



**Philosophy of Teaching Statement**  
**M. Leigh Funk, Ph.D.**  
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On a cool afternoon in April of 2005, I emerged from the Harvard Square subway tunnel to attend a graduate education class with Dr. David Rose, a scholar I had studied under earlier that week. As I stood on the campus of Harvard University surrounded by historic traditions of learning, a wave of pride washed over me and I thought to myself, this I believe. At that moment, I realized I had found my “flow” in the scholarship of learning. Like the distinguished brick buildings along Harvard Square, my philosophy of teaching is much like the construction of a great building. Biology and neuroscience comprise the foundation while the bricks represent the learning theory. The bricks are held together by the mortar of instructional strategies following a learning blueprint created by the instructional designer. Resulting from how I conceptualize learning and teaching, the goals I have for students, and how I view my role in the classroom. The following four beliefs summarize my philosophy of teaching:

1. Learning is the result of biological and environmental processes working together to construct new meaning.
2. Teaching is more than a collaborative endeavor; it is a partnership between learner and teacher where both are responsible for the learning.
3. In the twenty-first century, it is critical that students learn to think critically, reflect, and act upon their learning.
4. Combining brain research and new technologies can significantly affect teaching and learning resulting in quality education for the digital age.

*Conceptualization of Learning*

As I mature as a professional educator, I become increasingly fascinated with the science of learning. Surpassing all other variables present in an educational environment, the brain is the most powerful learning tool a student possesses (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Twenty-first century technologies are beginning to unlock the mystery of how the brain learns, thus offering the potential to foster classroom environments that leverage the biological processes of the brain that result in learning.

“Ultimately, how we teach depends on how we believe the mind works and how we understand behavior” (Zull, 2002, p. 7). Based on my own experiences, I have long thought that learning occurs primarily through the active construction of new meanings. Recent advances in neurobiology provide a solid biological foundation upon

which to build my constructivist learning beliefs. From a biological aspect, the parts of the brain used for learning are the sensory, reflective, abstracting, and acting regions. We use these regions as building blocks to construct new meaning when we experience, reflect, hypothesize, and act.

This conceptualization of learning was further solidified in 2012 as I was studying with another Harvard professor Dr. Todd Rose (no relation to David Rose). During the weeklong intensive institute on Mind, Brain, and Education, Dr. Rose presented his myth of the average. This talk was formally presented as a TED talk 2013. As a result, I left his class that day and immediately began to adjust my thinking, my instructional design, and my teaching to ban the average and design instruction to the edges. So many things in education are designed based on the average such as performance expectations, pacing guides, textbooks, etc. Nevertheless, I believe that in order to truly differentiate instruction, we must design adjustable seats for learning that can accommodate even slight modifications within the learning environment to fit each individual learner. This concept changed how I thought about differentiation and the strategies I use in my courses to model differentiation.

The implications of this conceptualization of learning are that I see the learning strengths and weaknesses of each student on a continuum based on their unique biological and experiential processes. Understanding learner differences offers the opportunity to utilize instructional strategies that are the equivalent to adjustable seats for learning and that can hopefully capitalize on unique strengths and biological functions of the unique brains within my courses.

### *Conceptualization of Teaching*

As a teacher, I believe I have two primary responsibilities to students: to construct an environment that is conducive to their individual learning needs, and to build a collaborative relationship with students in order to facilitate, advise and encourage their learning efforts. To construct an environment conducive to the needs of twenty-first century learners, I utilize instructional strategies like differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and problem-based learning to promote critical thinking, reflection, and problem solving.

My commitment to using technology to support learning stems from a deep seeded belief that relatively new technologies like the World Wide Web and multimedia applications hold great potential to both broaden access to educational information and deepen learning by supporting activities like analysis, synthesis, problem solving and decision making (Bates, 2000). Universal Design for Learning is a framework that enables me to incorporate

different instructional approaches, leverage current brain research and integrate technology to advance learning (Rose, 2000).

### *Goals for Students*

In the twenty-first century, we are no longer able to teach students everything they need to know in order to succeed. Therefore, it is imperative that students learn to think critically, locate resources and information, and evaluate information to make decisions. In addition to thinking, it is my hope that students will learn to respect and value learning. In today's society, lifelong learning is not a personal characteristic, but rather a necessary survival skill. Ultimately, I hope students will "honor, connect, and understand their learning" (Leichter-Dominck, 2003). In doing so, students will have the critical skills to think, reflect, hypothesize, and actively test information as they complete the biological and environmental process of learning. I hold these goals for students irrespective of where they reside in the academic process. Although I tailor the goals, objectives, and learning outcomes appropriately for undergraduate and graduate level students, I hold the same underlying expectations for all. This is not to say that I have the same standards for all students, rather, that I strive to differentiate the learning strategies on an individual basis for all students.

### *Implementation of Philosophy*

Upon further reflection, as I write this philosophy, I have realized that my beliefs about learning are complimented by my teaching strategies, and that my expectations for students each model my constructivist beliefs. My philosophy of teaching is demonstrated daily by the relationships I build with students, the integration of learning technologies, the differentiated instructional strategies, the focus on critical thinking and reflection, as well as the authentic assessment practices utilized. Prior to the first day of class, I send an email to students welcoming them to the class and introducing myself. This breaks the ice and provides a shared experience through communication in which to build a respectful, inviting, and engaging learning environment. My philosophy is further demonstrated by efforts to engage students in the learning process through discussions, hands-on activities, and inquiry probing strategies. Evidence of this style is found in a recent comment from a recent graduate student who was

reflecting on a provocative or at least thought provoking article I assigned as a warm-up for the class,

Wow, what a question! As I started to read, I just wanted to click through and scan the article to see how many pages I have to read. I said to myself, do I have to read every word or can I just scan throughout and get the full meaning. Well, I read the entire article and was speechless.

As my teaching practice advances, I strive to maintain an authentic approach in all areas of academia so that my teaching philosophy is an authentic representation of my practice, my practice is grounded in research, and my service activities provide opportunities for me to serve the greater community. Ultimately, I hope that the students I work with will have a better understanding of how to think critically, search out the information they need to solve problems, and utilize technology to support their learning as well as the students they teach.

#### References

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