

## Philosophy of Teaching and Faculty Development

My approach to teaching and faculty development has evolved over the last fourteen years as my identity has shifted from that of 1) an individual practitioner preparing for a faculty career in English but exploring innovative teaching to 2) a professional faculty consultant at the teaching center of a large research intensive institution and a manager with a fair amount of administrative responsibility.\* So instead of investing myself in attaining tenure in an academic discipline, my first job involved developing basic competence in educational theory and practice and learning how to consult with faculty members and graduate instructors and lead in-service teaching improvement programs. I did this for several years as a graduate student and then as the programs coordinator at a very small teaching center. For the last six years I have served as a research associate at a much larger teaching center that provides a wide array of services to faculty members, graduate instructors, departments, colleges and campuses at my institution. In this time, my philosophy of teaching has shifted dramatically as I have simultaneously developed a philosophy of faculty development.

I come to college teaching and to faculty development as a humanist, as someone interested in literature and the arts as they express our human capacity for self-realization, as well as our capacity to harm ourselves and others. I think of Thomas Jefferson's principles of education, which included teaching citizens the ways of the human heart so well that they can make good decisions based on the character of those they meet in public and private life. This sounds very old-fashioned and idealistic, but preparing a skilled and perceptive citizenry is one of the main reasons why I enjoy teaching writing and literary analysis. Likewise, it's why I'm interested in community-based, experiential learning. I'm also interested in science and technology as ways to advance or inhibit human self-realization. Thus, I find working in a profession that is inherently interdisciplinary to be stimulating as well as gratifying. Finally, I believe that we need to know who students and faculty are in order to help them realize their own goals—and I would include personal goals here. So being in a profession where I consult regularly with students and with faculty is enormously rewarding for me. The same interest in human

diversity, ethics, and culture studies that I acquired in English informs my work with instructors of all ranks in faculty development.

While I admit that I don't like conflict, I find working with so-called "difficult" students increasingly satisfying. Similarly, I appreciate opportunities to calm an irate administrator or help exasperated faculty members who are struggling to understand student feedback. I have learned the most from interactions with such individuals. I remember, for instance, a student who was defiant and angry, but who responded well to the boundaries I held him to and who turned out to be one of my best students that semester. I work with very high-functioning people, and most simply need a little guidance to overcome an obstacle or solve a problem. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that I am a patient and perceptive counselor on issues of teaching and learning, and a good listener no matter what the topic. When helping students and instructors, especially one-on-one, I am responding to the whole person, not just the issue or problem that brought the person to me in the first place.

In university settings, it pretty much goes without saying that we are teaching, collaborating with, and learning from people who are talented and have great potential for success. If they are not performing to expectations, therefore, this is my problem as well as theirs. I cannot simply say, "Well, you know, some have the right stuff, and I have to focus on helping them; the rest will have to explore other options." I don't think this realization solves all our problems in terms of helping students succeed in college or helping all instructors become effective teachers and productive faculty members. However, I do find it to be fundamental to how I approach any situation where learning is the goal. It is certainly my job to create smart contexts in resident and online instructional settings, in programs I lead for faculty, and in my interactions with my own staff and fellow administrators.\*\*

I've focused this statement thus far on the goal of individual self-realization and how that informs my work, but I have a growing awareness of my responsibility to help department chairs and committees assess academic degree programs and make changes at the curricular

level. This part of my work has come into sharper focus after a recent university accreditation focusing on undergraduate teaching and learning. I enjoy helping departments come to a common understanding of the goals of their program, what measures will be taken to assess these goals, and how courses, extracurricular activities, internships, etc. will be aligned with program goals and related learning objectives. In this work, my roles are less those of the counselor and model educator and more those of the political strategist and diplomat—as in, “The accrediting agency just wants to see that our efforts are genuine and systematic, so commit only to things you really want to do.” In a sense, I’m selling the idea of outcomes assessment to people who either have never had to do it before but must get on board or who have had unsatisfactory experiences with it in the past.

Looking to the future, I work for the day when our students have such good information about degree programs that they can make informed decisions about majors and discover that those majors deliver as promised. My colleagues and I will have performed perfectly when all instructors know how to align course objectives with teaching and assessment methods within the context of general education and degree program curricula. Finally, I could die perfectly satisfied if I knew that I had helped bring about a culture in which faculty members and administrators were as eager to advance undergraduate teaching and learning as they are graduate education and research.

\* At a recent conference, someone gave me a copy of Ray Land’s twelve orientations to faculty development (*Educational Development: Discourse, Identity and Practice*, Maidenhead: Open University/McGraw-Hill, 2003), and I am finding it immensely helpful in understanding the evolution of my own professional identity.

\*\*My influence here is “Smart People or Smart Contexts?” by S. A. Barab and J. A. Plucker [*Educational Psychologist* 37(3): 165-182], in which the authors look at a range of educational theories that situate ability or talent in educational contexts and human interactions rather than in the bodies and brains of individual students.