

My Teaching-Learning Philosophy

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Key terms that embody my teaching-learning philosophy are: experience, self-awareness, mindfulness, reflection, metaphors, creative-self expression, relationship, mutuality, humanness, person-centred, respect, caring, inclusive, safe, holistic, healing, and growth.

The Latin adage, *Omnia Mea Mecum Porte*, loosely translated to mean, *Everything I am, I carry with me*, encapsulates the premise with which I encounter life, and more specifically my teaching-learning relationships. My teaching-learning philosophy is grounded in Dewey's (1963) assertion that "every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences" (p. 35). My belief that all life events contribute to who we are in the process of becoming, as we live storied lives within the personal-social contexts over time and space (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), further underpins my view of teaching and learning. Additionally, I agree with Dewey's declaration (1963) that "without some reconstruction, some remaking" of our life experiences there is no intellectual evolution (p. 64). Thus, my assumption is that people's relationship with self and with others can be augmented by engaging in focused experiential reflection for the purposes of recognizing and accessing the unique humanness that is within each of us as we co-construct knowledge.

Exploration and reconstruction of my own life experiences through regular creative reflective practices increases my awareness of the stories that inform my way of being, knowing and doing my teaching-learning praxis. By honouring that aspect of myself, I provide the necessary time and space for my students to do the same. To that end I created an experiential teaching-learning tool I call *Narrative Reflective Process* (NRP) (Schwind, 2008, 2009, 2016). NRP is informed by Narrative Inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), a qualitative research approach through which I explore and study experience in education and practice. More specifically, NRP is a creative self-expression tool that incorporates storytelling, metaphors, drawing, writing, and reflective dialogue. In order to facilitate access to the creative part of ourselves, I begin NRP activity by engaging students in a mindful breathing activity (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In my teaching-learning practice I incorporate NRP and mindfulness in the following ways:

- I guide my year four nursing practice learners through NRP, helping them to mindfully increase self-awareness, and so to reflect on and critically examine their emerging personal knowing (Chinn & Kramer, 2018), thereby enhancing the quality of their personal and professional interactions. The process usually begins with mindful breathing, life stories, life metaphor, drawings, and sharing of 'safe' stories in small groups, all the while engaging in creative and reflective writing throughout the process. This part of the reflective process, when curricular time allows, spans the fall semester. During the subsequent winter semester, I invite the same year four learners to follow a similar process, only with the focus on

their professional practice and their role as care-givers within professional and therapeutic relationships. At the end of the second semester the learners review their personal and professional stories, metaphors and writing, seeking emerging narrative patterns, while accessing scholarly literature to support their exploration. The feedback from the students regarding the value of this process has been affirming.

- With my graduate learners I use aspects of NRP to help them make more meaningful connections within and across the complexities of qualitative research methods, development of nursing knowledge, as well as advanced therapeutic communication from an inter-professional (IP) perspective. More specifically, I use metaphors and weekly in-class Reflective Writing. I also invite learners to work in self-selected Teaching-Learning Groups, which are based on shared course-specific interests, thus upholding adult learning principles of self-direction and collaboration. Students from various schools in FCS, and from Biomedical Engineering, subscribe to my IP course, further supporting inclusivity.
- I begin each of my classes, undergraduate and graduate, with a brief mindful breathing activity and end with a lovingkindness meditation [Miller, Irwin & Nigh, 2014; Salzberg, 1995]. These activities, as any other creative self-expression, are always an invitation, respecting the inner wisdom of each individual to make an informed choice. In my course syllabi stands the notation of professional support access, should such be needed as a result of any of the creative activities.
- To further support student engagement in class, I use a “Mandala Colouring Activity”. Students engage in colouring mandalas at will. Throughout and at end of semester, students speak to their decreased anxiety, increased engagement with the course, and less need to access their personal technology during class-time.

Through these creative self-expressive modes my learners and I co-construct our professional ways of being, as we expand our consciousness (Newman, 2008), evolving as persons and professionals over time and in a safe environment, “finding greater meaning in life [and] reaching new heights of connectedness with other people” (p. 6). In other words, these experiential teaching-learning tools augment meaningful learning within professional relationships, thus opening possibilities for both the teacher and the learner to evolve toward wholeness.

In order to provide this holistic way of teaching-learning (Miller, 1990) I believe that as teachers we need to develop the self-awareness and openness for ourselves, before we can guide our students to do the same. To that end I endeavour to work with my colleagues, as they too explore their teaching-roles to include guiding their own students to greater depths of self-understanding (Schwind et al, 2012). As I role model this self-knowing and self-exploration with my colleagues and students, my hope is that they will do the same for those in their care, thus creating person-centred (McCormack, 2006) contexts where it is safe to heal, learn, and grow.

Furthermore, I believe that a teaching-learning relationship is one of mutual respect between the teacher and the learner, where the “I-thou” (Buber, 1970/1996) philosophy is lived, and the whole person, mind-body-soul, is honoured for both. This kind of interconnectedness allows care and respect to flourish beyond the teaching-

learning relationship to impact future ways of being for the teacher, the learner and those we each encounter in our personal and professional lives.

Finally, I see teaching-learning as a dynamic and enriching relationship between two human beings whose storied lives entwine with the program curriculum to give it life and meaning, both on personal and social levels. Through the encounter, not only do the teacher and the learner co-create learning and growth, but the curriculum, as a result, evolves and changes reflexively, generating potential futures for new generations. In other words, as a narrative inquirer, I live the integration of all aspects of my professional life, where my teaching-learning practices are mutually informed by my scholarship of discovery, and service. My teaching-learning experiences generate my inquiry questions, and in turn the newly created knowledge nourishes my educational situations where person-centred relationships are mutually transformative, thus impacting our collective evolutionary path of education, research and practice.

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