Reflect, Express, Compare: Reimagine Your Teacher Identity with
the TeachPhil U Model and Strengths-Based Reflective Practice

The TeachPhil U Model: Conceptual Overview and Theoretical Background

The TeachPhil U Model is a new flexible model intended to make the task of developing a statement of teaching philosophy more accessible by clarifying the relationships between different elements of a teaching statement and enabling everyone who teaches or facilitates learning to choose their own journey through the process of thinking and writing about the beliefs, goals, styles, and practices that characterize their personal interactions with learners.

Our U Model has been informed by the abundant literature on crafting teaching philosophies but also uses concepts and theories from organization development, strategic management, and applied psychology to provide a more flexible inclusive framework that moves beyond the top-down theory-to-practice sequence of steps generally suggested and encourages people to take alternative routes through the model that reflect the strengths of their teacher identity, including bottom-up and middle-up-down (or middle-out) approaches.

This handout provides a brief overview of the concepts and theories that form the background to the reflections, activities, and discussions that make up the TeachPhil U Model Workshop. We start with sample definitions and descriptions of a teaching philosophy statement, we look next at professional identities in higher education, and then introduce the strengths-based approach to reflective practice, the strategic planning U model and middle-up-down strategy.

Teaching Philosophy Statements

Sample definitions

"A teaching philosophy statement is a concise, compelling illustration of you as an instructor, a useful exercise in reflexive examination of your teaching, and a necessary component of many academic job applications."

(University of Pittsburgh, University Center for Teaching and Learning, 2019)

"A Teaching Statement is a purposeful and reflective essay about the author's teaching beliefs and practices. It is an individual narrative that includes not only one's beliefs about the teaching and learning process, but also concrete examples of the ways in which he or she enacts these beliefs in the classroom. At its best, a Teaching Statement gives a clear and unique portrait of the author as a teacher, avoiding generic or empty philosophical statements about teaching."

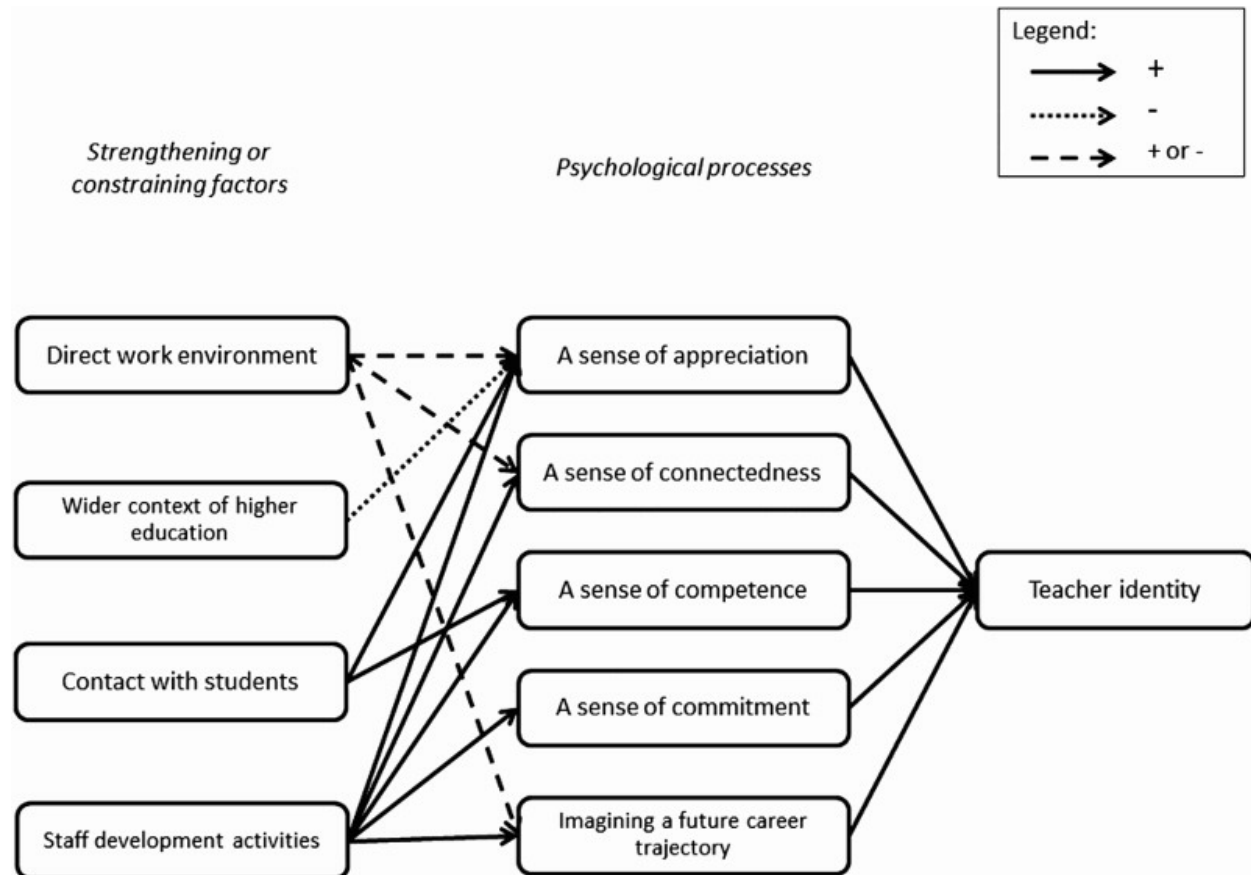(Vanderbilt University, Center for Teaching, n.d.)

