Teaching Portfolio:

Teaching Philosophy, Lesson Plan, and Learning Reflection

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# **Introduction**

As demonstrated by Beatty et al., one’s teaching philosophy is intrinsically personal (Beatty, Leigh, & Dean, 2009). Ten years ago, I began to contemplate my teaching philosophy on the edge of Africa as I aided in facilitating a small group of women’s learning. It was an experience rich time, including frustration, as I tracked our progress through the lessons, celebrating growth and grieving loss along the way. It was during this time that it became clear to me that regardless of the lesson I am seeking to convey, the time cannot be merely about *covering* the material in order to move on to the next lesson. It was necessary that these lessons be brought to life in their context, integrated into their lives and families in order to bring about transformation. Five years ago, living in a bustling urban center in North Africa I was part of launching a new community health initiative that targeted needs particular to the context and lives of the women in the area. Jane Vella’s invitation for all learners to “celebrate their own power as they contemplate, examine, struggle with and manage” (Vella, 2008, p. 70) learning informed our strategy. Our lessons were simple, yet themselves proved to be the vehicle for transformation for many of the women involved. I learned that when you teach or facilitate a group like this, there is far more happening than the planned content. You are shaping someone’s very capacity to think, reflect, critique, believe, and change. Three years ago, at a regional training conference for coworkers I led the community through a training I call, *Language Reborn* in which we looked more holistically at the process of language learning as it is a critical foundation to our work. I observed that creating spaces for people to reflect and see language learning in a broader context allowed them to engage in new ways while releasing hope, uncovering new motivation, and exposing subconscious limitations both professionally and personally. These experiences and countless others stirred a desire in me to know better and do more for the sake of my roles professionally and my volunteer commitments. This degree program, this class, and this teaching portfolio are all out workings of that desire and equally influenced them.

# **Teaching Philosophy**

The importance and awareness of one’s overall educational philosophy cannot be overstated. It impacts the teacher personally and professionally as well as all her students. When clear, this “comprehensive and consistent set of beliefs about the teaching-learning transaction” (Conti, 2007) aids and empowers both teachers and learners. When muddled it can result in confusion and frustration for all. One of the challenges in bringing clarity is the terminology. I have discovered multiple, overlapping lists of philosophies, theories or orientations that were pioneered and developed by several educators and scholars. The gift in these overlapping frameworks is the awareness that the field of adult education is deep and rich. As learners ourselves we have a plethora of voices to listen to, contributions to reflect upon, and ideally some to make of our own. In the following paragraphs I will explain my personal teaching philosophy as of today.

The purpose of adult education is to unlock the potential of development. Sometimes that potential is in one individual, sometimes in a group, sometimes in an entire society. This unlocking can be the learning of a new skill, behavior, or mindset. Adult education, as people development, exists to equip individuals and communities to process life’s experiences and transform them into useful knowledge and skills that help individuals and societies to flourish. To this end, the experiences one brings into the learning environment individually, socially, and culturally contribute, if not shape the learning itself. At times adult education is used to come alongside learners that are motivated and seeking out growth, at other times adult education is used to make space for those who do not yet know how to begin asking the questions.

A learner brings to the learning environment their whole selves including their needs, interests, and experiences. They are not a blank slate, but a Mary Parker Follett expresses they are a co-creator within the learning environment. (Kolb, Kolb, Passarelli, & Sharma, 2014) (p.219). Though at times learners may be highly motivated and self-directed, others might be more reserved and hesitant for reasons ranging from personal history or temperament to social expectations or perceived cost (of change), in both scenarios the learner arrives respected, as a contributor, and curious. This does not mean the educator is passive, rather the opposite, the educator engages the individuals, with their experiences, with the subject matter, with its meanings and various applications, within the broader realities of both the group and the society (Kolb, Kolb, Passarelli, & Sharma, 2014). The teacher is guiding the experiences and even introducing disjuncture in addition to assisting in the learners’ ability to access the resources to reflect, feel, and act on this new experience to change it into learning as can be seen in Jarvis’ figure of *the transformation of the person through experience* (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Returning to the imagery of adult education as unlocking potential, the role of the educator is to assist the learner to engage, introduce data, help remove barriers and affirm, or advise as needed. The Educator Role Profile offered by Kolb et al. demonstrates the cyclical aspect and necessity of these responsibilities.

