

A Philosophy of Teaching

2/23/21

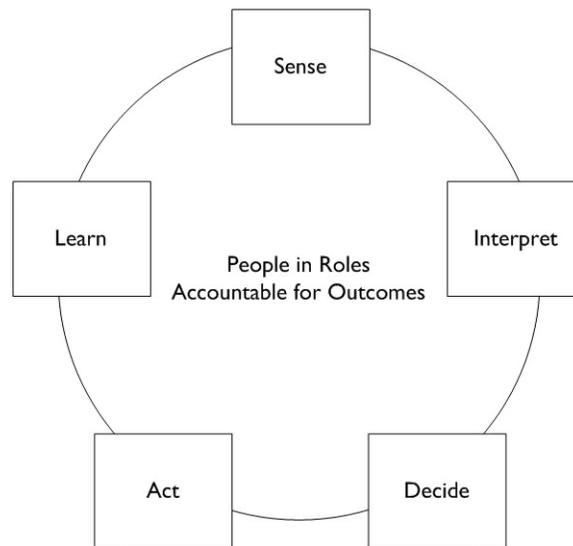
My job is to provide you with best possible conditions under which to learn.

Your job is to learn.

When one googles “philosophy” the result is:

the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline.

- a particular system of philosophical thought.
- the study of the theoretical basis of a particular branch of knowledge or experience.
- a theory or attitude held by a person or organization that acts as a guiding principle for behavior.



I’ve never laid my philosophy of teaching down although I think I have been consistent in its application for some time, perhaps even as far back as early in my prior career.

That being the case then this philosophy applies not just to students as we customarily understand the term, but to all people I encounter. This is perhaps presumptuous of me, but I would like to think that there is some notion on the part of most people I meet that I may be of value to them in some, albeit sometimes small, way. If that is true, perhaps I am teaching even in those moments.

This philosophy is built around the concept of the SIDAL loop (illustrated on this page) that has its origin in an article I read long ago (Haeckel &

Nolan, 1993) that was subsequently followed by a more extensive treatment (Haeckel & Slywotzky, 1999).¹

As I recall, Haeckel and his colleagues did not explicitly take up the Learn component. I’m unsure when I added it, but I suspect it was when I began my career in higher education in 2002. My sense was that that what was missing was an explicit statement about learning with the objective of ensuring that one’s subsequent trips through the loop would improve.

I also made an observation somewhere along the line that we live our lives by deploying SIDAL loops. Possessing loops more relevant, accurate,

precise, and faster than others tends to foster success.

My teaching thus centers on helping people to recognize the loop and its components, learn how to apply loops relevant to the issue to be resolved, and subsequently learn how to improve the performance of the SIDAL loop.

Some comments on the components of SIDAL follow.

¹ Haeckel and Slywotzky refer to the similarity to John Boyd’s OODA loop.

Sense

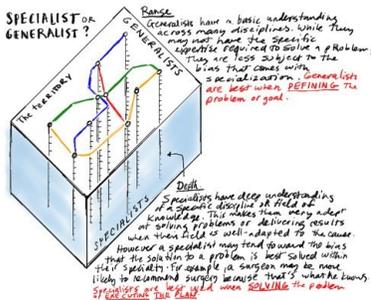
That which we sense is filtered by our capabilities (knowledge, skill, experience, attitude, behavior). Sense has three dimensions; breadth, depth, and temporal.



By breadth I mean the number of different subject areas (illustrated here by the 12 major areas of the Dewey Decimal System) that are meaningful to a person (or increasingly, a machine - think IBM's Watson on Jeopardy).

I tend to think that a person should be exposed to a wide variety of subject areas during their formative years (a somewhat indeterminate period of time).

In my courses, say International Business, there is a principal focus, but I also include tangential subjects, such as culture and geopolitics, which profoundly affect the shape and outcomes of international business.



I am affected by my own inclination to be a generalist, a stand that has served me well during my career and one that I think affords a better perspective on a fast-paced, complex world where interconnection abounds².

"If stated reasons don't sit well with your conscience or stand the test of logic, look for deeper motivations." Docent Glax Oth (Herbert & Anderson, 2002). The aim, then, is to help develop the senses that allows one to follow the Docent's advice.³

In short, my aim is to increase the student's ability to sense the signals produced by the environment.

Interpret

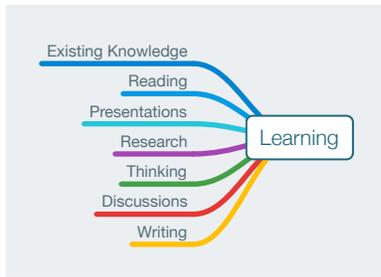
Four days a week, from September to May, I commute to the college where I teach. The very first thing I do, after turning on the coffee, is get a sense of the weather for the day. I interpret the information and it informs my dress for the day and whether I need to adjust my expectations for the commute time.