Teacher Identity Formation

Teacher identity is increasingly recognized as an essential part of professional development for all who teach and support learning in higher education. For example, "Professional identity, values and development" forms one of five domains (along with The Self, Professional Communication and Dialogue, Professional Knowledge and Skills, and Personal and Professional Digital Capacity) of the Professional Development Framework launched in 2016 by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Ireland.

Identity can be defined from both sociological and psychological perspectives. Kreber (2010, p. 172) suggests teacher identities are

   "shaped by a dynamic interaction between *personal theories of teaching* and *perceptions of self* (for example, perceived self-concept and self-efficacy), both influenced by *social* and *occupational* context".

A systematic review of the literature on teacher identity in a university setting also highlights the importance of *contextual factors* in supporting or constraining the development of identity through five *psychological processes*, which are all associated with membership of a professional community of university teachers (van Lankveld et al., 2017, p. 332). The processes and their relationship to the factors are displayed in the figure below.

Identity development of university teachers (van Lankveld et al., 2017, p. 332)

The notion of professional/teacher identity in higher education is complicated by people having multiple roles and identities. Academics are typically both teachers and researchers, and members of departmental/disciplinary communities at local, national, and international levels.

Professional roles and identities have also become pluralist and complex, giving rise to the concepts of "blended" and "third space" professionals operating at the intersections of academic and professional work; teaching librarians arguably exemplify such hybrid roles.

Celia Whitchurch (2008, p. 384; 2015) investigated evolving academic and professional roles in UK, US, and Australian universities and identified four categories of **third space professionals**:

- *Bounded professionals* work within clear structural boundaries (e.g., function, job description);
- *Cross-boundary professionals* actively use boundaries for strategic advantage and institutional capacity building;
- *Unbounded professionals* disregard boundaries to focus on broadly-based projects and institutional development;
- *Blended professionals* are dedicated appointments spanning professional and academic domains.

Teacher identity has been flagged as an issue for attention in the library community to advance the development and success of teaching librarians:

"Renewing one's commitment to one's teacher identity (or embracing a new one) can be critical to ongoing growth as a professional" (Walter, 2008, p. 55).

"Notions of identity – the way in which your work as and sense of being a librarian shapes how you think about and experience a new teaching role – were interwoven with the thinking and acts of a teacher" (Austin & Bhandol, 2013, p. 22).

Research has repeatedly shown the teaching role of librarians is not universally accepted. Wheeler and McKinney (2015, p. 118) found significant variation in the way academic librarians teaching information literacy positioned themselves as educators, describing four distinct conceptions of their role, Which are displayed in the table below.