In reflecting on my personal philosophy of teaching and how it is situated within the larger framework of approaches to adult education I have found it most helpful situate much of my approach within the Progressive Adult Education Philosophy as I resonate deeply with an experience-based learning from the real-world as articulated by Dewey (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Lindeman’s perspective that experience is “the adult learner’s living textbook” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) serves to emphasize the incredible resource both as we seek to do experiential learning as well as we seek to learn from experience. Additionally, the concepts of social responsibility, pragmatic knowledge, and needs assessments (Gailbraith, 1990,1991) are often associated with the progressive philosophy and are important to me as well. However, elements like problem-posing and not just problem-solving*,* discovery, equality, and possibility of cultural change not mere transmission are lacking. It is for these reasons that I also incorporate key aspects within the Critical Theory Approach and the Constructivist Orientation to round out my personal teaching philosophy. Through critical theory I gain the strength of Freire’s “process of conscientization” which enables learners to discover the assumptions, oppressive ones, that are holding them back (Lloyd, 1972). This process is echoed by Brookfield in a more traditional classroom experience through his “hunting assumptions exercise” (Brookfield, 2013). The constructivist orientation gives access both to the cognitive development theory by Piaget of transformational learning, and the social dimensions introduced by Vygotsky (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). This creates the contextual, mental, personal, and motivationally bound learning experience that is rich within this orientation. Furthermore, while it is important to know categorically which philosophy you identify with in preference or conviction, it is also equally important to understand that there are circumstances where a different approach could be warranted. There will be circumstances in which the questions of “what constitutes knowledge, the nature of the learner, the purpose of the curriculum, and the role of the teacher” (Conti, 2007) will change in small or large ways depending on a variety of factors including collective versus individual cultures, quantitative versus qualitative goals, extraneous versus material, psychology, biology, sociology, and even theology to name a few (Roumell, 2020). As the educator it is important to enter a learning arrangement knowing how and why you will decide what aspects of your learning philosophy to work out of because it will be necessary to communicate and maintain alignment with your standard through the planning, executing, and evaluating aspects of the arrangement.

Since adult education is about unlocking potential in learners and through learning, it is critical for the educator to know that the keys are not all in her hand. This humility requires the teacher to keep learning herself and lean on a variety of methods as well as the learners themselves to engage and participate. Learning from a brain-aware perspective is defined as "the changes that result from continuously elaborating, linking, and reconstructing neural connections" (Taylor & Marienau, 2016, p. 89). Considering this, the expectation reflected in my curriculum and the methodology allows for multiple touch points on the same subject through various means. It means massaging a subject matter, not simply covering the information is foundational. In order to achieve this, I choose to use a variety of methods including case studies and storytelling, group discussion, personal reflection, group reviews and activities, crafted experiences, embodied practices, lectures (participative and interactive), and more. The curriculum seeks to introduce a disjuncture of some sort and the methodology seeks to provide enough scaffolding for the learner to interact with the experience to such a way to turn it into learning in the form of a skill, behavior, or mindset. Evaluations are best when inviting the integration of data with the transformative process of engaging that data. I evaluate based on learners attempt to restore equilibrium after new ideas, events, objects, experiences et cetera that cannot be accommodated into the existing framework provoke a conflict or disturbance that requires an intentionality to build new frames, make new room thus releasing them to encounter the next disturbance (Cohen, 1999). This demonstrates the trajectory of growth in the overall subject matter and person. I look for movement, curiosity, and a heightened sense of responsibility towards the subject matter to assess if learning has occurred.

# **Lesson Plan**

The teaching context for the following lesson plan on “Street Drugs” is within a series of holistic health lessons for groups (size 10-15) of women in Morocco, North Africa. The lessons are conducted in a familiar fashion that seeks to create an unintimidating learning space for these women, all of which have an oral learning preference and most of which have only a basic level of literacy. Economically speaking, this demographic is upper lower-class and from a social perspective, this group carries the weight of family honor, life, and responsibility but with little external power recognized or encouraged from society. I currently oversee Halqa Health Circles which is an informal health education initiative that promotes holistic well-being through local engagement and empowerment in North Africa. I chose this topic for my lesson plan because many past participants have requested a lesson on street drug use. Additionally, I was motivated to do it well, as it was not a theoretical lesson plan, but I could picture the women and families who would benefit from such a lesson.

