

TOM TONKIN, PHD

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My Teaching Philosophy Statement

My core beliefs about the purpose of teaching and learning

I don't care for the term teaching philosophy as much as *facilitating learning* philosophy because that is the objective: to learn. In addition, as one who might be called a teacher, I also learn through teacher/student engagement. The outcome of any learning event is behavioral change, whether immediate or in the short term. That behavioral change suggests that you must also have a value shift. This is a big part of why certain teaching strategies do not work. In addition, I rely heavily on all the past research and the most recent research regarding human behavior. My teaching philosophy goes all the way back to Socrates and his disciples, such as Plato and Aristotle. Their relationship is one that I emulate as a teacher with my students. Then, I jump to John Dewey, a constructivist, educational reformer, and philosopher, and move to the present day, where I lean on the latest neuroscience of learning findings.

My high-level description of how I facilitate learning.

My learning facilitation starts with a Socratic approach, where a layout, a hypothesis, or an assertion for students to ponder. I usually start with a personal, present-day problem they are facing, something recent, because this conjures up the emotions required for behavioral change. Talking about abstract or distant issues becomes very disassociated. Association to the learning and the problem is a big component of how I teach. Thus, anything that moves the student closer to the behavior change in the problem they're facing, hence, the ability for them to associate, is an important technique of my teaching.

An explanation of why I facilitate learning.

The most important part of why I teach this way is the research conducted in the 70s through the 90s and the present on how the brain works to adapt to new learning and ultimately cause behavioral change. In the 70s, we relied on observation over long periods to understand the causality of behavioral change. As neural equipment technology matured, we found many of those observations were true from a causal perspective. Still, we also have found how we can invoke those causal forces to change behavior within an individual. Present-day neuroscience continues to affirm and expand our understanding of human learning and behavioral change, and as a thought leader, I am responsible for following those ideas.

My primary specializations

Most of my specialization and teaching have been associated with behavior changes that result in quantitative measures. For example, I immersed myself in sales training because we can see how behavioral changes through learning allow sales professionals to generate more revenue. We can prove this through statistical models. Another specialization has been around employee engagement and retention. Again, we can create statistical models correlating and proving causation, which I think is the "Holy Grail" of predictive and prescriptive behavioral changes.