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***Re-Imagining Your English Class: Pursuing  
Professional Excellence***



***The importance of developing our teaching  
philosophy as EFL professionals***

***Presented by***

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*ABSTRACT*

*Creating our own teaching philosophy is an innovative practice and it should be a meaningful part of ourselves as language teachers since it states our learning experiences, goals, beliefs, level of professionalism and self development among many other elements. As teachers we usually write our teaching philosophy just to carry out a school assignment or to complete our résumé. However, in real life, we not often implement all the nice ideas that we stated in our teaching philosophy. The goal of this presentation is to make ourselves as teachers reflect about the importance of developing our teaching philosophy in our field to show our learning and growth through time.*

### ***Introduction***

Developing a teaching philosophy statement is a relatively new teaching practice that many EFL professionals are not still aware of its importance for our professional growth. Nowadays, in English speaking countries like the United States and Canada it is common that educators develop their own teaching philosophy statement as a part of their personal portfolios. However, the creation of your teaching philosophy should not be just to have a file for your professional portfolio. During the first semester of my Masters degree I created my teaching philosophy and this was a great practice that motivated me to document my professional expectations, my values and beliefs related to teaching. Then almost two years later, in my last semester of the M.A TESOL program after reflecting on it I tried to add new ideas to it. This practice helped to guide and organize my teaching and I started to establish my own professional goals, teaching methods, and the most important of all was that I developed and documented my identity as an EFL professional. Concretely, with this work I pretend to make all educators aware of the importance of creating your teaching philosophy statement for your professional growth. In addition, this work includes some questions and tips and essential aspects that you need to include for designing your teaching philosophy successfully.

## **The importance of developing our teaching philosophy as EFL professionals**

### **What is a teaching philosophy statement?**

According to Schonwetter and other actors a teaching philosophy statement is “a systematic and critical rationale that focuses on the important components defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and/or institutional context.” (Schonwetter et al, 2002, p. 84)

Natasha Kenny defines a teaching philosophy statement “as a clear and logical statement that communicates what your fundamental values and beliefs are about teaching and learning, why you hold these values and beliefs, and how you translate these values and beliefs into your everyday teaching and learning experiences.” (Kenny, 2008, p. 6)

Brookfield (1990) as quoted in Hege (2004), defines a teaching philosophy statement as “a personal vision of teaching; a critical rationale of teaching; sense of purposes of teaching.” (Virginia TRC, 2004, p.1)

### **Why is it important to develop your own teaching philosophy?**

There are different reasons why EFL professionals should develop their own teaching philosophy statement. A lot of EFL teachers create their teaching philosophy just to add it to a personal portfolio or to your resume

or just to get a job. However, these points must not be the main purpose to create a teaching philosophy statement.

Developing a teaching philosophy should have specific goals like reflecting about your teaching, your students, your methodology, your ideals as a teacher, level of professionalism, personal learning, involvement, teaching beliefs, and values among other things.

Some concrete relevant reasons to do a teaching philosophy statement are:

- a) The teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning usually have a positive impact on the students and the classroom environment.
- b) Teachers tend to implement classroom practices that reflect their philosophical beliefs.
- c) A well done teaching philosophy helps the instructor to reflect and act appropriately in the classroom.

Additionally, some other experts consider important that teachers develop a teaching philosophy because it helps them to improve their teaching. For example, Coppolla states that developing your teaching philosophy is important because "the teaching statement gives you a starting point for examining your teaching practices, allows you to share your ideas with others, and allows you to monitor the progress of your own development as a teacher." (Coppolla, 2002 p.450).

Coppolla 2002 also provides two more important reasons for writing a teaching philosophy like:

1. By writing a teaching philosophy, you also make your thinking public, open to discussion or comment and this is important because it codifies your ideas at a particular time.
2. A teaching philosophy is a great organizer of your teaching. (Coppolla, 2002)

Goodyear and Allchin give some other relevant arguments to write a teaching philosophy such as: It helps you to organize your evaluation and to guide your behavior as a teacher, the teaching philosophy allows to document beliefs, values, and teaching approaches, and it contributes to articulate a view of teaching for administrative decision-making.

Brookfield (1990) mentions the importance of developing your teaching philosophy since it can be used for four different purposes:

1. Personal purpose: it is good that your teaching philosophy reflects why you are doing what you are doing as an EFL professional.
2. Political purpose: Your teaching philosophy needs to show that your position is grounded in a well-developed and carefully philosophy of practice. This helps you to gain respect, which is important to grow yourself in the political area.

