

Timothy A. Pychyl Ph.D. – Teaching Philosophy Statement

"You give me faith in myself." This is what my student said as our essay review session came to an end. Within this student's statement are the roots of self-confidence, intrinsic motivation and the willingness to try; and these provide a firm foundation for teaching and learning. These words also provide me with some assurance that my teaching is making a difference.

For me, teaching is partly an "act of faith." Certainly there is the student's faith in self discussed above, but there are many other aspects of faith that guide effective teaching. First, as a teacher I have learned that having faith in my students' abilities is fundamental. When they falter, when we falter in our learning activities, I lean on my faith in them and their abilities, and in this trust, in the safety of the classroom, learning continues in the face of uncertainty or momentary defeat. Second, I have learned that I have to have faith in myself as I negotiate the curriculum with each new class as a group and with each individual making up that class. Plans are just that, they are at best tentative, and my flexibility and ability to adapt to the students' needs requires a faith in my own abilities as a teacher, so I can let go of the "safety" of my plans to meet the needs presented in the "teachable moment."

Teaching is also "a way of seeing." To flex to the needs of the class in the teachable moment, I must first be able to see that moment of opportunity to influence learning. Seeing the student is much more complicated than it appears. It requires looking past the curriculum content and the insecurities of self in the "delivery" of this content to explore what the students bring to the class and how they are working with the concepts presented. Seeing the student requires a great deal of time for discussion, both inside and outside of class time, because "seeing" in this regard requires all of my senses, including empathy and intuition. Teaching as a way of seeing also requires me to see my discipline from many perspectives as well. It requires me to challenge the assumptions of how I organize knowledge and how I think about the world. It requires that I see myself as a learner.

Teaching is also about community. A community of learners, an atmosphere of high expectations for learning, students committed to learning by doing - these are all aspects of effective teaching and learning. Effective teaching involves community outside of the classroom as well. It involves understanding the students' lives in the context of the broader community; in the context of their responsibilities to family, work and friends. Effective teaching invites students to expand their own circle of community to join the community of scholars, and to learn the new discourse of this community without undermining their membership or role in other communities that are important in their lives.

The teaching community is not limited to students. Teachers require a community among themselves on which to base their practice. I have found that this community of teachers is represented at every level of our scholarship: through discussions with colleagues in our own departments, through participation in campus-based Teaching and Learning Centres, through national Societies for Teaching and Learning, and

through partnership with other teachers outside of the university. Collaborative teaching, participatory research, reflective practice, these are the hallmarks of the effective teaching community.

Finally, effective teaching is about learning. I must continually meet the challenge of learning about my own discipline to keep current with the content and issues in my field outside of my immediate research interests. I need to learn how to harness new technologies to enhance the effectiveness of my learning activities and to provide students with alternative access to education. I struggle to learn students' names and the issues that affect their lives. I strive to learn alternative teaching methods. And, perhaps most important of all, through all of this in the vocation of teaching, I learn the responsibilities of the intellectual life in society and about my role as teacher.