



## Moving Past Bumper Stickers: Writing a Teaching Philosophy

**Melanie L. Buffington**

Assistant Professor, Art Education, Virginia Commonwealth University

**An** important part of preparing a professional teaching portfolio for a job interview is writing a statement of teaching philosophy. Because a teaching philosophy needs to be relatively brief—about one page—it can be a daunting task. However, understanding the aspects of art teaching that are important to you is essential when moving into the job search process.

When I read teaching philosophies written by students, I notice they often contain generic sentiments that sound like bumper stickers, including, “I teach to touch the future,” “I want to have an impact on students,” or “I want to be just like my favorite teacher.” Though safe and easy to write, these types of teaching philosophies do not address the core values about art education that a teacher holds and will likely use to guide her/his practice in the classroom. After reading my students’ philosophies of teaching, I looked for suggestions. Though there are books from general education that include ideas for teaching philosophies (Campbell, Cignetti, Melenzyer, Nettles, & Wyman, 2007; Constantino & DeLorenzo, 2006; Wyatt & Looper, 2004), I did not find any from art education. Thus, here I explain a process I developed that may help you/your students craft a meaningful teaching philosophy.

**1.** The process begins with the article “Mapping Identity for Curriculum Work” (Congdon, Stewart,

& White, 2002), which engages readers in thinking about their identity and how it shapes their curricular choices. After reading the article and completing the chart, I recommend having a discussion with peers about the issues that are important to you. Taking the time to interrogate yourself and make your motivations and assumptions visible begins the process of understanding what is important to you about art education.

**2.** After discussing the results of the “Mapping Identity” chart, I suggest considering why you chose to become an art teacher and what you do or plan to do in your own classroom.

**3.** A few days later, move toward the first draft of your teaching philosophy. When working with students, I play the Whitney Houston song *The Greatest Love of All*. This song includes the line, “I believe the children are the future, teach them well and let them lead the way.” After listening to it, we analyze what Houston is promoting with this song. Students point out that the song is not specific and deals with romantic generalizations about childhood and teaching.

**4.** After thinking about how to avoid trite generalizations, move on to brainstorming a list of specific aspects of art education. Try to generate a list of 10-15 facets of art education that are meaningful

to you. This list might include topics such as multicultural art education, integrated curriculum, contemporary art, studio artmaking, museum education, service learning, social justice, ecological art education, ceramics, visual culture, the work of women artists, art criticism, and so forth.

**5.** From this longer list select the three most important aspects of art education that motivate you.

**6.** These three items can become the main ideas for your philosophy. For each of these ideas, write a few specific reasons why that aspect of art education is important to you. For instance, if multicultural art education is one area vital to your practice, you might list specific reasons, including the need for all students to see themselves represented in the curriculum and that living in a democracy requires that the contributions of all people are valued.

**7.** From here, write one or two sentences that offer a short example of what this looks like in your classroom. Continuing with the example of multiculturalism, you might include an example of teaching a unit that specifically addressed power and equality in the United States.

**8.** The final phase involves developing introductory and concluding paragraphs. In the introduction, set up the three main points and give the reader a sense of where you are going. In the conclusion, bring all the ideas together and show their connections. Once you have a statement that reflects your motivations, ask some teachers to read it. You will likely need to revise it a few times to get it to a polished state.

This approach helps students and teachers craft meaningful teaching philosophy statements. Once you complete your teaching philosophy, I encourage you to use it as a guide for putting together the rest of your professional teaching portfolio. The points that you raise in the philosophy can guide your choices of other artifacts to include in your professional teaching portfolio, making it a cohesive document.

## REFERENCES

- Campbell, D. M., Cignetti, P. B., Melenzyer, B. J., Nettles, D. H., & Wyman, R. M. (2007). *How to develop a professional portfolio: A manual for teachers*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Congdon, K. G., Stewart, M., & White, J. H. (2002). Mapping identity for curriculum work. In Y. Gaudelius & P. Speirs (Eds.). *Contemporary issues in art education*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Constantino, P. M., & DeLorenzo, M. N. (2006). *Developing a professional teaching portfolio*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Houston, W. (1985). *The greatest love of all*. Arista Records.
- Wyatt, R. L., & Looper, S. (2004). *So you have to have a portfolio*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Interested in submitting an article for *NAEA Advisory*?**  
See [www.arteducators.org/naea-advisory](http://www.arteducators.org/naea-advisory) for details.