3. Professional purpose: Your teaching philosophy needs to show your professional goals to develop an identity that will help you to improve the development of professional strengths among other teachers.

4. Pedagogical purpose: Teaching is about growing and finding new ways to develop your lessons according to the learners' needs, so your teaching philosophy should show what effect you are having on students and on their learning? (Brookfield, 1990).

There are other important elements to write a teaching philosophy. For example, in my case writing my teaching philosophy helps me to develop my identity as a language teacher. Also, writing a teaching philosophy helps you to observe what you do in your lessons, so you learn to monitor your work. Besides, creating a teaching philosophy makes you reflect about your values and beliefs as a teacher, this motivates you to set new goals and it helps you to improve as a professional and as a human. In general, the goal of writing a teaching philosophy is to guide your teaching.

### **What should be included in your teaching philosophy?**

According to Kenny 2008 teaching philosophies are generally structured: "from an introductory statement of your values and beliefs regarding teaching and learning; to a discussion of discipline-specific teaching strategies which demonstrate how these beliefs are put into practice; to future teaching goals which highlight a clear commitment to

continuous improvement; and, finally to a conclusion which highlights two or three main points which summarize the TPS and clearly demonstrate your commitment and dedication to teaching and learning.” (Kenny, 2008, p. 6)

This means that you need to organize your personal experience, what your values and beliefs are, your teaching strategies and your goals for the future including your professional improvement.

Other way to find out what to include in your teaching philosophy is by generating questions like the following ones suggested by Goodyear and Alchin, 1998; Ellis and Griffin, 2000; Schonwetter et al., 2002.

1. Why do you teach?
2. What are your teaching approaches? What is your teaching style? What teaching strategies do you most often rely upon? Why?
3. What are your standards or criteria for effective teaching?
4. What do you find rewarding about teaching?
5. What is unique about your teaching?
6. What characteristics describe an effective university learning environment?
7. What are your strengths and skills as a teacher? What strategies have been particularly effective in terms of student learning and engagement?



8. How do you establish rapport with your students?
9. What areas of your teaching require improvement? Why? How do you intend to improve?
10. What strategies have you used to evaluate and gather feedback on the effectiveness of your teaching?
11. What have you learned about yourself as a teacher? Have your students, peers or the instructor provided direct feedback?
12. Which teaching tasks do you find most challenging?
13. What is the most significant thing that has happened to you as a teacher?
14. What is your proudest teaching moment? Why?
15. What teaching moment do you feel most dissatisfied about? How can you improve upon this?
16. What are your future teaching goals?
17. What sorts of skills do you deliberately attempt to teach in your classes and why?
18. How do you evaluate whether you've accomplished your teaching goals?

### **What Constitutes a Good Statement?**

Kenny 2008 states that a teaching philosophy should communicate personal philosophical beliefs about teaching and learning. It usually

demonstrates a strong connection to scholarly research and literature in higher education; and it shows a clear commitment to continual improvement. So, teaching philosophies change through time, which provides direction, meaning and purpose to your teaching and learning experiences. Based on your teaching roles, you can prepare a teaching philosophy based on your fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning with a clear focus on your future teaching goals.

Mike Akitson (2000), a member of the Teaching Support Center of the University of Western Ontario, recommends that a well done teaching philosophy statement should include the following points.

1. Personal Reflection: This is about why you are teacher and what your role means to you and to others.

2. Citing specific teaching tactics: In this part the instructors talks about the things that he has done in the class using his/her pedagogical approaches.

3. To show a broad philosophical background for your own pedagogical approach. This is about mentioning the teaching values and principles that characterize you as an instructor following some philosophical foundations and pedagogical approaches.

4. Identification of goals: Teachers have a variety of goals in mind and the teaching philosophy should have those personal and professional goals that could be about your teaching, students, classes, studies, etc.

According to O'neal, Meizlish and Kaplan (2007) successful teaching philosophy statements include the following characteristics:

They offer evidence of practice: This is an important aspect to be included in your teaching philosophy because it shows your knowledge and learning based on your teaching experience.

They convey reflectiveness: A teaching philosophy should show that the instructor is thoughtful about what he does. Reflectiveness helps the instructor to be ready to face future instructional challenges and ready to set new goals for the future.

They communicate that teaching is valued: This an important point to develop a good teaching philosophy because the instructor needs to demonstrate his/her enthusiasm and commitment towards teaching.

They are student- or learning-centered, attuned to differences in students' abilities, learning styles, or levels. It is relevant to include the ways you work with students and how you help them to get involved considering their abilities. Additionally, you can specify how you take into account their learning styles and preferences.

