

Editorial: A Teaching Philosophy or Philosophy of Teaching?

Special Issue: Philosophy of Teaching

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More often than not today the phrase ‘philosophy of teaching’ refers to a ‘teaching portfolio’ that contains a statement of one’s ‘teaching philosophy’ generally encouraged and formalized by faculty development offices purportedly to develop teaching skills and reflection on teaching practice (e.g. Seldon *et al.* 1993). Indeed, this movement has gathered pace in the last few decades and now has assumed an ideological currency that is favoured and driven by university administrations (see e.g. Chism, 1998). The Faculty and TA Development Office at Ohio State University¹, for instance, pragmatically suggests

A philosophy of teaching statement is a narrative that includes

- your conception of teaching and learning
- a description of how you teach
- justification for why you teach that way

The statement can

- demonstrate that you have been reflective and purposeful about your teaching
- communicate your goals as an instructor and your corresponding actions in the classroom
- provide an opportunity to point to and tie together the other sections of your portfolio

The website cites Stephen Brookfield (1990) to suggest that ‘a teaching philosophy can be used for several purposes’

Personal purpose: ‘... a distinctive organizing vision—a clear picture of why you are doing what you are doing that you can call up at points of crisis—is crucial to your personal sanity and morale.’ (p. 16)

Pedagogical purpose: ‘Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly what kind of dent you want to make in the world means that you must continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative questions of all—What effect am I having on students and on their learning?’ (pp. 18–19)

A 'teaching philosophy' is not a philosophy of teaching. It is a matter of personal belief, style and statement designed to encourage professional reflection without laying down universal principles or a substantive engagement with issues of teaching methodology. There is a big difference between a procedure that assists practitioners to systematically reflect on their practice and one that argues for a particular view. The website provides a series of examples of teaching philosophy statements by faculty across the disciplines and from other institutions. It also provides links to other universities that follow the practice, including the Universities of Southern California, Iowa State, Texas at El Paso and Hawaii. Other sites provide links to endorsements by higher education unions of the concept of teaching portfolios.² There is no doubt that these statements which encourage university faculty to reflect on their own role and objectives and to examine the assumptions, expectations and responsibilities are a useful procedure even if they amount to a personal statement of beliefs about teaching rather than a philosophy of teaching. Clearly, philosophy of teaching is a broader topic within philosophy of education whereas the personal statement wrongly referred to as a 'teaching philosophy' is more to do with the demands that come from the university administration for improvements in the quality of university teaching. Where the former emanates from systematic reflection on the nature of teaching as a practice that has a long history the latter, it could be argued, springs from a business model of knowledge institutions based on the ideology of continuous improvement. Such a view has led to national centres such as Ako Aotearoa, The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence³ in New Zealand that has a vision, a mission and a strategy based on a view of learning designed to promote teaching that 'is more effective, is better valued and produces the best possible outcomes for learners and the nation.'

Philosophy of teaching as a field also has a contribution to make to the larger picture by analyzing, discussing and developing different philosophies of teaching and sometimes by providing a critique of accounts that attempt, as Jenny Steinnes remarks in 'Transformative Teaching: Restoring the teacher, under erasure': 'The teacher is presented more as part of the force of production than as an autonomous performer of a mandate given to him/her by society'. She argues 'He/she is supposed to supply knowledge that is considered useful to a society geared to production and consumption.' Against this view she provides an account of transformational teaching that draws on a combination of the work of an ancient Norwegian poet (The Dreamsong of Olav Åsteson) and Derrida's essay 'Where a Teaching Body Begins and How it Ends.'

By contrast and in a practical way Kieran Egan and Gillian Judson discuss the imagination in teaching Social Studies using 'cognitive toolkits' of students in the form of stories, images, and humour. David Carr and Don Skinner make a case for a broader view of teacher expertise than the instrumentalist versions of teacher education that emerged as the application of theory established in the foundational disciplines of psychology, sociology and philosophy. Donald Vandenberg discusses the role of truth in teaching and the notions, following Harry Broudy and Maxine Greene, that the educational epistemic ethos should be domain-specific, and pluralistic and lesson-specific. Vandenberg wants to show how truth can be

disclosed in teaching grounding knowledge in the being of the student and the world.

In 'Education as Training for Life: Stoic teachers as physicians of the soul' Mark A. Holowchak provides a critique of American liberal education and the Stoic model on which it is based—'education as self-knowing, the need of logic and critical thinking for informed decision-making, learning as preparation for life, and knowledge for integration in private, local, and global affairs.' His aim is to encourage institution to examine both their aims and their normative force. Matthew Clarke in 'The Ethico-politics of Teacher Identity' examines recent discussion around the notion of teacher identity and especially the problems concerning a lack of agency that surround poststructuralism's radical de-centering of the subject. Clarke adopts Foucault's ethics to develop a framework for talking about teacher identity and building ethical agency. Kelley Wells provides a Peircean approach to learning and teaching critical thinking developing a theory of learning from Peirce's concepts of the dynamics of belief and doubt that serves as an account for the process of changing one's beliefs. Teaching thus becomes the means to govern the process and helping the learner regulate their own 'settlement of belief'.

These essays demonstrate the theoretical nature of teaching as a practice and activity and also the contribution of philosophy of teaching to the art and practice of teaching.

Notes

1. See the website at <http://ftad.osu.edu/portfolio/philosophy/Philosophy.html>.
2. See The Centre for Academic Development website at the University of Auckland that links to the National Tertiary Education Union in Australia (<http://www.nteu.org.au/publications/other/teachingportfolio>).
3. See the website at <http://akoaooteaoroa.ac.nz/topics/term/22/resources/50>.

References

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