

Teaching Philosophy
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I've always enjoyed, and believed, a quote about education by William Butler Yeats; "education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." I truly believe that students must be excited about learning before anything will stick with them. I identify with two teaching philosophies, progressivism and social reconstructivism, both of which align with this quote. An amalgamation of these two teaching philosophies explains my own complex, ever shifting ideas about education and how to best implement various methods within a classroom. Within this paper I plan on explaining my personal teaching philosophy within the constructs of the two traditional philosophies. I will address my own concept of learning, my concept of teaching, my goals for my students and the methods to do so, how I will assess student growth, and how I plan on continuing my own professional growth.

Progressivism is a teaching philosophy that follows John Dewey's model of education. It is based on the belief that students must lead their own education by formulating meaningful questions and then creating the strategies to answer their own questions. Like John Dewey I believe that social learning has more meaning to children and learning that way sticks. There is no substitute for doing things and kinesthetic learning is a great way for children to learn. I will organize my classroom partially around the concerns, curiosity and real world experiences of my students. I think fieldtrips, science experiments and other methods are a great way to introduce real life experiences into a classroom. Another aspect of progressivism that I find directly applicable to today's world is the idea that the classroom should be a democratic, rather than authoritative place (Sadker and Zittleman, 2009). We live in a democratic world, yet classrooms are very authoritarian. I would like my classroom to be a safe place for all students to interact on an equal level.

The other philosophy that I identify with is the social reconstructivist theory. George Counts, who was a student of John Dewey, outlined social reconstructivism in a book he wrote. Social reconstructivism urges education to focus on “alleviating pervasive social inequities” (Sadker and Zittleman, 2009). He argued that this learning theory was a natural direction for student’s education to, a much more moral direction as well. Social reconstructivists, myself included, believe that school is an ideal place to address and explore social problems that we see in the world that we live in (Sadker and Zittleman, 2009). School provides a safe environment within which we can voice our opinions and analyze these problems. I think that using the real world problems to create a learning environment directly applies what students are learning to where they live. It provides a direct link between school and the world. It also helps students become more aware of the social problems of their world and in the long run, hopefully create responsible citizens of the world.

My overall goals for my classroom and my students are to promote positive learning, to spark enthusiasm for learning, to help students meet their fullest potential, and to give students a sense of pride. I believe that learning is a continual process that doesn’t stop just because someone leaves school. I want students to become lifelong learners who think that learning is a fun and interesting process that helps them to discover the world around them. I want to bring cognitive, emotional and environmental influences into my classroom so that students can learn at their highest potential. Education is a process, not merely transference of knowledge.

My concept of learning is what guides my concept of teaching. I believe that my job as a teacher is to provide a safe environment for all my students. My job is to play a supportive

role while students discover the world around them. As a teacher it is essential that I know my students. I must understand and empathize with them and be interested in their interests and feedback. Without these characteristics apparent in my teaching I would not consider my job complete. My goal is to treat each student as an individual and meet their needs and show them the joy in schooling and education. We live in a very diverse world; culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse. Part of my interest in teaching is because I would like to address these differences and help students become more culturally aware. As a teacher it is imperative that I address the differences among my students because each student will have a different background and thus a different need from their peers. Students with special needs must be addressed so that their learning is just as joyful as their peers. In such a diverse world there is a large spectrum of differences among students. Whether they are culturally, linguistically, racially different or differently-abled in another respect, it is my job as a teacher to create a safe learning environment for these students as well as others.

My goals for my students are for them to find something in the world that they are passionate about and interested in. Learning should be seen as an enjoyable lifelong pursuit that never ends. If they find joy in learning while with me then I have done my job correctly. In addition to this goal however there are many standards that a professional teacher endeavors to meet. Standards such as the grade level expectations (GLEs) provide structure for teachers and for students. These standards create unity within the world of education so that teachers can help students become citizens of the world.

There are many methods of teaching to reach the goals that I've listed. I think to keep students interested in what they are learning it must be presented in a variety of ways, not

through just one singular method. Brainstorming, videos, class discussion, small group discussion, role-playing, guest speakers, and cooperative learning are a few methods of teaching that I will employ within my classroom. These methods promote participation on many different levels. Brainstorming allows students to think creatively while simultaneously encouraging everyone's participation. It draws on a group's knowledge and experience and allows students to bounce ideas off of each other. Videos are an entertaining way of teaching within a classroom. They keep the class' attention and stimulate discussion among students. Class wide discussion and small group discussions allow students to take ideas and experiences from the whole group. While a class wide discussion allows everyone to hear everything being discussed, some students are more comfortable in small group settings. Using both of these methods allows for multiple types of learners to participate in their own way. Role-playing introduces situations in a lifelike way to the classroom and allows students to see a situation in a dramatic way. This provides students the opportunity to assume the roles of others to learn another point of view. A guest speaker personalizes topics that they are presenting which gives the students a real life perspective. A guest speaker can also break stereotypes that might be present. Cooperative learning helps to promote responsibility. Students work with each other and in doing so learn to be more patient and less critical.

