

Health Education in Practice

Framing the Teaching Philosophy Statement for Health Educators: What It Includes and How It Can Inform Professional Development

Dhitinut Ratnapradipa and Thereasa Abrams

Abstract

Teaching philosophy (TP) statements are increasingly required within academia for hiring and promotion purposes. For health educators, a TP can be a valuable resource for academicians as well as practitioners, linking educational theory with teaching techniques, philosophy with practice. The process of formulating a TP statement provides the opportunity to fully reflect on who you are as an educator and what you hope to accomplish in the learning process. The brief statement is intended to be a written reflection of your instructional and practical philosophy in both learning and the discipline of health education/public health. As an educator, the TP statement provides a roadmap for you throughout your career, documenting where you are and where you hope to grow, identifying both your pedagogical strengths and weaknesses. This paper is intended to provide insights gained through the preparation of TP and from professional and teaching experiences.

Introduction

The TP statement is a written personal reflection which has become a common requirement within the application and promotion process of many institutions of higher education. Even for those health educators who do not seek a career in academia, a TP can inform professional orientation as an educator. It is useful to examine not only one's theoretical and practical knowledge in health education, health promotion, and public health, but Chism (1998) suggest considering one's thoughts and beliefs about how learning occurs, how one's teaching style will facilitate future learning, and how those beliefs will translate into action within the academic environment. A TP statement provides a conceptualization of a teacher's approach to teaching, establishing the foundation for articulating and clarifying teaching and learning

beliefs, student learning goals, and personal development (Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesan, & Taylor, 2002). As the TP is formulated, consider how it addresses the consumer needs of the students and the institution in today's market-driven society, while maintaining the ideal of promoting intellectual growth and development (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009).

For the recent graduate, the brief, one to two page documents' usefulness has the potential to move beyond a vetting requirement by departmental search and promotion committees (Schönwetter et al, 2002), acting as a kind of roadmap that can guide the teacher toward an academic departmental home that will most closely fit his/her philosophical perspectives on teaching, field of study, and individual teaching strengths and weaknesses (Montell, 2003). The statement may also act as a renewing force for those experienced professors revisiting their educational beliefs (Korn, 2003). Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesan, and Taylor (2002) provide an operational definition for the TP statement: "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" (p. 84). The TP statement should be viewed as a fluid, dynamic document that grows and changes as the teacher develops over time; it should be reviewed frequently and adapted to include newly discovered insights that contribute to quality teaching and learning (Montell, 2003).

This paper is intended to provide insights gained through the preparation of TP and from professional and teaching experiences.

Preparing Your Teaching Philosophy Statement

Teaching is both a science and an art. As a science, it is driven by theoretical learning designs such as Bloom's taxonomy, inquiry, and reflection. Jenkins (2011) believes that while great teachers may be born, good teachers are made. He adds that the best teachers display a combination of both innate teaching ability and hard work over many years of instructional development. Reflection on one's TP establishes a foundation for teaching style (Korn, 2003), providing a jumping off point as to the instructor's personal, political, professional, and pedagogical purpose as a leader/participant in higher education (Chonko, 2007).

Given the limited instruction many doctoral students receive in actual college teaching (Jenkins, 2011), preparing

* Dhitinut Ratnapradipa, MS, PhD, MPA, MCHES; Associate Professor; Department of Health Education and Recreation, Southern Illinois University, 475 Clocktower Drive, Pulliam Hall 307, Carbondale, IL 62901; Email: dhitinut@siu.edu; Telephone: 618-453-2777; Fax: 618-453-1829; Chapter Alpha Alpha

Thereasa Abrams, MSW, LCSW; Instructor and Doctoral Student; Department of Health Education and Recreation, Southern Illinois University, 475 Clocktower Drive, Pulliam Hall 307, Carbondale, IL 62901

* Corresponding Author

a TP may require reflection about one's own experiences as a learner. Montell (2003) suggests beginning with reflection on one's teachers who have impressed or influenced personal growth either positively or negatively with their teaching style. For those with some teaching experience, Korn (2003) recommends beginning the writing process by examining past and present syllabi, assignments, and past interactions with students as a window to you as an instructor and your attitudes about learning. In addition to such reflection, reviewing the TP statements of mentors and/or colleagues can provide valuable guidance in developing a well-crafted statement. If possible, examine both the mentor's TP and syllabi to see how they build on each other. While your TP should reflect your own thoughts, seeing examples of TP statements from others can spark ideas and insights about what to include and how you might organize your TP.