Skill at interpretation of the signals provided by sensing is first learned, sometimes through formal education and sometimes through experience.

Classes, the best of which are taught by those with deep experience and extraordinary communication skills, are what most of us encounter first. Books and articles written by acknowledged experts are a critical part of developing interpretive skills. Discussions of these skills and their application are equally critical.

² Image from Hardy, S. (2007, August 28). Specialists and Generalists in 3D. Retrieved July 23, 2011, from <http://creativegeneralist.blogspot.com/2007/08/specialists-and-generalists-in-3d.html>

³ Additional thinking on the matter of generalists can be found Drogan, J. (2011, May 10). Some Thoughts on Using Generalists. Retrieved from <http://imsdrgn.squarespace.com/storage/Some%20Thoughts%20on%20Using%20Generalists.pdf>



Classes constitute a guided learning experience fed by a number of sources. This guidance is essential in the formative years and lasts until one “learns how to learn” and, quite possibly beyond. For example, in my own case, I returned to classes in 2009 to earn a MA in Diplomacy. My individual study of the subject matter was not giving me what I wanted.

In this case, the learning is aimed at developing the interpretive skills.

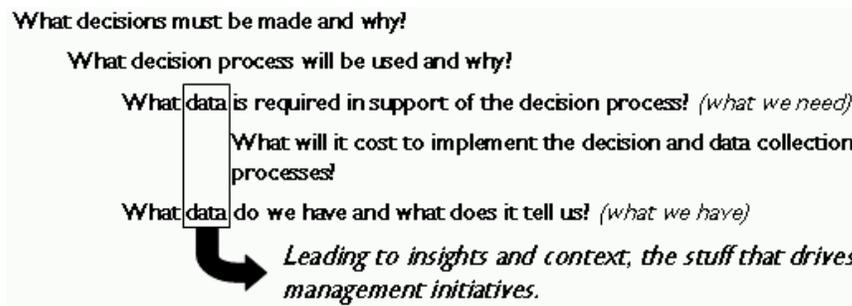
How have others interpreted what is being sensed? Why was the approach taken? What are the strengths and weakness of the approach?

This approach to learning applies to all the SIDAL components, but it seems appropriate to introduce it here.

My classes tend to feature all these sources.

Decide

In the critical thinking process, about which I will say more later, one must come to a set of conclusions and recommendations based upon those conclusions. That is, one needs to decide what to do.



"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all." - Peter Drucker

Consider the questions to the left.⁴

My sense is that making a decision rests

upon answering these questions. Thus, we spend time on why and what in my courses.⁵

Act

We can't actually act on our recommendations in a classroom setting. We can, however, have a reasoned discussion as to whether the recommendations are actionable. Those who have actual experience can aid in this examination. Where possible, simulations can be run. And, one would hope that opportunities for implementation of similar recommendations might occur as students engage in internships.

Another option is to select case studies that allow the comparison of student conclusions and recommendations to actual developments in business. I tend not to use case studies for I feel more is gained by students developing case studies.

⁴ Drogan, J. (2009, September 1). *Data, Information, and Knowledge - Relevance and Understanding*. SUNY Maritime College. Retrieved from <http://imsdrgn.squarespace.com/storage/Data%20Information%20and%20Knowledge%20-%20Relevance%20and%20Understanding.pdf>

⁵ Why and what are two of Rudyard Kipling's Six Best Friends. The others are who, when, where, and how. All of Kipling's friends are featured in my courses.

Learn

In this component I address three questions.⁶

1. What worked?
2. Where did we get stuck?
3. What will we do differently next time?

Introspection (Drogan, 2009b) is seen as a highly desirable characteristic and is a focus in this component.

The Ties That Bind

Ethics, Critical Thinking, and Communication

“If you deliver good information you’re relevant.”⁷

It matters little how well we know a subject if we lack an ability to think critically about it, and effectively communicate the results of that thinking. Ethics underpin and are essential to being able to do these two things.

These three items – ethics, critical thinking, and communications – are essential if we are to resolve the issues that we confront.

The relationship of what I have so far mentioned is captured in this graphic.