As detailed below, this lesson plan utilizes several techniques to engage minds and emotions while minimizing anxiety. One role of the opening story is to provide a normalizing “third party” that can be referenced, questioned, and analyzed without personal cost. The assessment involved in this lesson is monitored throughout its duration as learners engage intentionally in the awareness activities and the role play, but the most significant assessment hinges on the final commitment of when each participant will talk with their kids about what they have learned. At the beginning of the following week’s lesson the group will share about how their commitment played out and how conversations were actualized with their kids. As for evaluation and feedback on the lesson itself, the assistant facilitator, will note ideas, information, additions, and questions that the participants ask in order to continually upgrade the lesson to reflect the knowledge and needs of the community. This lesson will be evaluated before it is introduced into the curriculum by trusted members of the community and past participants of the program. The evaluation will focus on the accessibility of the language used in the lesson, the ability to understand the components (visualize and personalize them), and its overall relevance.

*Additional notes: (1) In the opening story, there are four characters introduced, their names in Arabic sound like the names for drug substances and that is why they were chosen. (2) In the Participative Teaching section and Awareness Activity B, I have removed the actual content information for each substance and the brainstorm ideas suggested as these both dramatically lengthen the lesson plan. In my opinion this removal does not alter the methodological components, but I am happy to provide those details if that is desired.*

**Street Drugs**:: Halqa Health Circles:: created 2021:: Angie McCormick

**Materials:**

* Images printed below (for group work), white board or large paper and markers.
* Glue, plastic bag, pill cartridge (for props)
* Printed brochures from: [https://www.omda.ma/index.php/fr/#](https://www.omda.ma/index.php/fr/)

**Time:** 60-90 minutes

**Methods:**

* Storytelling, discussion, participative teaching, awareness activities, role play, reflection

**Objectives/Goals:**

* To understand the presence and danger of street drugs
* To know the accessibility and general effects of the drugs on a person
* To explore both the factors influencing drug use and the power we can use to influence those factors.
* To learn language and tools to be able to talk with their children about drugs.

**Attitude**: We, as moms, are all doing our best to raise our kids well and it is good and courageous to help our kids through this tricky subject.

**Evaluation**: Complete practice conversation during lesson. Commit to a time in the coming week to talk with their kids about what they learned.

**Basic Idea:** Street drugs are present and dangerous. But we are not helpless, we can empower ourselves and our kids through action and conversation.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Method** | **Knowledge** |
| 5 min | 1. Storytelling- Milouda’s son story and questions | General idea of drugs presence, impact and destructive power |
| 10 min | 2. Participative Teaching | Cover common drugs accessibility, look, cost, and effect. |
| * 1. Min | 3. Awareness Activities and Discussion | Explore what increases or decreases the likelihood of drug use and discuss what we can do about those factors. |
| * 1. Min | 4. Role Play | Practice talking to kids about drugs |
| 10 min | 5. Reflection & commitment | Decide what and when we will each do in the coming week because of this lesson |

1. **Storytelling**:: Milouda’s son

Milouda has three children, two daughters and her son Adam. They live in an urban neighborhood in Casablanca. Milouda’s husband left them a year ago. Though Milouda is a little embarrassed to be divorced and moved back into her parents home, she is glad to be away from his drinking problem. The family home houses Milouda and her three kids, her parents and a few of her brothers’, their wives and children. Milouda’s daughters have adjusted well to the new set up, but Milouda can see that Adam misses his dad, even if he was a bad example. For his part, Adam does enjoy the laughter and life in the family home and he loves to play football with his cousins or friends in the neighborhood, particularly Ali, who he has known since he was four years old. At school, he isn’t the best in his class, but he enjoys learning and imagines that one day he might be a train engineer.