O'neal, Meizlish and Kaplan (2007) presented a rubric that you can use to evaluate your teaching philosophy statement. This rubric includes five categories: goals for student learning, enactment of goals, assessment of goals, creating an inclusive learning environment and structure, rhetoric, and language.

Rubric to evaluate your Teaching Philosophy Statement designed by the  
CRLT of the University of Michigan

Figure 2. Rubric for composing and evaluating a statement of teaching philosophy		Excellent	Needs Some Revision	Unsatisfactory
<b>Categories</b>				
<b>Goals for student learning:</b> What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in your discipline? What are you preparing students for? What are key challenges in the teaching-learning process?	Goals are clearly articulated, specific, and go beyond knowledge level, including skills, attitudes, career goals, etc. Goals are sensitive to the context of the instructor's discipline. They are concise, not exhaustive.	Goals are articulated but may be too broad or not specific to the discipline. Goals focus on basic knowledge, ignoring skills acquisition and affective change.	Articulation of goals is unfocused, incomplete, or missing.	
<b>Enactment of goals (teaching methods):</b> What teaching methods do you use? How do these methods contribute to your goals for students? Why are these methods appropriate for use in your discipline?	Enactment of goals is specific and thoughtful. Includes details and rationale for teaching methods. The methods are clearly connected to specific goals and are appropriate for those goals. Specific examples of the methods in use within the disciplinary context are given.	Description of teaching methods not clearly connected to goals, or if connected, not well developed (seems like a list of what is done in the classroom). Methods are described, but generically, no example of the instructor's use of the methods within the discipline is communicated.	Enactment of goals is not articulated. If there is an attempt at articulating teaching methods, it is basic and unreflective.	
<b>Assessment of goals (measuring student learning):</b> How do you know your goals for students are being met? What sorts of assessment tools do you use (e.g., tests, papers, portfolios, journals), and why? How do assessments contribute to student learning? How do assessments communicate disciplinary priorities?	Specific examples of assessment tools are clearly described. Assessment tools are aligned with teaching goals and teaching methods. Assessments reinforce the priorities and context of the discipline both in content and type.	Assessments are described, but not connected to goals and teaching methods. Description is too general, with no reference to the motivation behind the assessments. There is no clear connection between the assessments and the priorities of the discipline.	Assessment of goals is not articulated or mentioned only in passing.	
<b>Creating an inclusive learning environment, addressing one or more of the following questions:</b> How do your own and your students' identities (e.g., race, gender, class), backgrounds, experiences, and levels of privilege affect the classroom? How do you take into account diverse learning styles? How do you integrate diverse perspectives into your teaching?	Portrays a coherent philosophy of inclusive education that is integrated throughout the statement. Makes space for diverse ways of knowing and/or learning styles. Discussion of roles is sensitive to historically underrepresented students. Demonstrates awareness of issues of equity within the discipline.	Inclusive teaching is addressed but in a cursory manner or in a way that isolates it from the rest of the philosophy. Author briefly connects identity issues to aspects of his/her teaching.	Issues of inclusion are not addressed or addressed in an awkward manner. There is no connection to teaching practices.	
<b>Structure, rhetoric and language:</b> How is the reader engaged? Is the language used appropriate to the discipline? How is the statement thematically structured?	The statement has a guiding structure and/or theme that engages the reader and organizes the goals, methods, and assessments articulated in the statement. Jargon is avoided and teaching terms (e.g., critical thinking) are given specific definitions that apply to the instructor's disciplinary context. Grammar and spelling are correct.	The statement has a structure and/or theme that is not connected to the ideas actually discussed in the statement, or, organizing structure is weak and does not resonate within the disciplinary context. The statement contains some jargon.	No overall structure present. Statement is a collection of disconnected statements about teaching. Jargon is used liberally and not supported by specific definitions or examples. Needs much revision.	

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### **Conclusion**

This research work has been quite helpful to expand my teaching professional knowledge. Creating your teaching philosophy statement is a great practice for all teachers since by doing it you learn to reflect about your work as a teacher. In addition, the teaching philosophy statement is a good way to think about your beliefs, values, expectations and goals as EFL instructor. This is important because as teachers we need to have a clear idea of what to do in our job. Personally, I strongly recommend this interesting practice because in my case it was quite useful to improve in my work and I can say that thanks to my teaching philosophy now I have an identity as a teacher and this has helped me to learn everyday from what I do. Besides, the teaching philosophy statement has been quite good for me because in there I think about my goals for the future which gave me an orientation of what I need to do to reach those goals and be a better professional.

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