The four categories of description (Wheeler & McKinney, 2015, p. 118)

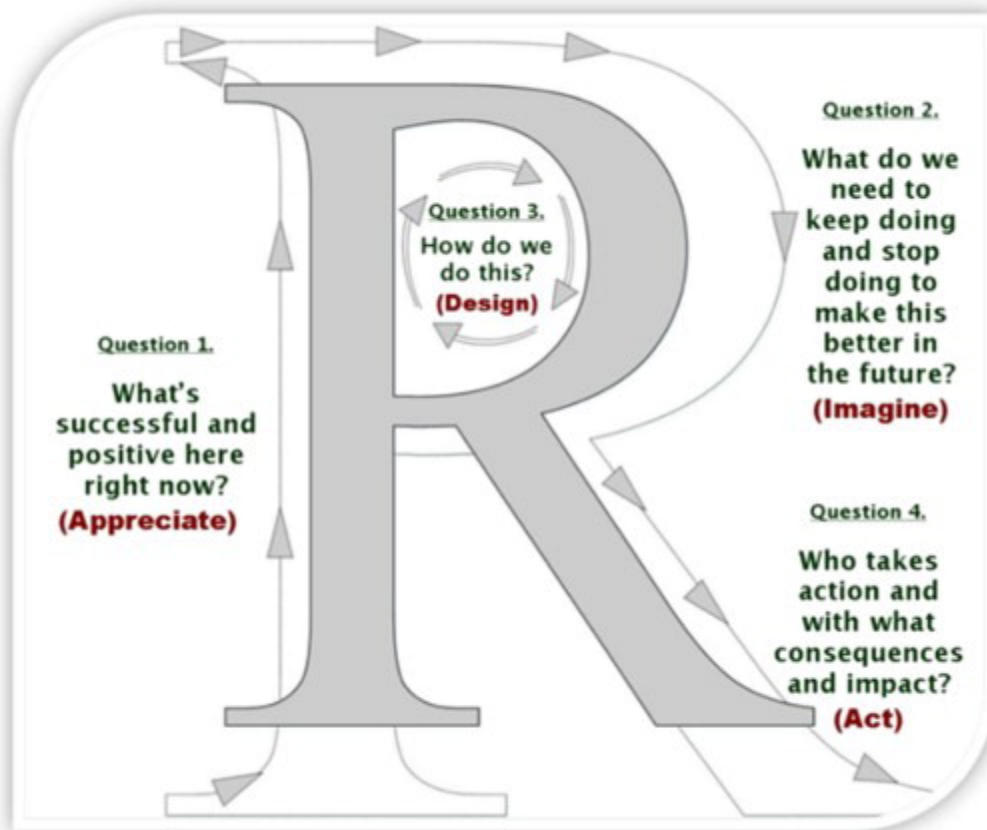|	I teach	I do not teach
I am a teacher	**Teacher-librarian** I am a teacher AND I do the same teaching as other teachers	**Learning support** I am a teacher BUT my teaching is not the same as other teachers'
I am not a teacher	**Librarian who teaches** I am not a teacher BUT I do some teaching	**Trainer** I am not a teacher AND I don't teach

Strengths-Based Reflective Practice (SBRP)

"a new kind of reflective practice – one that explicitly emphasizes reflecting on strengths so as to identify them, play to them and develop new ones" (Ghaye, 2011, p. 66).

The strengths-based approach to reflective practice was developed by Tony Ghaye (founding editor of the journal *Reflective Practice*) drawing on concepts from applied positive psychology. Related terms/concepts include *participatory* and *appreciative* action and reflection (PAAR), *positive* reflection, and *strengths-first* reflective practice.

Ghaye et al. (2008) identify four strategic turns or shifts required by the new approach:

- from deficit-based discourses (solving problems) to strengths-based discourses (understanding successes)
- from self-learning (individualism) towards collective learning (interconnectedness);
- from one perspective or way of knowing to acceptance of a more pluralistic view;
- from reflective cycles and spirals towards a **reflective learning framework**, comprising four mutually supportive processes:
  - ➢ Developing an appreciative gaze (1)
  - ➢ Reframing lived experience (2)
  - ➢ Building practical wisdom (3)
  - ➢ Achieving and moving forward (4)

A strengths-based reflective framework (Ghaye, 2011, p. 17; Dixon et al., 2016, p. 151)

The wording has evolved through successive iterations of the framework, but the four processes are the same: Appreciate, Imagine, Design, and Act.

