Statement of Personal Philosophy & Position on Program Planning
EAD 877
JAIME ADAMS

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The program planning that I am responsible for in my current role is to ensure that all staff and customers understand our software. This means that I have to create workshops, perform demonstrations, write user guides, and be open to all questions at any given time. In the future, I would like to start my own software company, so I know that training and planning programs for employees will continue to be a part of my work throughout my career.

One of the most impactful pieces that I have learned over the course of my master's program is that teaching in any context is all about heart. No matter what kind of work must be done, "teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart – and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be" (Palmer, p. 11). For me, this has always been what I love about planning a new program. It takes *all* of your heart to be successful at it. No one can go into teaching half-heartedly and expect to do well. It is a scary thing to be vulnerable. And "teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability" (p. 17). However, what I love about teaching is by having that vulnerability it empowers teachers to open new worlds to their students. So for me, the most important piece to planning any new program is to always have heart and passion for your teaching.

I know that teaching is all about planning. I have always considered myself a fairly organized person that spends more time getting organized for an event than I probably spend executing an event. However, I think that I have discovered that within learning there is no such thing as being too prepared. I believe most people will agree that "not everyone learns the same way, and having choices about the way you receive information is a great way to help students" (Svinicki and McKeachie, p. 12). We do not all come to the table with the same knowledge and

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"the knowledge base on adult learning is constructed from a number of fields and disciplines such as adult and continuing education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, neurosciences, and cultural studies" (Caffarella, p. 52). Anyone that wants to plan a program to meet the various knowledge levels and methods of learning for adult learners must present information in various formats. If a program planner is to make room for different learning and assessment types, they must be well versed in the various forms of learning and assessment as well as have a clear plan for how to incorporate these styles into their teaching. When I taught second grade, I thought I was differentiating instruction just by having several different groups working on different levels. It never occurred to me that by still having the same lesson format and the same assessment format, I was doing very little to actually meet the students' needs. Working through creating and evaluating a different program plans for adult learners has helped me realize that a teacher needs to be prepared for so many different possibilities within their classroom in order to have all students get to the same level of understanding.

This brings me to my approach to learners. I have realized that the teacher cannot and will not ever be the one that is in complete control. There is a certain amount of choice that needs to be incorporated into learning. "It's difficult (maybe close to impossible) for students to become independent learners when someone else is making all the learning decisions for them" (Weimar, p. 219). My goal is to help students become independent learners. I want to be able to produce employees and customers that take what I teach for them within my programs and then go out to learn more on their own. I therefore need to give up control of all things and allow for more student choice within my teaching. Svinicki and McKeachie state that "in general, individuals want to be in charge of their own behavior, and they value a sense of control over

their environment" (p. 140).  It is my belief that when planning a program, we must provide that sense of control to our students and create an environment of shared responsibility.

This again ties to the thought of needing to plan well.  In creating a plan, syllabus, or program outline a teacher is in essence detailing how the environment of shared responsibility will be structured.  A syllabus or plan "is a contract between you and your students.  But the contract is not one sided" (Sviniki and McKeachie, 21).  This type of contract will "provide insights into relationships (a) between the teacher and the learner, (b) between the learner and the subject matter, and (c) the subject matter and the world at large" (Zinn, p. 45).  Therefore, creating an effective teaching environment requires both detailed planning as well as an openness to allow for shared responsibility between the teacher and the students.

If a program is to have a sense of shared responsibility, I think one of the most key practices that must be put into place is having an environment of learner centric teaching.  I want to teach in a way that allows students to engage in their learning.  Palmer points out that "only when people can speak their minds does education have a chance to happen" and that the classroom "must also be a place in which the group's voice is gathered and amplified, so that the group can affirm, question, challenge, and correct the voice of the individual" (p.78). To me this idea is crucial for a successful program.  I think the most fun I ever had while teaching was not while I was in the front of the room giving answers to the students but rather when watching students working together, solving problems in ways I would have never thought of, and building each other up through their processes.  I love that Weimer points out "often when I teach less, I find that I actually teach more" (p. 142).  For me, this is the type of teacher that I want to be: the

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teacher that learns as much from their students because they are open to the ways their students learn.

The question next becomes, how do you continue to improve your program planning process? For me, the first step is to find the right mentor. Mentors have the

> "capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our own lives. If we discovered a teacher's heart in ourselves by meeting a great teacher, recalling that meeting may help us take heart in teaching once more" (Palmer, p. 22).

At the start I pointed out that the most important thing is to have heart for your subject area. For me, mentors are the key in assisting a teacher that has no heart to find it. And, more importantly, mentors have the ability to repair a broken heart. When I first started teaching, I was so passionate about the work that I was doing. Somewhere along the way, I lost heart in that work. By discovering a new mentor that ignited the passion within me again, I can honestly say that I would not be able to affect the changes that I have done without her. I also know that while having a great mentor is not always about "what made your mentor great?' but what was about you that allowed great mentoring to happen?" (p. 22). If we are open to mentoring, great things can come from that relationship. But the key is not only being able to find the right mentor but also to be open to what the mentor can unlock within you.

Along the same lines of finding a mentor to always improve, planners must also find ways of reflecting and evaluating their effectiveness. Bain points out that "if we ask students the right question, their answers can help evaluators make judgments about the quality of teaching

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(Bain, p. 171). I think it is our responsibility to always be asking for feedback on programs and how well they are fitting into the overall education process. I fully expect that the best teachers are constantly asking themselves

> "(1) Is the material worth learning (and, perhaps, appropriate to the curriculum? (2) Are my students learning what the course is supposedly teaching? (3) Am I helping and encouraging the students to learn (or do they learn despite me)? (4) Have I harmed my students (perhaps fostering short-term learning with intimidation tactics, discouraging rather than stimulating additional interest in the field, fostering strategic or bulimic rather than deep learning, neglecting the needs of a diverse student population, or failing to evaluate student's learning accurately)?" (p. 164).

For me these are questions that every program planner should be consistently and constantly asking themselves as well as finding way to ask this of their students. As I have pointed out several times, I believe that an effective environment is one where there is an atmosphere of shared responsibility. As part of that responsibility, I expect students to be able to give honest feedback in what is going well and what needs to be altered. My intention as program planner is to be "intentional in how [I] shape [my] course's climate and, consequently, student learning" (Ambrose, p. 187). I can only be effective in doing this if students are comfortable and able to provide feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the climate I am attempting to provide.

In conclusion, a program planner needs to be organized, open to multiple ways of teaching, and ready to always be improving. However, more than anything, one must have heart. Through all of my course studies and all of the readings I have done, one thing I have found time

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and time again: without passion for the work that you are doing, it is meaningless.  When I first

started teaching, my mother gave me a sign that said "if you're not having fun teaching, then

you're doing something wrong."  For me this is what has always rung true about having heart in

any aspect of work.  If you have heart, work isn't work, it's fun.  If you have heart, you have the

power to affect the strongest change in the programs being developed.

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