Incorporating Educational Theory and Course Development

The following aspects of learning and teaching provide a glimpse into teaching language and technique that may be considered when writing a TP statement, as well as considerations for integrating the TP with course development.

Educational Theory and TP

The TP statement should include the teacher's beliefs about how learning occurs based on established learning theory. Theory explains why people do things in certain ways in a widely accepted language. Categories and levels of learning fall within a continuum between content-based learning, which is considered teacher-centered, and problem-based learning which is more student-centered. For example, critical thinking is a higher level of learning in which the student is able to integrate theory with practice and problem solving (Collingwood, Emond, & Woodward, 2008). Critical thinking may then be defined as achieving understanding through evaluation of information to solve problems, and is instrumental in the student's ability to be a successful learner (Friedman et al., 2010).

Bloom's Taxonomy, a well accepted model within learning theory, proposes six hierarchical levels representing varying complexities of learning: (a) knowledge, (b) competency, (c) application, (d) analysis, (e) synthesis, and (f) evaluation (Forehand, 2005). Inquiry-based learning is founded on the belief that learning is focused on process in which asking questions, thinking critically, and solving problems is encouraged (Chonko, 2007; Friedman et al., 2010). Reflection is an extension of inquiry, in which the student is required to synthesize information through critical self-reflection, connecting new information to old, and then articulating the information in their own words (Lerch, Bilics, & Colley, 2006).

Practice, on the other hand, demonstrates how to apply theory in dynamic settings where innumerable variables

come into play. Fenwick (2002) notes a shift in pedagogical practices toward problem-based learning, moving away from traditional content-focused, lecture-driven instruction and toward activity-based, student-centered learning. Practice allows students to see and experience how aspects from a variety of theories can be integrated to address the complexity of public health practice. Problem solving challenges students to not only assess what they have learned and how it applies, but also to expand their inquiry into other areas.

Integrating theory and practice can be supported through sharing professional experiences to supplement readings and lectures, having guest lecturers illustrate how practitioners deal with health issues and possible solutions in real public health settings, and site visits. Students have opportunities to practice what they are learning through in-class activities and scenarios as well as course assignments, including service learning opportunities. Consider what influence you have on learning and how it can be presented within the TP statement. This fits within the first core area of responsibility for Certified Health Education Specialists, to assess the needs, assets, and capacity for health education, including Competency 1.5: Examination of factors that influence the learning process (National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, 2010). The TP statement should also include actions you have taken and plan to take to support student learning, and may include highlighting techniques that you have found to be effective.

TP and Course Development (There Really is a Connection)

The TP can guide course development, including the syllabus. Syllabus development puts the TP into practice as you determine course structure, teaching techniques, assignments, and assessment methods. As indicated in Table 1, some teaching techniques (and assessment methods) are easier to implement with smaller class sizes, while large class sizes lend themselves to content-based lecture-style instruction. The audience also impacts teaching technique: graduate coursework typically includes higher levels of complex thought than an introductory freshman class would entail. However, the TP should be broad enough that it can apply to a variety of courses.

In reverse, syllabi can be an invaluable resource for TP formulation as you reflect on the educational theory underlying how you develop and present your courses. While many first-time syllabi are adopted (and adapted) from a predecessor, give thought to what is being presented to your students through this initial representation of you as an educator. Does your syllabus truly reflect your teaching style? Examine the rules for conduct, assignments, rubrics, and scheduling and determine if they not only represent the required subject content, but that they also represent your philosophy of learning and the kind of classroom atmosphere you expect. How does your syllabus structure communication and feedback with students? Does the syllabus reflect your view of students as responsible adults who are capable of

Table 1

Integrating Educational Theory with Practical Considerations

Theoretical base	Class structure	Teaching techniques	Grading/evaluation methods
Content-based learning	Formal/traditional classroom, large lecture	Faculty member lectures while students take notes, assigned readings	Scantron exams focused on content knowledge
Inquiry-based learning	Semi-structured, participatory	Lecture with open questions and class discussion, reflective writing assignments	Essay and short answer to practical questions
Problem-based learning	Small groups, student-as-teacher	Individual and group presentations, research assignments, practical application projects	Rubric indicating level of comprehension and ability to synthesize knowledge
Experiential learning	Real-world settings: practicum, internships, volunteer service	Reflective observation and active experimentation	Evaluation by professionals in the field
Computer-based learning	Web/distance learning	Video lectures, discussion-threads	Web platform-submission, web-conferencing

success in your classroom, your perspective on classroom discussion, group work, and other non-teacher centered strategies that may be employed (Jenkins, 2011)?

