

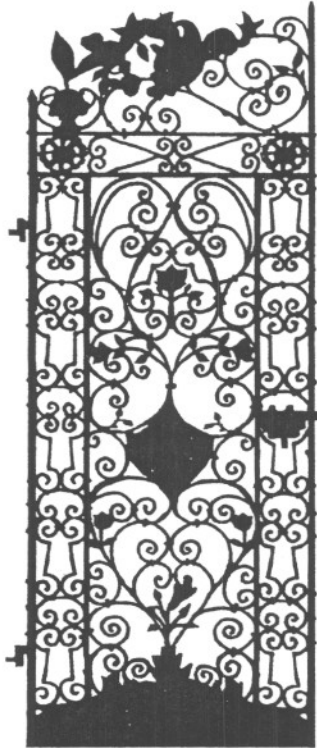
LDC *Lately...*

Learning Development Center

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Teaching Philosophy Issue

★ Workshop and
Lunch 'n' Learning
Schedule sent
separately

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING



Who are you as a teacher? Select the metaphor that best describes your teaching style.

— A FILLED CONTAINER, ready to pour a valuable substance into waiting empty cups.

— A TOUR GUIDE who will introduce neophyte travelers to a strange new land, guiding them through its obstacles and introducing them to its wonders.

— A GURU, a master, who models an expert skill or profound understanding, expecting inspired disciples to follow his lead.

A study of college faculty's perceptions of teaching style found that most responses could be categorized into the three general themes noted above. (Grasha, 1996, p. 35)



The Eisenhart Award for Outstanding Teaching, the most prestigious award for teaching excellence on our campus, rightly asks applicants for a statement of their philosophy of teaching. Articulating the guiding principles of our work forces us to dig deep into our souls to find our motivation to appear day after day in front of a sometimes unappreciative audience, and to identify the thrills that keep us coming back for more. We invite you to peruse this issue with the intent of exploring your own philosophy of teaching.

In past issues of *LDC Lately*, we have discussed learning style. Information about student learning style is only half of the teaching-learning equation. The impact of teaching style on our encounters with students is equally important. In this issue, we would like to help you explore several dimensions of your style in order to develop awareness about the principles, concepts, and assumptions about teaching and learning that guide how you teach.

There are several ways to look at teaching style. In this edition, we are closely following the work of Anthony Grasha, Ph.D. from his book *Teaching with Style*. We will focus first on the development of a personal teaching philosophy through the use of metaphor.

Metaphor is one of the devices we may use to define ourselves as teachers. A number of attitudes, values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and learning are embedded within our metaphors. Our 'guiding metaphor' summarizes in a distinct and highly memorable word, phrase, or image our personal model of the teaching learning process. (Grasha, 1996, p. 132)

Before writing a teaching metaphor, it is helpful to explore four areas: the assumptions you bring to the classroom, how you define teaching, the formal teaching principles you espouse, and your views of human nature.

PERSONAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT TEACHING

In considering **personal assumptions**, you might relate to any of the following quotes:

"It is better to start a course with a firm hand and to lighten up later in the term."

"Give students an inch and they will take a mile."

"A good grading system is all you need to motivate students to do well."

"The use of instructional technology is a good way to motivate students to learn."

"Learning proceeds best if students collaborate with each other."

"Teachers are more effective if they present information with enthusiasm."

(Grasha, 1996, p. 106)

In the space below, list some of the assumptions you make in relation to the teaching-learning process:

DEFINITIONS OF TEACHING

It is also helpful to look at how your personal assumptions may be embedded in your **definition of teaching**. This is only a first step in developing a personal teaching philosophy, as this definition may not fully encompass the underlying beliefs that you, as a teacher, espouse in bringing this definition to life. However, it can be a succinct expression of who you are as a teacher.

... I am amazed at how often colleagues of mine are unaware of their [teaching] philosophy. When I periodically ask someone what is your philosophy of teaching or how do you define yourself as a teacher, most just look at me without responding. I'm not sure whether they don't understand the question or have not thought about it and consequently have no answer.

(Grasha, 1996, p. 112)

Examples of Definitions of Teaching

Teaching is a process of internal and external dialogue about things of importance conducted with passion and discipline.

Teaching is a performance art.

Teaching is an imperfect attempt by one person of higher status to influence the thoughts and behaviors of someone of less status.

Teaching occurs when someone with knowledge and expertise in a discipline purposefully steps into the background.

(Grasha, 1996, p. 113)

Write your current definition of teaching in the space below:

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

The next thing to consider in building a personal teaching philosophy is the **theoretical foundation** of your teaching practices. Most teachers ascribe to a combination of all three basic theories; however, one or two may be predominant in your approach to teaching.

COGNITIVE THEORY

Overview: Information processing occurs primarily through sensory and automatic mental processes.

