

## DALLIN GEORGE YOUNG

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### Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I believe that education has the power to inspire and to be profoundly transformative. Teaching is a necessary part of the educational equation as experiences without direction are too open to deliver on that transformational and inspirational promise. I originally considered entering the ranks of the faculty partly because I was told then that I was “good at teaching.” At the time, I believed that compliment but really had no idea what it meant. Now that I have had more experience in formal teaching roles, I am not sure if I believe that I am “good at teaching” as much as I did then, likely because I am starting to develop a clearer picture of what it means and what it takes to be *good* as a teacher. Moreover, in retrospect, I fear that I set my bar for excellence way too low at that point. What people likely meant when they said that I was good at it meant that I had the potential to be better at it, which has become my ongoing objective.

Now, at this stage in my development, I am starting to develop a clearer picture. I have started to contemplate the ways in which I can create learning opportunities that can push students to be better than they were when they began their engagement with me. I have learned that teaching and learning is a mutually constituted experience in which both aptitude and a willingness to admit ignorance are on display. As a result, I see my role as something of a player/manager in which I must simultaneously direct the team while being a part of it. To say that I have perfected this or any approach would be the height of hubris and would call into question the meaningfulness of the rest of my career (in other words, the best-case scenario would be that I plateaued from this point forward and more likely than that, I would only get worse). However, I would like to highlight three interrelated concepts that are currently guiding my thoughts and actions around the ways in which I organize my courses, the activities I ask students to engage with in the classroom, and what I want students to learn and get out of their educational experiences.

### **Becoming**

If the aim of education is to transform and inspire, much like any good construction project, a blueprint is needed. The blueprint for learning that is currently guiding my thinking about teaching and learning is outlined in the book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* by Lave and Wenger. They posit that learning is a social event that happens as individuals participate in meaningful and authentic ways in a community of practice, starting at the periphery. In the higher education context, this requires focused and deliberate student-faculty connection. As I have taught graduate courses geared primarily toward master’s students over the past few semesters, I have thought about how I could create a learning environment in which the tools, knowledge, and culture of the classroom as an activity system could become a community of practice that is an extension of the professional world in which they will find themselves. As a result, I routinely engage them in large and small group conversations asking them to reason through authentic situations such as the difficult tensions faced in current conversations in higher education or to consider how to apply the concepts to issues that matter to them, thus creating something of a rehearsal space for future practice. As students do this, an important part of my teaching becomes the monitoring of student identities. In other words,

starting to ask myself, “Are the students starting to see themselves as more central to the community? Are they becoming fuller participants in our community of practice?” I have used reflective journaling and the monitoring of student feedback to assess their progress as well as mine. The benefit I have seen taking this kind of perspective is that when students take on these new identities, they engage in a process of becoming. When I have had success with this, students have become something more than when they first started, which I hope extends into other areas of their lives. It is worth saying here that this perspective about participation, identity, and becoming also makes me keenly aware of the uniqueness of the students in my courses and the valuable contributions each of them makes.

### **Elements of High-Impact Practice**

If *Legitimate Peripheral Participation* is the blueprint, I would consider the eight *Elements of High-Impact Practice* the tools. As a follow-up to the widely popular “High Impact Practices,” Kuh outlined the eight conditions for which there is at least some evidence that lead to the demonstrated impact. These include (a) high expectations, (b) meaningful interaction around substantive matters, (c) quality feedback, (d) opportunities to reflect, (e) exposure to diverse and new perspectives, (f) investment of time and effort, (g) real-world application, and (h) public demonstration of competence. As I have sat down to consider the pedagogical environment in my classroom, I have used these as a touchstone at both the syllabus design level as well as the individual class level. For instance, I have recently implemented a “class discussant” system that draws on the elements of high expectation, investment of time and effort, and public demonstration of competence. Naturally, there are support structures in place, such as guidelines, rubrics, credit toward final grade, and appropriate advance notice, to make this kind of challenge manageable and productive.

### **Aesthetic Instructional Design**

Finally, extending the construction metaphor, with a blueprint and tools, we now need something to organize our work – a construction plan. I have recently been drawing on a perspective described by Parrish, an instructional designer, that describes an *aesthetic* approach to instructional design. He describes creating and designing educational experiences like a three-act play, with elements of introduction, development, and culmination. This has helped me consider how to structure the course over the length of the semester as well as each individual class session. As I am making my way through the introductory concepts at the beginning of the semester, I am intentionally signaling to the class that we are doing foundational work that will serve us well when we get to the next stage. From there, I am clear about making the distinction of when we are transitioning to the culmination. This helps students understand where they are in the journey of their learning and helps them with the meaning-making across each class period. Similarly, I try to structure each class with a beginning, middle, and end – culminating in some kind of abstract or applied integration to provide opportunities for reflection. Of course, things do not always go to plan, so I find myself creating a back-up plan as well as being willing to follow the class session where it seems to want to go.

In conclusion, I am grateful to have found these perspectives to help me construct the learning environment as I have been fortunate to teach. Nevertheless, much like all things in life that result in transformation, I can see my current points of view are just one stage in a larger process. I look forward to continuing to become better than just “good at teaching.”