

Writing a Philosophy of Art Teaching

Pam Stephens

A philosophy of art teaching is a personal narrative that clearly explains your attitudes about teaching and learning. Most university teacher preparation programs require that a teaching philosophy be written prior to student teaching. Such exercises help pre-service teachers think deeply about the profession for which they are training.

Because a teaching philosophy is a living (or organic) document, it is something that should be constantly revised. The document that is created as a student should not be the same document you will have as an experienced educator. The philosophy, once written, should be reviewed on a regular basis and edited to reflect new understandings, insights, and approaches. As you grow and change as a teacher, so should your philosophy grow and change.

How to Start

Figuring out where to start with the philosophy is sometimes daunting. Try brainstorming to start. Consider some of these questions as segues into developing your philosophy.

1. What are the over-arching objectives that you have for your students? What do you want your students to know at the end of the year? What do you want them to remember in twenty years?
2. What objectives do you have for yourself? Where do you envision yourself in a year? In five years?
3. Describe your teaching style and methods. For example, what learning theories do you most use? How do you deliver lessons (lecture, hands-on, mentorship)?
4. Discuss a theme that runs through your teaching.
5. Why did you decide to become an art teacher?
6. Why is art teaching important to you?
7. What or who influenced you to teach art?

8. What or who has most influenced your style of teaching? How does your teaching reflect this influence?
9. How will you improve in the future?

Pointers

Like your résumé, the teaching philosophy should be professional in its presentation. The philosophy often serves as your introduction to other teachers and to school administrators or parents. Here are some pointers to help with the presentation of your philosophy.

- Select a good paper in a light, neutral color; no frilly, colored, decorated, or perfumed papers.
- Use Times New Roman or Arial in 10 or 12 pitch; no fancy or cute fonts.
- Employ an economy of words. One page is perfect, two is the maximum.
- Avoid generic phrases such as "I like working with children."
- Limit the use of metaphors.
- Be concrete. Give specific examples.

"Education is the avenue of the future. Education binds our purpose with our intent, and character I hope to materialize the importance of learning, turning it from task to passion."

Alicia Fawley
Mission

- Steer clear of jargon and technical vocabulary that only art educators would understand.
- Use present tense and action verbs when possible.
- Make it memorable. What can you say to make your philosophy stand out?
- If posting your philosophy to a Web site or sending it by e-mail, it is usually better not to use the tab key, bullets, or automatic numbering as these can become scrambled.
- Refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*, Fifth Edition, if you have format or grammar questions.

Example

For an example of a teaching philosophy, visit www.pamstephens.blogspot.com where Dr. Stephens' philosophy of art teaching is posted.

Pam Stephens is a SchoolArts advisory board member and she coordinates the art education program at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.