

# TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT: IT IS TIME TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

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**ABSTRACT.** The teaching philosophy statement in Canadian academia is integral to applying for faculty positions, promotions, awards, and grants. However, the notion of philosophy is quite unfamiliar to many science students and educators, which is one main audience for this Note from the Field. Moreover, teaching is no longer limited to a traditional didactic model. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many new technology-infused, online, and hybrid teaching models became popular. Years-old philosophies no longer fit with many of the latest innovative teaching approaches. We suggest considering some creative but equally effective alternatives for formal teaching philosophy statements. A reflective essay or short video introduction are two such possibilities which can be equally effective in evaluating one's teaching practices and goals.

## DÉCLARATION DE PHILOSOPHIE PÉDAGOGIQUE : IL EST TEMPS DE PENSER AUTREMENT

**RÉSUMÉ.** Une déclaration de philosophie pédagogique est cruciale pour postuler à des postes d'enseignement, obtenir des distinctions et des financements dans les universités canadiennes. Cependant, la philosophie est souvent mal comprise par de nombreux étudiants et enseignants en sciences. L'enseignement ne se limite plus à un modèle didactique traditionnel. Pendant la pandémie, de nombreux nouveaux modèles d'enseignement, intégrant des technologies, en ligne et hybrides, sont devenus populaires. Les anciennes philosophies ne correspondent pas aux approches pédagogiques récentes. Nous suggérons des alternatives créatives pour les déclarations de philosophie pédagogique formelles. Un essai réflexif ou une brève vidéo introductive sont deux options qui peuvent s'avérer aussi efficaces que la méthode traditionnelle pour évaluer les pratiques et objectifs pédagogiques d'une personne.

In Canadian academia, the teaching philosophy statement (TPS) is now a common requirement for applications to faculty positions, promotions, teaching awards, and grants (Schönwetter et al., 2002). Outside Canada, higher educational institutes in many countries worldwide also require a teaching portfolio and TPS to support a candidate's teaching expertise.

#### TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT: WHAT DO WE KNOW, AND WHERE DO WE STRUGGLE?

The concept of the TPS is rooted in self-reflection. According to Chism (1998), the TPS reflects one's teaching, emphasizing teaching goals, actions, and visions for personal and professional development. More simply, a TPS explains what we do in class and why we do it (Beatty et al., 2009). A TPS documents the guiding principles of our teaching pedagogy and how we put them into practice (Kenny, 2015). A spectrum of guidelines is available (Chism, 1998; Goodyear & Allchin, 1998) and many are adopted by the teaching and learning centres of several leading universities (e.g., the Michael V. Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning at the Ohio State University and the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation at the University of Toronto). Chism has outlined five components for an impactful TPS: conceptualization of learning, perception of teaching, goals for students, implementation of the philosophy, and a professional growth plan. Chism's outline has been adopted by many teaching and learning centres as a golden guideline for writing a TPS (see the two institutions mentioned previously). However, the suggestions made by Goodyear and Allchin (1998), which are different from Chism's, are also popular. According to Goodyear and Allchin, a TPS needs to integrate teaching responsibilities, expertise, relationships with students, approaches to create a learning environment, teaching strategies, teaching innovation, and learning outcomes for a student. Thus, there is not only one model; several do exist. For their part, Schönwetter et al. (2002) have described another conceptual model of the TSP, and a corresponding evaluation rubric to assess it.

Conceptualizing one's teaching philosophy and choosing the best guide to write a personalized TPS can therefore be quite challenging for candidates applying to a teaching position or for educators early in their careers (Richlin, 1995). A study by Perlman et al. (1996) assessed application documents submitted for a tenured track assistant professor position in cognitive psychology. The findings revealed that most candidates failed to emphasize teaching in their submitted document; many never reflected on their teaching practices and received no guidance on developing a TPS. To write a good TPS, one should understand previously established

educational theories and reflect on theory-driven practices. However, many scholars (and especially those in the sciences) are skeptical of philosophies, as philosophy is generally not included in traditional science curricula (Fjelland, 2022).

### **EDUCATION TODAY HAS MANY FACES, AND SO DO EDUCATORS**

The type of education delivery and the role of an educator within a given context can vary widely. Higher educational institutes increasingly enrol a mixed group of learners with various pedagogical and andragogical learner characteristics (Dachner & Polin, 2016). In Canadian higher education, teaching is no longer limited to a traditional didactic model. As a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns, many educators moved their teaching to online or hybrid platforms. In an asynchronous online course, the students might never meet the instructors in person, yet the virtual relationship between student and teacher is far beyond what is expected in traditional teaching. Many faculty members play roles as mentors, supervise research students, and provide career guidance to junior faculty.

