003. "What's your philosophy on teaching, and does it matter?" The Chronicle of Higher Education, March 27, 2003.

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