

Page 1 Constructing your own theory

Step 1 Describing your overall concept of your work.

Instructions: On this page, using the reverse side if needed, write about your work, what you think about it, how you feel about it and what it means to you. Write as if you are writing for one of your colleagues--be sincere, specific, and try to express what is most important to you in your work. You do not need to hurry. Take time to think about what your work means to you before you try to express its meaning by writing. You will have about 15 minutes and you will remain in control of how much of what you write you are willing to show to others in the class or to discuss with them.

-----

Page 2 Constructing your own theory

Step 2 Finding a metaphor which adequately describes your work

Many teachers, counsellors, social workers, youth workers, nurses and other helping professionals do not have a very rich language with which to describe and discuss their work. Often the language used is stilted, formal or simply lacking in meaning. One way to begin building a richer vocabulary with which to communicate about one's work is to search for personal metaphors which express the meaning of work and worklife.

Metaphors which I have witnessed people using to express the essence and central meaning of their worklife include the following sample:

- ☺ My work is like.....a fruit-laden tree...
- ☺ My work is like.... going up a down escalator...
- ☺ My counselling is like....being a fellow pilgrim on a never-ending journey....
- ☺ My work is like.... a gurgling, rushing stream....

One teacher wrote that her life is like.... a waterfall. She wrote:

Life is the waterfall as it proceeds from start to finish. The water is the individual learners as they try out different routes and seek to grow in awareness of themselves and truth. The spirit of the rocks is the teacher taking various shapes and forms, sometimes creating tremendous visible impact and sometimes a more subtle effect. The spirit of the rock accepts all the water that comes its way and attempts to make it the most beautiful that can be in its own way---sometimes spectacular and sometimes simple and ponderous but always contributing to the flow of life. This has become my metaphor for my work as a teacher.

Instructions: Become quiet and reflective. Think of your own work place, your office, classroom or wherever it is that you work. In your private mind become aware of the sounds and sights, the images and happenings of your work life. From this let images arise and jot down several until you find a symbol or image which seems to you to express something essential about your work. Beginning with the words, "My work is like...." use your symbol and then write a succinct, descriptive paragraph or two about your work as that symbol(metaphor). Use the rest of this page and the reverse as you need it. You will have about 10 minutes for this task.

Page 3 Constructing your own theory.

Step 3a Defining person characteristics [Identify a person for each of the categories below]

1. The first male student(client) who comes to **mind**.
2. A female student you found hard to **understand**.
3. A male student you would like to help.
4. The first female student who comes to mind
5. A female student you would like to help.
6. A male student you would like to know **better**.
7. A male student whom you liked very much.
8. A female student whom you liked very much.
9. A male student whom you don't like.
10. A female student whom you don't like
11. A male student you found hard to **understand**.
12. A female student you would like to know **better**.
13. A male student whose behavior/attitude **completely** puzzles you.
14. A female student whose behavior/attitude **completely** puzzles you.
15. A male student you admire.
16. A male student you perceive as a personal **threat** to you.
17. A female student whom you admire.
18. A female student you would most like to see change.
19. A male student you would most like to see change.
20. A female student you perceive as a personal **threat** to you.

Page 4 Constructing your own theory.

Step 3b Essential characteristic[behavior, value, attitude, emotion, ability]

For each of the twenty persons you have identified:

a. Develop a one-sentence description of the characteristic of the person which led you to identify that person[the characteristic may be a behavior(for example, is violent)a value[for example, loves nature],an emotional disposition[for example, is loving], an attitude[for example, shows respect] or ability[for example composes poetry].

A teacher identified Tom A as the male student whom she felt personally threatened by. The characteristic she described was: Tom unpredictably hits other students[behavior].

b. Convert your one sentence description into a brief "preferred outcome statement" That is if the characteristic is violent behavior, then the preferred outcome might be "reducing or eliminating violent outbursts". If the described characteristic was "imaginative" then the preferred outcome might be "develop higher order, imaginative thinking".

This may take a while. If you feel stuck on one category, go on to another and come back later. You can take as much time as you need. This often takes an hour or more.

Page 5 Constructing your own theory.

Step 3c

Now that you have identified twenty persons and attributed a defining characteristic to each, and have indicated what you would want to bring about with respect to the defining characteristic, you are now to explain what procedure you would use as a counsellor[or teacher, nurse, social worker or whatever occupation in which you currently have membership] to bring about the preferred outcome. For example

Person Characteristic	Preferred outcome	Counselling procedure
lacks independence	to develop self-control and independence	Rehearse and outline specific steps to accomplish a task

Your product should look something like the example below

Summary Chart of a Counselor		
Client Characteristics (P)	Learning Outcomes (B)	Counseling Approaches (E)
short attention span; self-centered	to interact with peers in small groups or dyads	introduce individual to peer for mutual support
weak self concept	to develop feelings of self-worth	stimulate efforts of individual in setting own course of action
inquisitive	to increase exploratory abilities	outline an activity promoting multiple alternatives
fearful of new environments	to become involved with a peer support group	accompany individual to a peer support group, for the first time
domineering; want to feel in control of situations	to initiate a self-directed learning experience	allow individual to problem solve with little direction
easily distracted; irresponsible	to become responsible and dependable	contract with individual, completion of a task
self-centered; inflexible	to develop some outside interests	encourage individual to select activity, involving another person
cynical, especially of something new	to be receptive to something new	discuss with individual feelings, trying something new
hardworking, dependable	to feel efforts are satisfying and worthwhile	commend efforts of individual in working through something difficult
isolated, few outside interests	to interact with peers in group environment	foster individual's sharing of a skill with others