Syllabus as a Roadmap for the Course

Just as the TP could guide syllabus development, consider each syllabus as a roadmap which guides students to understand what they are expected to learn, how the learning objectives tie in to professional standards, and why the learning objectives (and standards) are important. Emphasis on written learning outcomes serve to help students prioritize and strategize to maximize their learning by understanding: What can I expect to learn by the end of the lesson? How will this information be useful to me in the future? Course objectives should be threaded throughout course instruction beginning with course planning, always including the Responsibilities and Competencies for Health Education Specialists as the basis for most course objectives (National Commission for Health Education Credentialing (2010). Take opportunities for personal reflection on how and what is being taught within the classroom to ensure that the objectives are being covered throughout the course. For practitioners, this process mirrors program planning and evaluation considerations.

As a roadmap, the syllabus outlines where the course is going while allowing some flexibility for how students arrive at the prescribed destination. Because students learn in different ways and begin each course with differing levels of knowledge, consider using a variety of instructional methods to reach a broad range of learners. Likewise, consider the

use of a variety of assessment methods to evaluate student progress. Assignments and exams are designed to measure the extent to which students are meeting the stated objectives of knowledge and competency, and the use of individual or group presentations assesses content application and analysis (Friedman et al., 2010), while reflection can be used to synthesize new knowledge (Jordi, 2011). The above techniques may be utilized to demonstrate teaching activities within the TP statement, although the TP itself need not include discussion of grading policy or practice.

Role Reversal: Students as Teachers

How do you feel about relinquishing formal control over the learning environment? Allowing students to act as peer instructors in limited settings while maintaining primary responsibility for the overall course instruction may help guide student learning. Opportunities for students to act as teachers can occur throughout the course, such as spontaneously during class discussions or small group activities, or through a formal assignment such as individual or group presentations or assigned discussion facilitation. Allowing students to be teachers helps them synthesize their own understanding of concepts, as well as reveal gaps within their understanding. Thus, providing opportunities for student-as-teacher is both a reinforcement of student learning as well as an evaluation tool for the teacher to assess a student's knowledge and competency of course content. Your beliefs about students as teachers could provide support within the TP statement to portray how you view yourself as a teacher.

Role of TP Statement in Your Professional Development

Professional Development

Returning to the idea of teaching as an art form, Jenkins (2011) writes, "...how our students respond to us—and by extension, to our subject matter—depends largely on the quality of the performance we give in class day in and day out" (Teaching is performance art section, para.3). Your view of your own professional development should therefore be considered in your TP. The TP can provide an opportunity for you to formulate or clarify your personal and professional goals, career objectives, and future plans. Some reflection questions to consider include: How do you view yourself as a learner? How do you improve your skills as an educator? What role do student and peer evaluations of your teaching play in how you develop, present, and alter your course content and delivery? What professional conferences and continuing education opportunities are best suited to meet your goals and objectives, and how can you best make use of such opportunities? How do you integrate new developments in the field of health education/public health into your teaching? How do you incorporate your research/scholarship agenda and professional service into your teaching?

Direct and Indirect Teaching Opportunities

Teaching occurs in both formal (classroom) and informal settings, so thoughts about the teacher's impact on the educational environment should be included in the TP statement. How does your attitude toward your students and the subject matter impact your class atmosphere? How does the class atmosphere impact which techniques to use? For a student-centered approach, active participation provides an opportunity for application, analysis, and synthesis of knowledge. However, this approach requires a basic level of trust and respect between the instructor and the students and among the students themselves. If they are to feel comfortable and safe contributing to the class, students and teacher must build trust in each other by respecting that each brings a unique perspective to the class, that all participants can make valuable contributions to the learning process, and that all students have dignity and worth (Chonko, 2007).