I believe in a lot of hands-on type of methods that allow students to work with each other or with materials. So many students learn through kinesthetic learning that it is imperative that a substantial amount is included. Mathematical concepts in particular are difficult to learn merely through lecturing, but if an alternative method of learning is provided there is a greater chance that more students will understand the mathematical lesson being taught.

For example a lecture about multiplication is not very likely to reach the whole class. Rather a lesson about multiplication by having the students experiment with manipulatives would allow them to understand and remember how the lesson works.

I have found in my experience that elementary aged school children learn best with short sections of instruction. Keeping lessons shorter allows students who don't have long attention spans to still learn the lesson without becoming fidgety or bored. I would rather plan several short activities to teach a lesson than one long lesson. I want my interaction with my students to be one of mentorship where I facilitate their learning. My least preferred method of teaching would be one of lecturing.

Following all of these methods of teaching I would like to present the methods of assessing student achievement and progress. As with methods of teaching there are many ways to assess a child's progress within the classroom. Since different students learn different ways I like to employ a wide variety of assessment techniques. With such a diverse student population it is viable to believe that a student would perform poorly for one form of assessment and well on another one. I like to keep student maintained portfolios as well as teacher maintained portfolios so that there is a wide range of material available to be reviewed. Another good way to assess students is to use standards that they themselves have had the opportunity to create. Student based rubrics are a great way to see if students understand what is expected of them and if they have or have not achieved what they decided as a class was important. Assessment can be done through portfolios, student made rubrics, journals, small group assessment, student-teacher conferences, read alouds, checklists, and student-teacher-parent conferences. In addition to my own methods of daily assessment there are larger assessments that must be completed to satisfy current

state and national standards. The Grade Level Expectations are a very valuable resource to use within assessments. Another method of state and nationally supported assessment that will take place in my classroom is standardized testing. All of these kinds of assessments will give me the best idea of how to help each individual student with their goals for their education, I like to have substantive varied and formative feedback within my classroom so that every student can be assessed fairly and reach their potential.

Within my field of education and teaching I think it is imperative to have family involvement in the classroom. Parent involvement can enrich the classroom as well as their own students' school experiences. I see my students and their families as collaborators in my classroom. Families are experts on their children and it is imperative to draw on this knowledge. I believe that "developing strong working relationships with the families of students is not only a nice activity, but also a necessary step for developing effective ways of reading and teaching all students" (Amatea, 2009). Families are partners in their children's education. This aligns my beliefs with the collaboration paradigm that shows that I believe that students' families have a huge influence on their education. Thus calling for a working relationship between the teacher and the family.

There are many ways to implement this collaboration paradigm within the classroom. At the beginning of the year I would like to implement a "Ready, Set, Goal" conference between myself, my students, and their families to find out what their goals are for the school year. With these conferences in mind I can better work with the student and their families. In addition to this initial contact between families and myself I like to keep in constant contact with the parents of my students. The better I can keep them informed, the more support my students will have from all ends of the spectrum. Communication

between the school and home is key to helping students enjoy their education. In addition to the “Ready, Set, Goal” conferences there is a myriad of ways to improve and continue communication with families including, but not limited to: back-to-school nights, “written, face-to-face, telephone, and formal and informal meetings” (Amatea, 2009). I plan on using as many of these methods as possible in my classroom. These beliefs directly address beginning teacher standard seven which highlights that beginning teachers should work as partners with students, families, and the community by promoting regular communication and participation in school events among other things.

As a teacher it is my goal to help my students reach their goals and their potential. To do this I believe in continually furthering my education and to continue growing as a teacher. I think the evaluations and assessments I do of my students says equally as much about my teaching as it does about their learning. I plan on using these assessments to critique my teaching. In addition to this I would like to conduct student evaluations of my teaching to get feedback from my students. This will help me to assess whether or not I have been teaching my students effectively. There are a lot of resources for teachers to access. There are always a lot of conferences and classes that allow teachers to learn the newest methods, techniques, and beliefs that are permeating the world of education. By continually keeping myself updated on the newest ideas that are out there, I hope to never fall behind the times and get stuck in a rut, thus putting my students in a rut. By pursuing professional growth I will be able to show my students my own love of learning and hopefully transmit that love to them.

My teaching philosophy is far from complete as I know it will morph and change throughout the years. Right now however I truly do fit into the progressivist and social

reconstructivist philosophies. I believe that every child has the ability and the desire to learn; they just need the right environment and support. I will endeavor to bring awareness of cultural diversity into my classroom as well as parent involvement. The support of the community is just as important to the classroom as other qualities.

References

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