Exploring The Relationship Between Espoused Philosophies Of Teaching and Practice

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Roisin Donnelly & Marian Fitzmaurice

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Context
‘The dominant paradigm in academic development seemed to me,…..too often to emphasise the practice and perfection only of methods and techniques’
(Walker, 2001 p.5)

‘My reservations about what I see as the most common form of staff developments come from their poor fit with my analysis of professional learning’.
(Knight, 2002 p.217)

- PG Certificate in Third Level Learning and Teaching
- 2000-04, 61 graduates
- Teaching Portfolios
- Why focus on Teaching Philosophies?
- Process of Developing a Philosophy Statement

How to work with academic staff?
The form of intervention that is best suited to encouraging changes in conceptions of teaching

The context which will encourage lecturers to use deep approaches to learning and teaching
(Ramsden, 1992)

Academic Development Role
Land (2001) identifies 12 orientations to the practice of academic development including:
- managerial
- entrepreneurial
- romantic
- vigilant opportunist
- reflective practitioner

Professional Knowledge:
- Content knowledge
- General pedagogical knowledge
- Curriculum knowledge
- Pedagogical content knowledge
- Knowledge of learners and their characteristics
- Knowledge of educational contexts
- Knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values and their philosophical and historical grounds
(Shulman, 1987. p.8)

Knight (2002, p.24) suggests that there is an additional type of knowledge to be added:
- Knowledge of self, including awareness of our own self theories, our preferred identities, the values we tend to act out, and our emotional drives and needs.
Teaching Philosophy Statements:
- Learn from a variety of different sources
- Importance of developing and interrogating personal knowledge about teaching
- Individual process
- Value in sharing knowledge and opening up thinking to peer comment

Research Question
Is the development and writing of a philosophy of teaching statement an intervention that encourages change in conceptions of teaching?

What is the role of subject disciplines in forming personal philosophy statements?

Research Study
- Interpretative
- Qualitative: 2 phases
- Retrospective
- Phase 1: Open-ended Questionnaire
- Phase 2: Microteaching Video Analysis

1. Prior to starting this course, did you ever have the opportunity to explore your teaching philosophy?
2. How did you begin writing your philosophy statement: what areas did you concentrate on first?
3. What were the core ideas that you explored when writing your teaching philosophy statement?
4. Did you discuss your philosophy statements with colleagues in your department?
   If, Yes, in what ways did this help?
5. How better could we have facilitated you during the process of writing of your teaching philosophy statements?
6. Following the composition of your teaching philosophy statement, what have been the benefits on how you now approach your teaching practice?

Findings
41 respondents from 4 disciplines
3 had explored their personal philosophies previously through professional practice:
   Early childhood education
   Adult educator
   Nursing
38 had never had the opportunity prior to this course, but some had implicitly been considering it

How to begin formation of a personal philosophy statement:

| Social Science | Aims of HE; Personal core L&T values; Putting values into practice
|               | Begin with a central idea: ‘learning as a journey’ then addressed a range of issues including facilitating learning, encouraging development of critical thinking and application of theory to practice |
### Considerations of what students are going to achieve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Considerations of what students are going to achieve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Science  | Metaphor  
Consideration of how the teacher felt as a learner  
Class readings and discussions |
| Apprenticeship | Researched the area to understand, identify and prioritise  
How teacher was taught/Reflection on past learning  
How to prepare students for the workplace |

### Core ideas explored when writing statement

| Social Science | My tutoring role  
The relationship between learning, teaching and research |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Business       | Wanted an individualistic statement  
Exploring different ways students learn |
| Science        | Race’s adaptation of Kolb’s Cycle applied to lesson plans  
Learners will encounter a period of disequilibrium before they understand something and making allowances for that |
| Apprenticeship | Equality, integrity, honesty, quality  
Teaching strategies, curriculum design, student motivation, delivery methods  
Primarily preparing students for the workplace  
Respect for students, understanding ‘engagement’ of students in topics; I wanted to be able to say ‘this is how I see the world’ |

### Discussion of philosophy statements with colleagues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Science</th>
<th>Yes, helps to verbalise my beliefs during course committee meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Only with fellow course participants, not colleagues in depts; assumed they weren’t on the same wavelength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>No but great to get other ideas especially from the more experienced staff on the course who discussed methods that have provided a better learner center environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>Not initially even with fellow course participants; felt it was a very personal thing and was sensitive to criticism. The openness on the course helped develop a deeper understanding of points of view and understanding of own philosophies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How could facilitation have been improved?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Science</th>
<th>It is difficult if you have not studied philosophy in the past. Small group work or brainstorming ideas of what is involved. Also examples of other’s philosophy statements Start writing from the beginning of the course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>If we had been asked to present very briefly on the teaching metaphor we had developed – this would provide feedback early on and I’d have heard how others were approaching writing their statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>More verbal interaction with others in the group to explore what I had written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>It would help by asking if the existence of a philosophy statement would affect one’s lecturing practice or if the journey to defining a statement was the real benefit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Any benefits on how you now approach your teaching practice?**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Social Science</th>
<th>Have something to measure my practice against Useful tool for reflecting on my approach to learning and teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Increased focus even more on the learner Brings me back to basic principles of teaching Made me much more interested in my</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
own job
Students also notice the difference in my style
I would have involved my students directly in the process of writing it

Science
I am confident about my teaching/discussing with colleagues because I have thought about it and now know why I take the approach that I do
Equipped to reflect on changes/new situations

Any benefits on how you now approach your teaching practice?

Apprenticeship
Now teach with more care and compassion for students’ learning needs
I now know why I do this job
More comfortable in the classroom
Students require customized learning and from peers
Set goals for improvement; approach classes in a more structured and thoughtful manner.
Through reflection I am learning from my experiences
I use a greater range of teaching methods and constantly evaluate outcomes

Implications for Learning and Teaching
- Increased confidence
- Improved range and use of teaching strategies
- Impact of reflection
- More student centred approach
- Better equipped to deal with change