In medical, dental, and other health professional schools in Canada, a clinical faculty's teaching responsibilities differ from traditional didactic teaching. Simulation-based teaching requires skillsets and approaches from an instructor that are significantly different from classroom teaching. Moreover, mentorship and preceptorship are integral to health professional education, which also varies widely from conventional classroom teaching. A growing number of educational institutes are embracing technology-infused active learning strategies to promote student engagement. Active learning strategies shift the teacher's role from a traditional lecturer to a facilitator, delegator, or demonstrator. Many educational institutes offer sample TPSs like those found at the University of Iowa and the University of Michigan (Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, 2021; Office of Consultation and Research in Medical Education, 2024). However, none of these sample TPSs demonstrate an entirely online teaching experience, teaching in simulation, or experience of a preceptor in clinical teaching.

Young clinical faculty and other health professionals seeking to apply for clinical teaching positions are thus often perplexed by the existing teaching philosophies and lack of guidance on writing a TPS that matches their unique teaching approaches and experiences. This is why, in this Note from the Field, we suggest moving outside of the TPS box.

## IT IS TIME TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

When hiring for a faculty position, employers read the TPS of a candidate to learn about their future ideas and goals for teaching, as well as their effectiveness and willingness to reflect and improve teaching in response to student and peer evaluation (Fragher et al., 2019). Instead of a TPS, an application document can be a reflective essay on pedagogical goals and practices summarizing one's thoughts and plans for teaching. Reflection is generally defined as looking back at an event and its consequences with an attempt to understand the reasons and identify the lessons learned. This approach helps educators re-evaluate their teaching and uncover hidden beliefs, potential, and room for improvement (Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Loughran, 2002). A sample reflective essay is provided in Table A1.

A similar but more innovative approach would be to ask for a video introduction as an application requirement. In a short video introduction, the candidate could be asked to introduce themselves, talk about their teaching practices, and elucidate a plan to improve their teaching. They can also be asked to answer the question of what, in their opinion, makes them a good educator. A sample set of instructions for creating a video are demonstrated in Figure A1, with screenshots from a sample video shown in Figure A2. Such a video will allow employers to learn about the candidate's pedagogical approaches and plans for improvement. Moreover, such a short video clip will also reveal the candidate's ability to organize ideas and present them in a lucid, concise, and compelling manner.

In conclusion, while traditional TPSs serve educators well for conventional didactic teaching, non-traditional TPS formats may be better suited to allow candidates to highlight and demonstrate their unique approaches to teaching, especially in a still rapidly evolving educational landscape.

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## APPENDIX

TABLE A1: A sample reflective essay with general guidelines for preparing the document

(i)	<b>General Instruction (provided by an employer)</b>
<p>Please provide a reflective essay answering questions from the following list. Note that some questions may not apply to your experience or expertise. Word limit: 2,000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your experience as an educator. What do you teach? Who are your learners?</li> <li>• What makes you an exceptional educator? What is unique about your teaching practice? Why do you choose that teaching practice?</li> <li>• Describe an experience that makes you proud as an educator.</li> <li>• Describe a challenging experience as an educator.</li> </ul>	
(ii)	<b>A Sample Reflective Essay</b>
<p><b>My Teaching Practices: A Reflection</b> [First name] [Last name]</p>	
<p>Not too long ago, when I started my undergraduate studies, I was exceedingly motivated and excited to learn. I enrolled in the program of my dreams. Everything started perfectly. However, I soon struggled to stay attentive in class, even though I was highly interested in the topic! Now, as an educator, I see my old self in my students – the same enthusiastic and curious mind. I realize that to keep the students vigilant, I need to feed their inquisitive minds, keep their excitement thriving, and inspire them to become lifelong learners. Every day, my students remind me of the importance of my role as an educator.</p> <p>I am a clinical instructor, teaching my students how to operate dental procedures in a simulated environment. My students are in the 1st year of the Dentistry program. My teaching environment is a simulation lab, where students work on plastic mannequins. In my opinion, what makes my teaching style unique is that I constantly remind students of their future goals and expectations. I emphasize that a mannequin is too perfect compared to a real human. I also highlight how they must consider a person's consent, personality, and comfort when working with an actual patient. Student feedback shows that many students find this teaching approach encouraging and helps them prepare for their transition to a clinical setting.</p>	
<b>General Instruction (provided by an employer)</b>	
<p>Please provide a 10-minute video describing your teaching practice and a plan to improve your teaching. You can choose to answer the following questions in your video presentation. Note that some questions may not apply to your experience or expertise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you teach, and how do you teach it? Who are your students?</li> <li>• What makes you an exceptional educator? What is unique about your teaching practice? Why do you choose that teaching practice?</li> <li>• How do you plan to improve yourself as an educator?</li> </ul>	

FIGURE A1. Example of general instructions for creating a video presentation

These instructions can be provided by the employer; the guiding questions can be modified according to the needs of the position.



FIGURE A2. Screenshots from a sample video explaining one's teaching practices

This sample video is created using an AI-generated avatar by Playground AI (<https://playground.com/>), with a voice generated by ElevenLabs (<https://elevenlabs.io/>). D-ID (<https://www.d-id.com/>) was used to animate the avatar. Camtasia (<https://www.techsmith.com/camtasia>) was used for compilation and editing. The complete video file can be accessed [here](#).

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