Ali has been by Adam’s side through a lot, and this year as Adam has struggled with his dad’s departure Ali offered to introduce him to *Farid* and *Hicham*, since they help him when he is feeling sad or overwhelmed with family problems. Adam has only seen *Farid or Hicham* a couple times, and he has a feeling that he should avoid them. But *they* look popular and fun and Ali said *Farid* and *Hicham* really help him feel better. *Neither* likes football, but they often attract a crowd of kids and they love parties. Adam was really curious how and why. One day as Adam was feeling sad and worn down by Ali’s consistent offer, he said, “yes” to meet with *Farid* and *Hicham* and find out what the crowd is all about. The experience with them felt weird, Adam’s heart raced, he felt a bit nauseous, but he also felt good and happy, and strangely close to everyone around him. Adam didn’t understand much about *Farid or Hicham*, and the different names people called them were confusing too. But Adam felt pulled to spend more time with *them*. No one had ever really told him why he shouldn’t hang out with *Farid and Hicham*, to Adam he was just having a good time with friends. Sometimes when Adam hung out with *them* he felt loaded up with energy, sometimes he felt relaxed, sometimes angry, he’d even get in fights sometimes! It was not long before *Farid and Hicham’s* impact on Adam started to show up in how he treated his family and how he applied himself at school. He became more and more irritable and anxious. Milouda became suspicious of his behavior. She noticed him avoiding saying where he was going or even lying to her about where he had been. She also knew that he was taking money from her purse. Milouda was concerned, but she didn’t know what to do.

Meanwhile, Adam started to feel like he needed *Farid and Hicham* in order to feel good or even just make it through the day. One day Aliintroduced Adam to *Chaab*. Adam knew *Chaab* from his dad and he had heard a little about *Chaab* from others too. Adam was surprised that *Chaab* seemed to not care about anything or anyone. The more Adam hung out with *Chaab, Hicham and Farid* the less he did anything else and the more money he stole. One time even stealing money from the hanoot when the owner was distracted. Milouda noticed that he was much different than he had been at the start of school that year. She also knew the smell that followed him when he came in late. Milouda noticed more and more money was missing, and others in the house were beginning to comment and make her feel unwelcome. Milouda tried to ask Adam about it one day, but he only yelled and stormed off.  Adam discovered that when *Chaab* hung out with *Farid* and *Hicham* things tended to get out of hand. *Hicham* also introduced Adam to hisfriend *Ghali*. *Ghali* was intimidating and strong. Adam was afraid to hang out with him at first, but by this point Adam’s closest friends were *Farid*, *Hicham*, and *Chaab* and they encouraged him to meet *Ghali*. Adam didn’t know how to get out of this crowd and go back to school and his football friends… he also owed *Hicham* money and *Ghali* said he had some ideas of ways Adam might make money. *Ghali* handed Adam a small clear bag with colorful pills in it and told Adam to introduce his cousins to *Farid*. Milouda found the bag in Adam’s pocket. She cried a few tears and prayed to God for help, but the shame and fear of it all paralyzed her. Milouda put the bag back in the pocket and pretended she didn’t see it.

Adam never became a train engineer. He never got his Bac. He spent several years in prison for stealing, getting in fights and introducing others to *Farid*, *Hicham*, *Chaab*, and *Ghali*. Milouda spent a few years taking care of his needs while he was in prison, but eventually they lost contact.

Questions:: What happened in the story?

Who/What are Farid, Hicham, Chaab, and Ghali?

Do you know mom’s like Milouda/ kids like Adam?

Why does this happen?

What can we do?