Motivation: Students are seen as active seekers of new information.

Roles of

Teacher: Provide activities that tap into natural problem-solving and decision-making instincts. Actively engage students through novelty and a variety of approaches.

HUMANISTIC THEORY

Overview: Integrates the cognitive and affective aspects of learning.
Focus is on teaching students how to learn.
Encourages students to reflect on the emotions associated with learning.

Motivation: Students are seen as active learners with a desire to achieve their learning potential.
Provision of active support and encouragement nurtures students' efforts.
Encourages choice-making and development of personal connections to content.

Roles of

Teacher: Accept the unique strengths and weaknesses of each learner.
Nurture and develop the self-image of students.
Emphasize positive feedback.

BEHAVIORAL THEORY

<u>Overview</u>	<p>Emphasizes the influence of external stimuli on learning</p> <p>Manipulation of external rewards and classroom structures guide and direct the actions of learners.</p> <p>Allows students to develop skills incrementally</p>
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Motivation	Learners are seen as incentive driven. Requirements and procedures have natural consequences.
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Role of

Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a structured learning environment with clear goals and objectives Allow self-pacing for individual differences in skill development Stress mastery of information Provide opportunities for immediate feedback and reinforcement
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(Grasha, 1996 pp. 121-122)

List the aspects that most closely describe the theoretical foundations of your teaching practices.

VIEWS OF HUMAN NATURE

Our **beliefs about basic human nature** may also influence our actions in the classroom. These beliefs often hold true across a variety of situations, including our classrooms.

Take a moment to mark where your beliefs about human nature might fall on the following eight bipolar dimensions presented by psychologist Lawrence Wrightman in *Teaching with Style* (p.129).

Humans, generally...

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Are Trustworthy..... | Are Untrustworthy |
| Are Rational..... | Are Irrational |
| Have Willpower..... | Lack Willpower |
| Are Altruistic..... | Are Selfish |
| Are Independent..... | Are Conforming |
| Are Complex..... | Are Simple |
| Are Stable..... | Are Unstable |

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

The following activity is designed to help you develop a statement of your personal teaching philosophy. It is adapted from the W-I-F process used by A. Grasha in *Teaching with Style*.

1. List several WORDS you would use to describe the dynamics of your classroom, students, and teaching approaches.

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

2. List several IMAGES you would use to describe the dynamics of your classroom, students, and teaching approaches.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

3. List several FEELINGS you would use to describe the dynamics of your classroom, students, and teaching approaches.

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

4. Summarize what you have listed above into a “guiding metaphor” (e.g., WORKING A DIFFICULT PUZZLE, TOURING VARIOUS SITES, DIRECTING A PLAY, GUIDING A JOURNEY, FILLING A CONTAINER)

Following the examples above, we invite you to expand upon and develop your metaphor.

BOOK REVIEW

In addition to Grasha's *Teaching with Style*, we are reviewing three books related to teaching philosophy. The three books discussed in this edition of *LDC Lately* are part of a set of faculty development materials recently purchased by Wallace Memorial Library. We heartily recommend them to all classroom instructors, whether they are beginners or seasoned professionals.

The Courage to Teach--Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life. Parker Palmer. Jossey-Bass, 1998.

Palmer's approach to professional development for teachers is to strive for wholeness as a person. The path is threefold. He would have you explore the intellectual, emotional and spiritual components of your self. The question at the heart of the book is "Who is the Self that Teaches?" He guides us on this pathway of reflection and understanding with a series of probing questions.

On the intellectual path the questions might be:

- How did we choose the content area that we teach?
- How do we go about teaching that content, and who are our students?
- How do people know and learn?
- What is behind some of the behaviors of our students?

These fundamental questions help us explore why we are in the particular teaching situation that we have chosen and how we are doing in preparing a classroom experience that will work for our students. Do we fully understand who is in the classroom and what they bring to the learning situation?

On the emotional path the questions might be:

- How do we feel in the classroom every day?
- How do our students feel?
- What kind of fears are both teacher and student facing?
- What is satisfying and what is no longer satisfying?

These questions guide us to explore how our teaching experience is connected to our emotional well being.

- Is this still the right role for me?
- Can I understand or do I have the right resources to address my fears and the fears of my students?
- What drives my desire to continue to teach?

On the spiritual path the questions might be:

- How are we connected with our teaching experience?
- How can we lead our students and ourselves on a path that will enable us to see connections with each other and with the material we are teaching?
- How does this teaching experience enrich our understanding of life itself?
- Are we comfortable being connected?

These questions help us to explore the bigger picture and to seek meaning in our teaching and our interactions with students, the material, and the larger community.

Palmer feels that the more we know about ourselves, the more well grounded our teaching will be. He believes that teachers possess the power to create conditions that help students learn a great deal about specific content areas and life itself.