Indirect teaching should also be addressed in the TP. How flexible are you with your office hours? Do you view advising as departmental service or as an opportunity to foster individual rapport with students? What is your approach to mentoring? What types of opportunities (research, conference presentations, etc), if any, do you provide for students outside the classroom, and how do these opportunities relate to your TP?

Marketisation: Consumerism in Higher Education

Your philosophy about the place of higher education in our current market economy deserves consideration within the

TP statement. Although teachers may not think of themselves as actors in a consumer market, Caru and Cova (2003) assert that where there is a financial exchange, a consumer experience may become the product. Historically, institutions of higher learning enjoyed a protected environment dedicated to advancement of knowledge and intellectual growth within society (Molesworth et al., 2009). However, what many students seek in today's universities are skills that may translate into technical innovations, salable products, or skills that will be beneficial in the workforce (Fitzmaurice, 2008). In today's economy, most state universities are challenged by declining enrollment, limited funding, and departmental cutbacks. Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion (2009) contend that today's student is more concerned with having a degree than higher order learning, obtaining a lucrative job rather than obtaining advanced knowledge. As unsavory as it may seem, educators may have to determine where along this philosophical continuum of consumerism in higher education they can comfortably reside.

Grounding Philosophy of Teaching in the Professional Discipline

As a health education/public health faculty or practitioner, it is imperative that your philosophy relative to the discipline be included within the TP statement. Give thought to your philosophy as to the health educator's purpose, role, and responsibilities within communities, what the focus of health education should be, the prescribed goals, and what constitutes a successful intervention (Buchanan, 2006; Jean, 1951; Minkler, 1989; Nyswander, 1967; Russell, 1976).

Russell (1976) suggests that although there is little hope for a single philosophy within the profession of health education, there is room for diversity of opinion and that philosophical positions may be best represented along three continuums of thought (Figure 1). The reflection of health education/public health philosophy will aid you and others in helping find your best professional fit and will provide a roadmap from where you have come within your health education studies to where you hope to be.

Conclusion

The process of formulating a teaching philosophy statement provides the opportunity to fully reflect on who you are as an educator and what you hope to accomplish in the learning process. The brief statement is intended to be a written reflection of your instructional and practical philosophy in both learning and the discipline of health education/public health. As an educator, the TP statement provides a roadmap for you throughout your career, documenting where you are and where you hope to grow, identifying both your pedagogical strengths and weaknesses. The TP statement also serves as a window for search and promotional committees as to your philosophy on learning theory, practice techniques both in and out of the classroom, student interaction and involvement within the learning

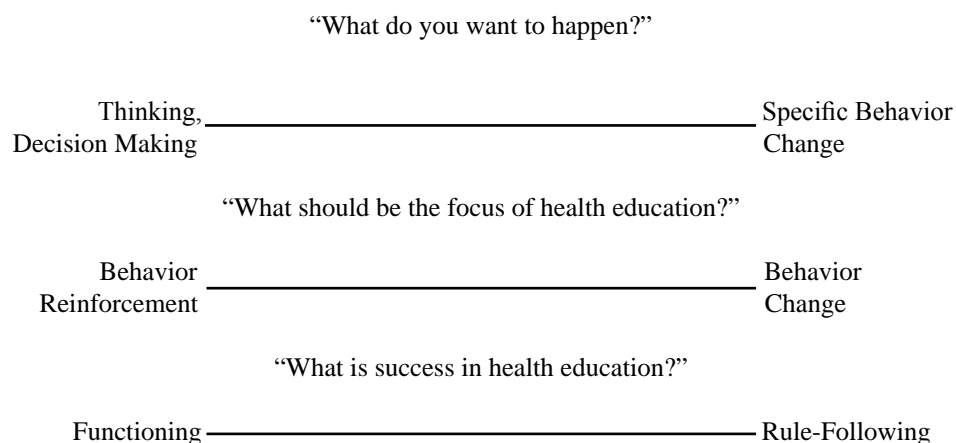


Figure 1. Russell's continuums of thought. Adapted from "There is No Philosophy of Health Education! Rather...Our Strength and Our Weakness Is In the Many," by R. D. Russell, 1976, Paper presented at the National Convention of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, pp.2-3.

process, and your place in the marketing of your academic home. Once written, consider the statement as a living document, much like the curriculum vitae, that reflects your growth both as teacher and a health education/public health professional.