1. **Participative Teaching: what drugs/ what effect?** Introduce a substance and ask what they know. Add additional information, gently correct any harmful information. Communicate: (1) Availability/ Cost/ Form (2) Short term effect: experientially & physically (3) Long term impact: experientially & physically *(substance information removed for length reasons)*
   1. Faneed (Pills):
      1. Lexta (MDMA)
      2. Qarqoubi  (psychotrop mix)
   2. Other substances:
      1. Cannabis: Hachich, kif, Maajoun
      2. Alcohol
      3. Silicon (Inhalants)
      4. Cigarettes
      5. Ghobora- (cocaine)
   3. Where can you learn more about drugs, problems, and treatments?
      1. <https://www.drogues.gouv.fr/> (this one has videos aimed at teens as well as information for understanding many drugs available)
      2. <https://www.ofdt.fr/produits-et-addictions/de-z/> <https://www.omda.ma/index.php/fr/>
      3. There are 9 rehabilitation centers across Morocco with more coming, as well as additional outpatient services.
2. **Why do people use drugs? And What can we do?**
   1. Awareness brainstorm activity one, Why do people use drugs?:
      1. Using full page prints of the images in the appendix, explain that there are risk factors and reasons why people use drugs in each of these domains. Define each domain: self, family/home environment, peers, school, community.
      2. Spread out the images for everyone to see (on the floor, on a table, or on the wall). Begin discussion of risk factors or why someone might use/abuse drugs. Collect these ideas in words or pictures on a white board or large white paper. Continue the discussion until each domain has been explored and the items in the table below are represented.
      3. Next, identify factors that decrease the risk of drug use/abuse. Continue the discussion until each paper has something and the items in the table below are represented.
      4. Spend 1-2 minutes in silence looking at the posters/ white board the group has made, have the women think about what they could do to decrease the risk.
      5. As a group circle with a different color the items listed that the women can influence, where we can exert our power

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Why? Risk Factors | Domain | Preventative Factors |
| A child with impulsive behavior  A child with low self esteem | (self) | Self-control  Affirming home environment |
| Lack of supervision  A family member who uses  Family stressors | (family/ home) | Parental monitoring  Home free of substance abuse |
| A friend who uses  boredom  Peer pressure | (Peer) | Good friends  Part of group sports  Friend commitment to stay clean  Knows how to say « no » |
| Drug availability  Struggling in school, discouraging school environment | (School) | Anti-drug policies and programs at school  Assistance to achieve success in school |
| Poverty  Apathy | (community) | Strong neighborhood commitment/ attachment  investment |

* 1. Awareness brainstorm activity two: What can we do? (pay attention to the items circled in the activity, discuss ideas as a group, draw out ideas and reinforce the ones listed below: (*sample ideas removed for length reasons)*
     1. Self
     2. Family/ home
     3. Peers
     4. School
     5. Community

1. **Role Play/ Practice scenarios** Break the group up into small groups of three. Give each woman in the group one of these three scenarios, the other two women will play the other roles in each scene. The goal is that each woman has the chance to practice a conversation with their kids about drugs. Quickly arrange the room to accommodate each group to work simultaneously. As the facilitator roam from group to group keeping the mood light and encouraging.
   1. Scenario 1: You are a mother, and you want to talk with your children about the dangers of drug abuse. On the way home from the corner store, you see a group of kids passing around pills down an alley. Once you arrive home you sit your children (aged 9, 11) on the couch and say…
   2. Scenario 2: You are a 12-year-old girl who has a strong relationship with your mother where you can talk about anything. On your way home today, you noticed kids in the neighborhood taking pills/faneed. Today over dinner you ask your mom what it is asking...
   3. Scenario 3: You are a mother. Today you learned about drug abuse at a health lesson, when you sit your children at teatime you start a conversation about what you learned saying…
2. **Reflection and Takeaway**
   1. Come back together as a group and have one person from each small group share about what they learned in practicing.
   2. Ask what questions they still have? (not necessarily to answer)
   3. Have each woman present say one thing they will do because of this lesson, or when they will speak with their kids.

# **Learning Reflection**

This course has been a continual feast for my intellectual appetite to explore the world of adult learning. Our texts as well as the accompanying articles and videos blending philosophy with the practical outworking of teaching and I found the interplay between the two invigorating. Both my personal experience as well as my teaching philosophy make me curious of different perspectives and techniques and how they can complement each other, even if *officially* being situated in different schools of thought. Though I could comment separately through the material that we were assigned to cover in the course I would rather identify a few key takeaways and how they are shaping me.