The SBRP emphasis on appreciating strengths, reframing experience, sharing insights, and moving forward makes it well suited to supporting the task of articulating a teaching philosophy and reimagining your teacher identity, particularly in the context of ACRL (2017) reframing its standards for proficiencies for instruction librarians as roles and strengths of teaching librarians.

> The use of particular reflective practices which are fuelled by positivity and the use of strengths (both performance and character) can reveal new insights and understandings about who we are, what we do and why" (Dixon et al., 2016, p. 154).

Strategic Planning U Model

The U model was developed by organization development consultant Ian Cunningham to explain the nature and relationships of key elements in strategic planning and management, and applied to organizational learning in his books on the topic (e.g., Cunningham, 1999).
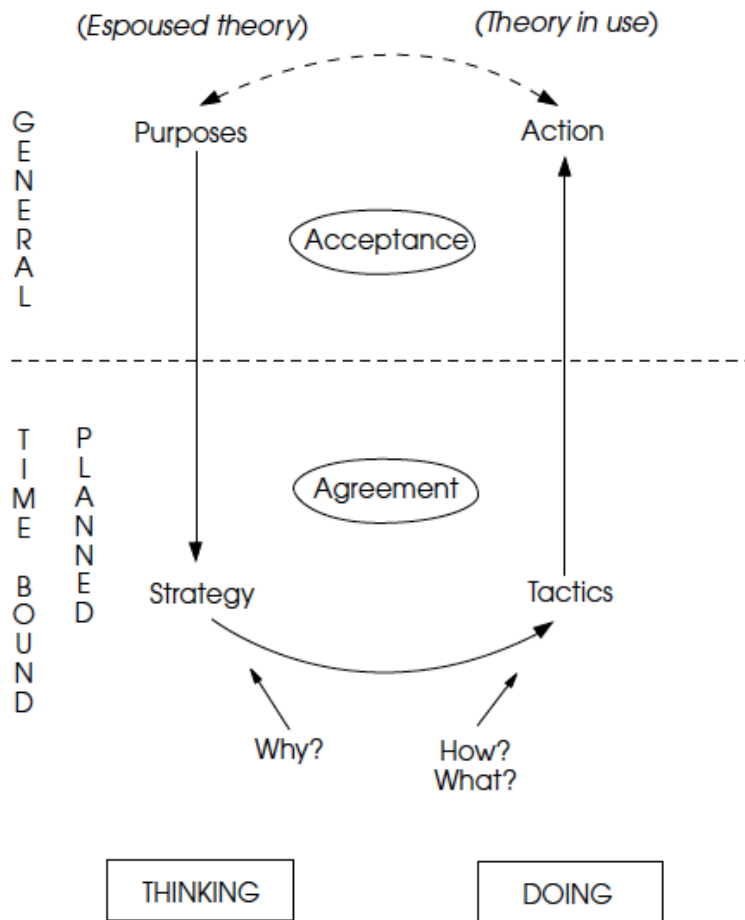
Others have conceptualized the strategy process as non-linear and recursive, and have also indicated progression from abstract to concrete and from thinking to doing. The U model is unique in explicitly differentiating time-bound/fixed-term elements of strategy from continuing/open-ended elements, and linking these characteristics to ease of change: Cunningham (1999) argues that fundamental purposes and behavior patterns may be more embedded and therefore more difficult to change than strategy and tactics.

The arrows on the model (shown on the next page) depict an anticlockwise flow from abstract to concrete elements, and indicate that you should ask "how?" or "what?" questions to move from one element to the next in the direction of flow in a coherent way (e.g., from purpose to strategy).

> You can also check whether your actions and tactics are congruent with your strategy and purpose by going clockwise and asking "why?" Here Cunningham draws on work by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (Argyris, 1991; Argyris & Schön, 1974), presenting the left-hand *thinking* side of the model as "Espoused theory" and the right-hand *doing* side as "Theory in use".

Argyris (1991, p. 103) explains the origin of these concepts in his observation that people often claim their actions are guided by particular principles, but how they actually behave suggests they are working to different precepts:

> "people consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use, between the way they think they are acting and the way they really act".

