

Teaching Philosophy Statement Framework for Early Career Faculty in Teaching Institutions

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Background Context

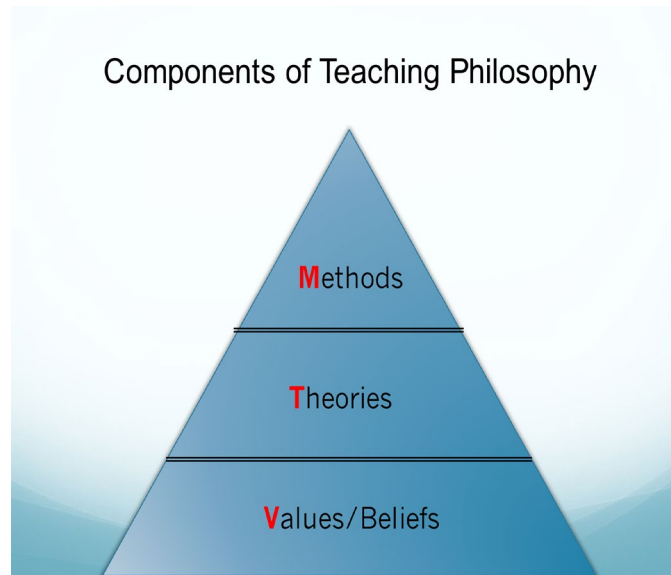
Over the past two decades, my role as a teacher educator and faculty associate in my university's faculty development center has enabled me to work with preservice teachers, graduate students, and early-career faculty to help them learn pedagogical foundations. One of the key curricula is developing teaching philosophy statements (TPS). As noted in the editorial, writing TPS is often a requirement for job applications. In many cases, once hired, it is also a requirement to include TPS in tenure and promotion documents in higher education, especially where teaching is the primary focus of the institution. However, there is a paucity of literature, especially a clear guiding framework on how to write TPS (Taff, 2023). In some of the existing frameworks, there is a host of components to be included in the TPS such as the purpose of teaching and learning, teacher's and student's roles, methods, models of learning and teaching, assessment, etc. (Eierman, 2008; Schoenwetter et al., 2002), which can be overwhelming for early career faculty with limited prior knowledge, experience, and training in education.

In particular, those who are new to the field of higher education need more support in various aspects of teaching, as they navigate through high-stakes teaching observations and course evaluations that may influence tenure, promotion, and retention. The first step in providing such support is to help early-career faculty examine *why* and *how* they teach. Rather than treating TPS as a mechanical or random process of putting ideas together, the goal in developing TPS is to reflect on clear and coherent directions in one's teaching, enabling faculty to make multitudes of pedagogical decisions before, during, and after teaching. This includes grounding one's teaching in solid theoretical foundations as well as discerning which methods to use among hundreds of different teaching methods and ideas readily available on the internet today. Thus, articulating teaching philosophy will serve as a beacon for teachers to not lose sight of why they teach the way they do and how they go about enacting their vision.

MTV Framework

To help early-career faculty in teaching institutions where teaching is a primary focus, I developed a simple TPS framework with three essential components (see Figure 1): Methods (M), Theories (T), and Values (V). As the acronym MTV indicates, it is easy to remember, connecting to one's prior knowledge (i.e., Music Television). It is intended to assist those who are new to the field of higher education teaching to examine teaching from three areas that are interrelated.

Figure 1. Framework for Writing Teaching Philosophy Statements



Values/Beliefs

In the MTV framework, the core values are positioned at the bottom of the pyramid. This section shows one's unwavering values related to teaching students. It clarifies and shapes one's teaching, representing what one is committed to and passionate about. For example, providing *equal access* to learning is an important core value for me when I teach diverse learners. Given that learners come from various cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds, this fundamental value is critical in shaping my teaching, exemplifying an element of my identity that is unshakable. If there were guests observing my class, they should be able to see manifestations of this core value reflected in my language, lesson sequence, seating arrangements, participation structure, pacing, activities, and other areas of teaching.

These core values are constant reminders of why one teaches and what matters in teaching. As the teacher learns and grows over the years, the core values may be honed, clarified, and modified. However, as a representation of the teacher's core identity, this foundational component in the TPS serves as a steadfast cornerstone to guide the teacher throughout their career. Moreover, beliefs, often used as a verb, elaborate on one's values with specificity. In the above example, I believe that providing equal access to learning is essential for all students so that no one is left behind or excluded from their right to learn.

