

## GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A GOOD TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

**Introduction:** As part of a concerted effort by the National Teaching Council, (NTC) to professionalize education in both the private and public sector, the issue of portfolio building has gained teachers' attention for some time now. The piece highlights the major guidelines for preparing an acceptable teaching philosophy which forms an integral component of the portfolio. A teaching philosophy is a written description of your values, goals, and beliefs regarding both teaching and learning and uses evidence from your teaching to make a case that you have excelled as a teacher. Teaching philosophy statements are unique to each individual and reflect contextual factors such as the discipline, influential mentors, personal educational experiences, type of teaching etc. **Teaching philosophy has the following sub-headings: 1. Statement of my teaching philosophy 2. Validity of my teaching philosophy 3. Effectiveness of my teaching philosophy 4. Application of my teaching philosophy 5. Conclusion and 6. References**

**1. STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY:** A good statement of teaching philosophy must include the following:

**Learning Goals:** What got you interested in your discipline? What does your discipline mean to you? What do you most hope students will appreciate about your discipline? What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in your discipline? How are these disciplinary knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to students' academic, personal, and professional success? Your learning goals must be specific to the context of the discipline (mathematics, English Language, Science etc). Kindly capture these details under the 1<sup>st</sup> heading.

Example 1: *My teaching philosophy is crystal clear in my mind: putting my students first. I'm always committed to impart quality education and stand to respect their values and empathetic to stand by and to solve their academic problems. When my intent to teaching is positive and vision is futuristic, undertaking the impossible task becomes possible. That's how I encourage, motivate and teach my students to obtain desirable results as learning outcomes. As always keeping students my priority and supreme, I get a holistic view on key teaching-learning issues from the talented, genius and techno-savvy minds. (No discipline has been stated)*

Example 2: *My teaching philosophy is that students construct their mathematical knowledge and skills effectively in a conducive academic learning environment. This academic learning environment encompasses a given space allotted for the learning process in some excellent social, psychological, and pedagogical contexts which influence students to maximize their efforts in learning.*

I strongly believe that the mathematics learning environment must be well-endowed with innovative teaching and learning materials (such as Cuisenaire rods, geoboard, realia, visual and audio-visual aids), good teacher-student and student-student relationships, valid assessment strategies, purposeful classroom routines, and discipline for effective instruction. For this reason, academic learning environment must be a dynamic social system which comprises good teachers' behaviour, teacher-student interaction, student-student relationships, school climate, socio-economic status of students, cultural diversity and ethos as these form integral elements that potentially influence students' learning.

My decision to become a mathematics teacher stems from the fact that I want to make a difference in the mathematics world. To this end, I uphold in a high esteem a holistic mathematics education through an excellent mathematics learning environment as a vital tool for imparting mathematics learners' lives. (A major discipline-mathematics stated)

## **2. VALIDITY OF MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

Every teaching philosophy is underpinned by a theory. If your philosophy is that learners can construct their own knowledge, then the constructivist theory should back your philosophy. In the same way if your philosophy is that learners learn better in a conducive environment then Lev Vygotsky's Social learning theory must back you. Under this sub-heading of the teaching philosophy, you will write briefly on the theory that underpins your philosophy by including its educational implications. Kindly present the information in this way:

**Example: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning underpins my teaching philosophy. Lev S. Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a seminal Russian psychologist who believed that social interaction plays a critical role in children's learning. Vygotsky (1978):**

- ❖ *believed learning occurs in a social setting through positive relationships.*
- ❖ *stressed the role culture, language, play, more knowledgeable adults, and peers have on learners' development and how cultural beliefs affect how learning takes place.*
- ❖ *proposed the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding as vital to learning.*
- ❖ *explained the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as 'the distance between the learner's actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the potential development as determined through problem-solving in collaboration with adults or more capable peers'' (p. 85).*
- ❖ *explained scaffolding as a step-by-step process of leading children to learn a concept and gradually withdrawing such a guidance.*
- ❖ *recommended summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting as instructional scaffolding techniques to help learners acquire more knowledge in their ZPD*

NOTE:1. Kindly note that authorities could be stated here and duly referenced after the conclusion. Authors can be referenced like this: Agyeman, (1998) stated that .....; or According to Agyeman (1998), .....

2. Include only relevant information under this sub-heading please. Early life and marriage of proponent of the theory are NOT needed.

### **Educational Implications of Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory**

You can bullet your points as far as the educational implications of the theory are concerned. You must write in complete and simple sentences. Always keep your statement of teaching philosophy in mind and develop linkages with the educational implications. Write at most 5 educational implicational implications.