References

- Buchanan, D. R. (2006). A new ethic for health promotion: Reflections on a philosophy of health education for the 21st century. *Health Education and Behavior, 33*(3), 290-304.
- Caru, A. & Cova, B. (2003). Revisiting consumption experience: A more humble but complete view of the concept. *Marketing Theory, 3*(2), 267-286.
- Chism, N. V. N. (1998). Developing a philosophy of teaching statement. *Essays on Teaching Excellence: Toward the Best in the Academy, 9*, 1-3.
- Chonko, L. B. (2007). A philosophy of teaching...and more. *Journal of Marketing Education, 29*(2), 111-121.
- Collingwood, P., Emond, R., & Woodward, R. (2008). The theory circle: A tool for learning and for practice. *Social Work Education, 27*(1), 70-83.
- Fenwick, T. J. (2002). Problem based learning, group process, and the mid-career professional. *Higher Education Research & Development, 21*(1), 5-21.
- Fitzmaurice, M. (2008). Voices from within: Teaching in higher education as a moral practice. *Teaching in Higher Education, 13*(3), 341-352.
- Forehand, M. (2005). Bloom's taxonomy: Original and revised. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. Retrieved from http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Bloom%27s_Taxonomy
- Friedman, D. B., Crews, T. B., Caicedo, J. M., Besley, J. C., Weinberg, J., & Freeman, L. (2010). An exploration into inquiry-based learning by a multidisciplinary group of higher education faculty. *Higher Education, 59*, 765-783.
- Jean, S. L. (1951). Stars to steer by. *American Journal of Public Health, 41*, 963-970.
- Jenkins, R. (2011, September 20). A philosophy of teaching. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from: <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Philosophy-of-Teaching/129060/>
- Jordi, R. (2011). Reframing the concept of reflection: Consciousness, experiential learning, and reflective learning practices. *Adult Education Quarterly, 61*(2), 181-197.
- Korn, H. H. (July, 2003). Writing a philosophy of teaching. *PsychTeacher Electronic Discussion List*. Retrieved from <http://www.apadiv2.org/ebooks/eit2003/eit03-07.pdf>
- Lerch, C., Bilics, A., & Colley, B. (2006, April). *Using reflection to develop higher order processing*. Conference presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Minkler, M. (1989). Health education, health promotion, and the open society: An historical perspective. *Health Education Quarterly, Spring*, 17-29.
- Molesworth, M., Nixon, E. & Scullion, R. (2009). Having, being and higher education: The marketisation of the university and the transformation of the student into consumer. *Teaching in Higher Education, 14*(3), 277-287.
- Montell, G. (2003, March 27). How to write a statement of teaching philosophy. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://bama.ua.edu/~sprentic/695%20Montell%202003.htm>

National Commission for Health Education Credentialing. (2010). *Responsibilities and competencies of health educators*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nchec.org/credentialing/responsibilities/>

Nyswander, D. (1967). The open society: Its implications for health educators. *Health Education Monograph, 1*, 3-13.

Russell, R. D. (1976, April). *There is no philosophy of health education! Rather...our strength and our weakness is in the many*. Paper presented to the National Convention of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Milwaukee, WI.

Schönwetter, D. J., Sokal, L., Friesen, M., & Taylor K. L. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *The International Journal for Academic Development, 7*(1), 83-97. doi: 0.1080/13601440210156501. Retrieved from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSIOLOGY AND HEALTH SCIENCE

14-CREDIT-HOUR GRADUATE CERTIFICATE

PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION

- Sharpen your skills in a tightly targeted program.
- Begin your graduate work with online classes offering flexibility for new graduates and working professionals.
- Focus on program planning, worksite health promotion, and epidemiology.

Applicants must meet the admissions requirements of the Graduate School and must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with at least an academic minor in health education, health and safety education, health science, or an equivalent subject. The information presented here, correct at the time of publication, is subject to change. Ball State University practices equal opportunity in education and employment and is strongly and actively committed to diversity within its community.

www.bsu.edu/distance

CONTACT US

Online and Distance Education
Carmichael Hall, Room 200
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
765-285-1581
distance@bsu.edu