Theories

While core values and beliefs are commonly included in the TPS narrative, a key element that is often overlooked or missing in TPS is learning theories. This is understandable, given that learning theories are normally taught in an educational psychology course, and having taken the course is not a requirement to be hired for a teaching position. However, the basic knowledge of learning theories is both critical and instrumental in formalizing one's core values in the realm of teaching.

As Figure 1 shows, this middle component is situated atop one's core values. Theories link noble philosophical ideas or idealism to the actual teaching realm in framing one's teaching

as part of enacting one's core values. As such, theories are aligned closely with the articulated values. In my previous example, I stated that providing *equal access* to learning is an important core value when I teach diverse learners. This value is aligned with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) in which students become active agents of their learning along with their peers and instructors. During class and beyond, through small group discussions, projects, and other means, students are provided with continuous access to learning through scaffolding, as they become co-constructors of knowledge with one another.

Additionally, one may have more than a single theory to frame their teaching, especially as one develops and acquires more teaching experience and knowledge. For example, under the umbrella of social constructivist theory, there are cognate theories to frame my teaching, such as situated learning theory which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interactions in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This theory supports a particular method I consistently use in the learning space discussed in the next section: student learning community.

Methods

Situated at the top of the pyramid are methods that one uses in teaching. While there are countless methods to choose from, such as group projects, collaborative learning, problem-based learning, reciprocal teaching, etc., one should select hallmark methods that represent one's core values supported by learning theories. A laundry list of methods is uncalled for; rather, a few methods that distinguish one's teaching are discussed in this section of TPS.

For example, based on my commitment to *equal access* and the theoretical underpinning of *social constructivism*, I use *student learning communities* throughout my courses. I have used this method over the past several decades, but I realized that it has become *indispensable* in my teaching during the past few years. In fact, I cannot imagine teaching without using learning communities. This choice is based on my strong belief that students co-construct knowledge with one another and the instructor in a socially constructed environment. Student voices are heard in small-group and whole-class discussions, as they actively participate during and beyond class. I often encourage students to take their learning beyond the boundaries of the classroom with their peers to work on a teaching demonstration assignment or project. Students learn to work with one another in a safe learning space over time. This method epitomizes my core values and the social constructivist theory, which are the foundations of my teaching.

Another facet of the methods component of TPS is pedagogical frameworks. Initially, I struggled with their placement in the TPS model, such as the Bob Moses' 5-step Approach (Moses & Cobb, 2001). At first, either the theory or methods section seemed suited to house pedagogical frameworks. However, I eventually realized that theories are conceptually much broader than step-by-step pedagogical frameworks. In the end, the methods section was deemed more suitable to include concrete pedagogical frameworks as a way to apply one's selected theories.

Points of Consideration

As early-career faculty begin to implement the MTV framework, there are a few points of consideration. First, the three components – values, theories, and methods – are reciprocated and used as a *check and balance* to determine whether new ideas or changes in these areas align with one another. For example, multisensory approaches such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile senses are indispensable in engaging diverse learners to learn actively in my own teaching

(Ahn et al., 2024). As I reflect on my TPS, this method aligns well with my core values of bringing equal access to all students to learn actively with multiple senses. Similarly, this method aligns well with social constructivism, where learners actively engage in learning in a social environment with their peers. Thus, using these components of the MTV framework, I am able to check if my teaching philosophy statement is coherent.

Another point of consideration is the need to provide professional development for early-career faculty to learn the foundations of learning at each institution's faculty center. As discussed earlier, higher education faculty are normally not required to have a background in learning theories to be hired. However, the fundamental knowledge of learning theories is critical in writing TPS and understanding teaching and learning from a theoretical perspective. This calls for higher education institutions to take an active role in providing systematic learning in pedagogical foundations beyond popular methods as new faculty are hired, retained, and promoted.

The final point of consideration is creating a professional learning community. For this journal issue, the editors created an author learning community to guide and support early-career authors for successful publication. The continuous and deep learning on the process of writing TPS not only resulted in the authors' but also the editors' learning and growth. Learning from this experience, the editors decided to help early-career faculty from higher education teaching institutions to create an online learning community to deepen our understanding of writing TPS.

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