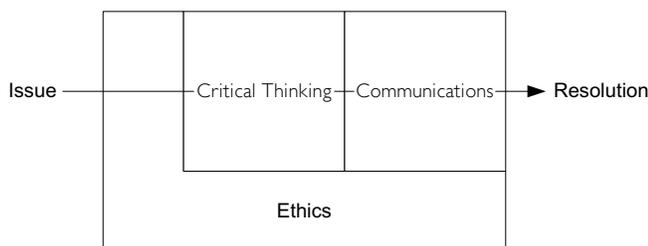


Figure 1 Relationships

This graphic exists within the context of the world around us; a world of constant and unpredictable change; a world changing with sometimes frightening speed; a world that, in some significant respects, seems to change not at all.

I write this note for two purposes.

1. To satisfy myself that my appreciation of the importance of the three items, and the way in which can think about and apply them is reasonable. Assuming satisfaction, then
2. To provide ideas for consideration to others, especially my students, on the subject in hopes they will find something of value they can pack in their survival kit.

While I make some points about the three major areas, the purpose of this is note is not give an exhaustive treatment of its three major themes. Others have done that. I want to focus a bit more on their interrelationship and sequencing.

⁶ Similar to military after action reviews.

⁷ J. M. McConnell, Today's Challenges, Tomorrow's Threats: Why America Needs an Agile and Robust Intelligence Community, 2008, Video, Harvard University Institute of Politics, Available: <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/Multimedia-Center/All-Videos/Today%27s-Challenges,-Tomorrow%27s-Threats-Why-America-Needs-an-Agile-and-Robust-Intelligence-Community>, January 23, 2009. McConnell was the United States of America Director of National Intelligence

The above is from *Ethics, Critical Thinking, and Communication* (Drogan, 2009a), a paper assigned in all my courses.

These three ideas are the second of three structural elements upon which my courses are built. SIDAL is the first.

Teams

My experience is that more often than not you will find yourself working on a team to resolve an issue. Sometimes you know the leader and members of the team. Other times you will find yourself in the initial meeting of the team knowing no one.

The initial and subsequent meetings may be face-to-face or all meetings may be virtual and, on occasion, asynchronous.

The issue to be resolved may be clear; the roles and responsibilities prescribed; the deliverables clear. At times all the preceding may be vague and the team needs to find its own way.

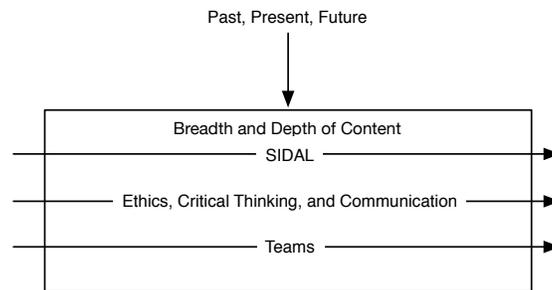
It seems prudent to prepare yourself for this situation. The intent of teams in my courses is to help in this preparation.

The above is from *Teams* (Drogan, 2016) and constitutes the third structural element.

Rubrics

Assessment of student performance and the degree to which the course learning objectives are being met is through a fairly well-developed set of rubrics (Drogan, 2018).

Summary



My teaching philosophy has evolved under the influence of the times, the students, and my experience. This will continue.

During the summer my habit has been to perform a fairly deep after action review or assessment of all my classes with the aim of continuous improvement.

The aim of my courses is to equip students with the capabilities valuable to resolving the current and emerging issues in the marketplace in which they may find themselves. At the time this document was written my responsibilities pointed towards two markets.

The Maritime Industry: The maritime industry comprises the ship engaged in the transportation of goods and commodities and the supporting facilities at the origin and destination points up to an including the terminal in-out gates and their functional equivalent in commodity shipment. This definition is meant to include anything that directly affects the performance of the ship.

The Maritime-centric Supply Chain Industry: A maritime centric supply chain comprises a group of organizations involved in the movement of goods wherein the maritime portion is indispensable to the success of the supply chain. That is, removing the maritime portion causes

the supply chain to fail. By failure we mean that there is no reasonable substitute for the maritime portion. Examples of such supply chains include bulk commodities such as oil and grain, containerized traffic such as furniture and electrical machinery.

Given the focus on current and emerging issues the courses tend to rely less on existing texts and more on contemporary information from reputable sources. This focus provides an opportunity for students to learn and practice skills in information management.⁸ Related to this is an intent is to help students develop their professional networks comprising people and organizations that can be of value.

I would be remiss not to mention the importance of my long career in IBM in shaping my philosophy of teaching. IBM's Basic Beliefs – respect for the individual, customer service, excellence in everything we do – have a profound influence.



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⁸ See Drogan, J. (2009, September 1). *Data, Information, and Knowledge - Relevance and Understanding*. SUNY Maritime College. Retrieved from <http://jmsdrgn.squarespace.com/storage/Data%20Information%20and%20Knowledge%20-%20Relevance%20and%20Understanding.pdf> for additional information.