The first is the accessibility of teaching. I saw through Brockett an explanation of adult education that was not crowded with scholars and methodologies but was rich with guiderails for educators looking for a place to start and improve. This accessibility is a demonstration of great teaching by Brockett in action as our later reading, and previous experience, informed me that adult education is a complex multifaceted realm of study and discussion. Brockett’s memorable use of the acrostic *TEACHER* to carry the effective attributes of an instructor are useful for beginning teachers, but also as a personal evaluative tool for experienced ones. I reworked his definitions slightly for my own use in reflecting on my role/goal as a teacher. Trust, how is my foundation? Am I in building an environment conducive to successful learning (hear, engage, interact, respond, change)? Empathy, am I connecting and understanding others and what they are experiencing while maintaining a healthy degree of detachment (not merging)? Authenticity, am I being true to myself without pretense? Confidence/ Competence, do I know what I am talking about? And how to transfer it? Humility, am I grounded? Am I seeking excellence in my subject while still recalling the journey I have been on and the one still ahead? Enthusiasm, am I excited about this subject? Do I care enough about it? Respect, am I recognizing and giving the God-given dignity and value to each learner, even though I may not share the same beliefs or ideas. (Brockett, 2015). The way in which Brockett made learning accessible has been a key point of connection for me.

The second is the art and science of brain aware adult education as developed by Taylor and Marienau. (Taylor & Marienau, 2016). I have long been a proponent of embodied learning and know well the affective impact that our emotions have on the learning experience, but their book codified and communicated these topics with creativity and clarity. I facilitated a workshop on the role of the teacher in cross cultural learning transfer in February, and I greatly utilized the brain aware approach both in my facilitation and in my content. We began the workshop with each person writing a list of distractions down and then we all crumpled the paper and threw it across the room. I also experimented within the workshop with other methods presented in the book like “see, feel, analyze,” specific reflections with poetry, awareness of multiple intelligences, and metaphors. A significant takeaway for me from this course is the illustration of the “theatre of knowing.” I have enjoyed studying the diagram and considering ways to increase the reflection “spotlight” in my own life personally through my relationships, my parenting, and my personal development, as well as professionally within teaching, training, and facilitating.

My final significant concept from the semester is power, and it’s ever present, complex, shifting nature that was captured articulately by Brookfield. (Brookfield, 2013). Working for much of my adult life in cross cultural settings I am not a stranger to the presence of power. Many times, I have benefitted from it unknowingly. In my teaching contexts, I have long tried to mitigate it or work with it to accomplish needed goals or tasks. Brookfield’s insights gave me a deeper awareness of this dynamic, constant, and costly reality. I enjoyed the overlap of language I often saw in Brookfield’s text that connected with previously explored aspects of brain aware learning specifically in the form or stories, metaphors, art, etc. I found the use of these techniques to unearth assumptions and create or capitalize on those disjunctive experiences to solidify my own personal philosophy of adult education. In both the video and the book, Brookfield shares deeply personal stories about uncovering his own assumptions. Knowingly, this modeling stirs the reader/audience to reflect and evaluate where he/she is falling for the same assumption trap. I found myself riveted by the example and the awareness that teaching in this manner must be exhausting. There are safer ways to *share information*, but perhaps not to *teach.*

These three concepts of accessibility, brain-aware learning, and power impacted my lesson plan in many ways. The lesson plan is on street drug use which like adult education, is complex, nuanced, and overwhelming. Brockett demonstrates that with focus and memorable techniques, complex become clear. I used Brockett’s simple tools as a kept my audience in focus and teased out “what is essential to know, important to know, and nice to know” and stick with the purpose and not get distracted in the details. Brain-aware learning is present using story, a group activity with tangible images as well as the interactive role play. The power is safely shared through inviting participants to offer what they know, brainstorm risk factors and specifically addressed at the close of lesson as the group discusses where each woman can use her power to change.

Overall, this course work, including the class discussions have contributed to a deeper awareness and appreciation of adult learning. I find myself grateful for the scholars and educators that have walked this road ahead of me.

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# **Appendix**

Appendix A: images of drugs for lesson

A picture containing metalware, kazoo

Description automatically generatedLexta Shape

Description automatically generatedQarqoubi A picture containing table

Description automatically generated Cannabis

Diagram, engineering drawing

Description automatically generatedhachich A picture containing text

Description automatically generated silison

Appendix B: images for group activity

Shape

Description automatically generated with low confidence self Icon

Description automatically generatedfamily / home Shape

Description automatically generated with low confidencepeers

A picture containing engineering drawing

Description automatically generatedschool A picture containing text, clipart

Description automatically generated community