### 3. APPLICATION OF MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Consider the following areas when writing about the application of your teaching philosophy

**(a)LESSON PLANNING:** Example: I make efforts to know my students' names, interests, weaknesses, strengths, mathematical language proficiency and identify student-student relationships through observation, personal interaction and questioning. To this end, I always plan mathematics lessons and identify possible students' difficulties (misconceptions) in advance, design and rehearse effective strategies to mediate them and put the students into goal-oriented cooperative learning groups.

**(b)LESSON DELIVERY**> Kindly elaborate o the teaching methods, strategies, approaches and technique that are in line with your teaching philosophy. Try to write in response to the following: *What do you see as the relationship between the student and the teacher? What do you see are the respective responsibilities of the student and the teacher? How are these relationships and responsibilities reflected in your teaching methods? How do these methods contribute to your learning goals for students? Why are these teaching methods appropriate for use in your discipline? How are your teaching methods attentive to student expectations and needs? How do your personal characteristics and values impact your choice and implementation of your teaching methods?*

**Example:** *I employ reciprocal teaching where I collaborate with students effectively in the learning process by practicing the four critical skills: summarizing, questioning, clarifying and predicting. I use innovative teaching, and learning materials such as realia, models etc as well as web-based mathematics applications and software in my lessons to promote conceptual understanding. I constitute cooperative groups (comprising high, medium, and low-ability learners); give special review and open-ended questions on topics treated and ensured individual feedback when evaluating group performances. I devote adequate time to the groups and intermittently change the members. These cooperative learning groups promote a community where students receive support which resulted in positive relationships in the classroom and high math achievement. Group work promoted an effective way of using scaffolding principles because students can learn from each other while working together and more advanced students help others learn.*

©ASSESSMENT: In an attempt to write on assessment, you tailor your write up to answer the following: How do you know that your learning goals are being achieved using your teaching methods? What sorts of learning assessment tools do you use (e.g. tests, papers, portfolios, journals) and why? What do the learning assessments say about your teaching?

Example: I measure student mathematics performance by asking a thought-provoking question, allowing students to complete mathematics tasks on the whiteboard, calling students randomly to answer fellow students' questions, giving assessment of learning tasks, homework, and assignment. To promote transfer of knowledge, my lessons always have application questions that I give to my students. For my students to acquire increase mathematical knowledge skills without any frustration, I test their ability to solve problems both independently and in groups and encourage them to summarize the main points in the lessons.

(Kindly note that the examples cited above are on a teaching philosophy that involves creating conducive learning environment in mathematics)

#### **4. EFFECTIVENESS OF MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

To write on the effectiveness of your teaching philosophy, kindly write on some observable changes that your students have experienced as a result of your teaching philosophy.

Example: Through personal interaction coupled with well-monitored group and cooperative group work, students developed a modicum of social skills and fully cooperate with one another in learning mathematical concepts with understanding. This enhanced vital 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as collaboration, communication and problem-solving in my students. This is evident in my successful accomplishment of specific objectives and student participation. Students are always eager to ask and answer questions, and reach their different levels of mathematical understanding where errors and misconceptions were greatly minimized.

2. Talk about the effects your assessment strategies have on student performance and transfer of knowledge.

## 5. CONCLUSION

To write a good conclusion to a teaching philosophy document, consider the following points:

1. Write about what you are interested in doing in the near future to herald your professional development and the action steps that will help you. For instance, "I am interested in conducting and publishing more action researches on critical topics such as mathematics anxiety, mathematics performance, perception about mathematics, measurement in mathematics education, the role of culture in improving mathematical language, assessment in mathematics education, and impact of mathematics teachers' personality on student mathematics performance to expand the trajectories of mathematics research. **Reading mathematics journals, articles, and listening to commentaries from mathematics experts will help me a lot.** *(You can state about three and explain them)*
2. Mention some professional development courses you have attended which are related to your teaching philosophy and the possible ones you wish to upgrade your skills professionally.

**NOTE:** If you have cited any authority in the teaching philosophy, then it is imperative for you to acknowledge it nicely in the APA style. APA style use the author /date method of citation in which the author/s last name and the year of the publication are inserted in the actual text of the paper. APA= American Psychological Association. (Do well not to number them, please.). For example:

## 6. REFERENCES

- Ampadu, E. (2012). Students' perceptions of their teachers teaching of mathematics: the case of Ghana. *International online journal of Educational sciences*, 4(2), 351-388
- Ampofo, P. (2012). *Motivational packages and their effects on employee performance in the Ghana education service: A Case study of Asante Akyem Senior High Schools*. Unpublished masters' dissertation, KNUST, Kumasi
- Vygotsky, L.S., (2013). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.