U model (Cunningham, 1999, p. 146)

Middle-Up-Down Management

The concept of middle-up-down strategic management is generally attributed to Japanese Harvard-based scholars Ikujirō Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, who evolved the idea to resolve perceived contradictions in organizations between the abstract vision/overall theory of top management and the concrete reality of the day-to-day practices of frontline workers (Nonaka, 1988; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Takeuchi, 2013).

Middle-up-down management advocates a more central role for middle managers in closing the gap between vision and reality by synthesizing and integrating views from above and below in both strategy formulation and strategy execution.

This model (also known as middle-out strategy) adds to the top-down and bottom-up approaches by suggesting the pragmatic option of beginning in the middle of the hierarchy.

References

ACRL (2017). ACRL Standards and Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators Revision Task Force. Roles and strengths of teaching librarians: Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, April 2017. *College & Research Libraries News, 78*(7), 364-370. doi:10.5860/crln.78.7.364. https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/16698

Argyris, C. (1991). Teaching smart people how to learn. *Harvard Business Review, 69*(3), 99-109.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Austin, T., & Bhandol, J. (2013). The academic librarian: Buying into, playing out, and resisting the teacher role in higher education. *New Review of Academic Librarianship, 19*(1), 15-35. doi:10.1080/13614533.2012.740438.

Cunningham, I. (1999). *The wisdom of strategic learning: The self managed learning solution* (2nd ed.). Abingdon, UK; Brookfield, VT: Gower.

Dixon, M., Lee, S., & Ghaye, T. (2015). Strengths-based reflective practices for the management of change: Applications from sport and positive psychology. *Journal of Change Management, 16*(2), 1-16. doi:10.1080/14697017.2015.1125384.

Ghaye, T. (2011). *Teaching and learning through reflective practice: A practical guide for positive action* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Ghaye, T., Melander-Wikman, A., Kisare, M., Chambers, P., Bergmark, U., Kostenius, C., & Lillyman, S. (2008). Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) – Democratizing reflective practices. *Reflective Practice, 9*(4), 361-397. doi:10.1080/14623940802475827

Kreber, C. (2010). Academics' teacher identities, authenticity and pedagogy. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(2), 171-194. doi:10.1080/03075070902953048.

National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2016, August). *National professional development framework for all staff who teach in higher education.* Dublin, Ireland: National Forum. Retrieved from https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/resource-hub/professional-development/the-national-professional-development-framework-pdf-for-all-staff-who-teach-in-higher-education/

Nonaka, I. (1988). Toward middle-up-down management: Accelerating information creation. *Sloan Management Review, 29*(3), 9-18.

Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company: How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Takeuchi, H. (2013). Knowledge-based view of strategy. *Universia Business Review,* (40), 68-79. Retrieved from https://dialnet.unirioja.es/ejemplar/345342

Walter, S. (2008). Librarians as teachers: A qualitative inquiry into professional identity. *College & Research Libraries, 69*(1), 51-71. doi:10.5860/crl.69.1.51. Retrieved from https://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/15912/17358

Wheeler, E., & McKinney, P. (2015). Are librarians teachers? Investigating academic librarians' perceptions of their own teaching skills. *Journal of Information Literacy, 9*(2), 111-128. doi:10.11645/9.2.1985.

Whitchurch, C. (2008). Shifting identities and blurring boundaries: The emergence of third space professionals in UK higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly, 62*(4), 377-396. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00387.x.

Whitchurch, C. (2015). The rise of third space professionals: Paradoxes and dilemmas. In U. Teichler & W. K. Cummings (Eds.), *Forming, recruiting and managing the academic profession* (pp. 79-99). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-16080-1_5.

University of Pittsburgh Events Calendar (2019). Developing a teaching philosophy statement. Retrieved from https://calendar.pitt.edu/event/developing_a_teaching_philosophy_statement_5565

van Lankveld, T., Schoonenboom, J., Volman, M., Croiset, G., & Beishuizen, J. (2017). Developing a teacher identity in the university context: A systematic review of the literature. *Higher Education Research & Development, 36(*2), 325-342. doi:10.1080/07294360.2016.1208154. Retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07294360.2016.1208154

Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching Guides (n.d.). Teaching statements. Retrieved from https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-statements/