THINKING ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING: Developing Habits of Learning with First Year College and University Students. Robert Leamnsnson. Stylus, 1999.

If Palmer challenges us to teach from our souls, Leamnsnson reminds us to keep our feet on the ground. With a scientific mind sharpened by forty years as a biology professor, he carefully defines his terms:

- LEARNING is “stabilizing, through repeated use, certain appropriate and desirable synapses in the brain . . . [it] makes the brain permanently different than before . . . [it is] not exactly easy . . . [and it] requires effort as surely as does building muscles.”
- TEACHING is “any activity that has the conscious intent of and potential for facilitating learning in another.”
- A PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING is “the set of beliefs about how teaching should be done . . . we need to think about teaching, read about teaching, and talk about teaching reflectively, honestly, and seriously.”
- PEDAGOGY is “the summation of our teaching behaviors . . . everything a teacher is and does when teaching and getting ready to teach.”

Like both Grasha and Palmer, Leamnsnson speaks in metaphors:

- “Students are neither flawed nor vessels, but works in progress.”
- “First year students are our lumpy raw material.”
- “New teaching innovations are largely sound practices dusted off and updated.”
- “A philosophy of teaching serves as a beacon during stormy periods.”

Leamnsnson’s personal teaching philosophy consists of seven elements, each of which he explores in depth:

1. Develop a dear and explicit concept of what learning is.
2. Language is at the heart of the matter.
3. Beware the “preposterism” (going directly to the goal, but ignoring the means).
4. Know the clientele.
5. Believe what you do makes a difference.
6. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
7. Helping implies loving.

Leamnsnson’s philosophy reflects his optimism, his experience, and a thoughtful study of his craft. As a result, his practical suggestions for classroom practice have a firm theoretical foundation and reflect his understanding of the unique challenges of first year students. Leamnsnson offers a refreshing combination of wisdom and good sense to instructors of today’s college students, especially freshmen.

Personal Reflections...

-- Susan Donovan, Director, Learning Development Center



Reading Grasha, Leamson, and Palmer has led me to reflect on my own teaching philosophy. My history suggests an evolution from "me-centered" to "us-centered" teaching, and at this stage of my career, my metaphor is that of a playmate. Let me clarify. I'm not talking about silly, over-simplified childish games. I'm talking about a child-like participation in the pure pleasure of learning something new. I'm talking about respect for each other's contributions, appreciation of the process of discovery, a willingness to take risks, and the shared joy of entering new intellectual territory.

Memorable moments of my teaching career illustrate my point. In my first job, I was the only 10th grade English teacher in a small rural school. Several students in my "low" class had already spent considerable time in the 9th grade, and were graciously promoted to the next grade when a new teacher (me) entered the scene. These students hated school and read poorly; one boy refused to speak. Our break-through as a class came when, out of desperation, I decided to have them tape-record a play. Together, we had to figure out how to present the text dramatically, including sound effects. Much to my surprise, our mute classmate could do awesome squealing cars and clumping feet! He became the star of the production, inspiring the other students to match his extraordinary performance. The finished product made all of us proud. WE had met the challenge, WE applauded each other's accomplishments, and, together, WE had produced a fine radio drama. It was my first experience of learning WITH my students, and I loved it.

Teaching writing at RIT was a different challenge. How do you teach a skill without a content? By that time, I had learned about writing communities, in which everyone is a student and everyone has a story worth telling. No one, I believe, ever learns to write perfectly; learning to write is a life-long process. I began to write with my students, doing every assignment that they had to do, submitting my own drafts in our peer-editing sessions. At first, the students were wary of my intentions. After all, I was the teacher, and I was supposed to know everything about writing. Gradually, however, they saw my struggles with early drafts, and they were willing to play with my ideas, just as I was playing with theirs. Doors opened for discussing grammar, syntax, organization -- the stuff of mechanics that students often dismiss as boring or irrelevant. But in the context of working together toward a shared goal of expressing ideas clearly, the mechanics became useful tools. In an environment of mutual respect and experimentation, we all became better writers.

I am most uncomfortable with a class that refuses to engage in the fun of untangling complex ideas or looking at possibilities. My challenge then is to convince them that memorizing rules and lists isn't enough; want my students to come with me in exploring how to use the "facts" in meaningful ways. The most fun I've had recently was with an FYE class, when we investigated Erikson's stages of development. For each stage, students used props to act out the developmental tasks, and when we were done, we had a tableau spanning infancy to old age. I'm guessing that those students could describe all the stages to you, because together we worked through and became every point in the continuum.

The metaphor of playmate doesn't work for everyone, but I do know remarkable RIT teachers of mathematics, physics, poetry, biology, computer science, business, philosophy, and history who share my perspective. Their message, like mine, is "come play with me."

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