

# **My Philosophy of Teaching**

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My entry into the world of education was a mix of opportunity that met with many uncertain and untrained skills. I did not enter my undergraduate studies with the intention of leaving it as a teacher but here I am applying what was knowledge that I took for granted all throughout grade school. As a result of decisions made with little foresight as a young college student, I have come to seriously understand and respect the role of a teacher and the intricacies of learning. As a result of the decisions I made early in college with little knowledge, I learned to have "... the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that the teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of the community that learning, and living, require." (Palmer, 1998 p. 11) Teaching has tugged at my heart and made it vulnerable. That is why I now teach.

## **CORE BELIEFS**

### **The Role of a Teacher**

I have a strong belief that the role of a teacher is to provide the opportunity for learning and train students to get to a point where they can become independent learners of the content. Weimer describes this type of learner self-directed (2002, p. 168). This can happen as the teacher assumes many different roles and provide a variety of learning situations that should offer great opportunities for students to take it upon themselves to learn. When it comes down to it, a teacher is to provide and facilitate the opportunities for students to learn and grow. Until the learner learns how to go the right path on their own for this to happen, the teacher trains with and models what this should look like to the student with a fervor that exposes their caring intention.

## **Role of the Student**

Learning is done best when the student is the one that takes it upon them to learn anything. The learning is the responsibility of the student while the opportunities to learn are the responsibility of the teacher. In an effort to learn, the student takes chances and becomes willing to expose themselves. Making mistakes are opportunities to learn and grow as the learning process does not end with the mistake but from the learning of it.

The role of the student is a difficult one. A student needs to enter a situation with an open and inquiring mind while simultaneously testing pre-determined notions. A student needs to learn from their failures by being allowed to fail. Through these opportunities, students will learn much about themselves as well. Such opportunities are looked at as opportunities to further grow while they expose and threaten a student's willingness to take further chances. This, however, is what it means to learn. This is the role of a student.

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The process of learning is a delicate balance of the teacher's resolve and student's willingness to be exposed. The learning environment that a teacher produces can either ensure the opportunity for continued learning from a student or inhibit the process. While there is no perfect learning environment that a teacher can produce, the teacher can determine enough information from the students that would allow for adequate opportunities to learn. Therefore, the first step in producing a reasonable learning environment is for the teacher to know and learn about the learners. The information that is gathered from the students will direct the learning outcomes of what the teacher designs.

Part of knowing our learners are knowing that everyone can be at a different developmental place and have a different learning style that works. These differences are vital for me to provide the numerous learning opportunities for those that I am teaching. However, I do not believe that learning opportunities need to always be tailor-made to the learner's preferences as this limits how a student can truly stretch themselves in learning. I believe that these opportunities can help build the confidence of these learners but should not be limited to their preference.

For this reason, I seem to go at odds with contemporary and liberal educational idealists. I believe that students should be exposed to a wealth of opportunities and also recognize that life will not always tailor itself in the ways most convenient to our current learners. The learning environment that is produced in our classroom is about preparing our students for the world outside of the classroom. Learning preferences are important for students to become self-directed learners but it would be naive of any educator to expect that the rest of the world would make all the same sort of accommodations. The learning environment produced in my classroom will not give students this false sense of assurance and will be intended to also prepare students for difficult situations in life while accounting for ways to bridge the gaps necessary to learn.

## **TEACHING METHODS**

I believe that different learning situations give teachers different opportunities to fulfill the roles described by Pratt (1998). He describes five perspectives of teaching: transmission, apprenticeship, nurturing, developmental and social reform. From taking the survey, I found that

I lean heavily to the perspective of apprenticeship. As it happens, this makes sense since I thrive in opportunities where I work with students and can challenge them individually.

This discovery was made recently and so I am still learning how to utilize this perspective of teaching. However, it reminds me of how I work with individuals and how I can be effective in opportunities where I am able to work with students. This is why I never sit at my desk at school when students are doing work. I seek opportunities to interact with students and encourage critical thinking and integrity in their work. I have also learned to be patient to be effective with students to get them to think for themselves.

There is more than just how I interact with my students when discussing my teaching methods. There is a great deal in how I prepare and why I prepare what I teach in the way that I do. This is evident in how all lessons that I teach are introduced.

I am a firm believer that anything worked for in the classroom is transferrable to the future of the students. That is why I have my students consider the big picture of any lesson and reflect on how the big picture applies. This can be very challenging as I teach math but I steer the students in a constructive conversation about “when the content taught is used”. I rarely answer the question of “why students need to know what is taught” as this can only be answered subjectively and give reasons for students to feel that they don’t need to engage in a lesson. Rather I challenge students to consider how they can grow in their understanding of what is taught while considering the opportunities that are available to them through what is taught. I will never truly know the future of students but I firmly believe that attempting to make everything taught immediately relevant to what they currently know is a way to hold students back and prevents growth. I believe that students need to be challenged outside of what they

know. This is why I challenge all students to consider how and when the content being taught is applicable and how learning the content may provide future opportunities and success. This is why all students are introduced to the big picture of what is taught.

How the content is taught is also a difficult task. Again, I want students to explore how the content taught can be used and applied. Therefore all content is introduced in a way that requires the student's willingness to explore, interact and take chances.

Understanding that all students are different in the way they learn also plays a significant role in the instructional strategies. Therefore it is important for me to learn about the students I engage with and learn how the content can accommodate the diverse learning needs of the students while simultaneously looking for opportunities for students to be stretched by the introduction of different perspectives. If anything else, students can gain in learning through perspectives that are difficult for them by appreciating the differences amongst themselves. In any case, I hope to give all classes meaning in the same way that I expect to leave a course with a new understanding of the course content and what each student has to offer to the course.

Finally I believe that assessment is an important component of any teaching and learning experience. As a teacher, assessment is necessary to determine areas of strength and weakness while also determining the retention of information that is relevant. Assessment used to determine strengths and weaknesses are necessary for the purposes of giving students feedback and to formatively assess what they are learning and how it would impact the direction of curriculum.

Assessments that are more summative, like that of a test, are also relevant to my teaching. I may be more of a traditionalist but I believe that students do need to be assessed according to

the “bottom line”. To suggest that this would not occur outside of the classroom only prepares students in the wrong way and give them a false sense of assurance when they enter the working world.

As such, I believe that assigning grades are fine but feel that teachers need to recognize how to communicate progress and what the grade assign really means for a student as they move forward as their assessment is the best determinant in decided the next step a student will take. I have seen too many students that only fail forward into my high school classes with no expectations to succeed knowing it won't change much. This is not to say that tests and exams assessed better would solve this issue. However, we need to see these assessments as the best determinant of the next steps of a student.

## **MY CONTINUED GROWTH**

My development as a teacher greatly impacts my effectiveness as a teacher and the learning of my students. This cannot be understated. McKeachie and the authors of the book Teaching Tips put it this way, “Human beings have survived as a species because we are learners. We enjoy learning...we take pleasure in becoming and feeling competent” (2006, p. 344). I believe that there is so much more for me to learn and how to learn how people learn. It is a never ending process that at times exhausts me.

However, I will say that one main pleasure of teaching the last few years has been how much I have learned. My efforts to teach effectively have caused me to learn things that I would never have had it not been due to my pursuit of becoming a better teacher. It is my hope that this attitude translates into my interactions with students and encourages them to take similar steps in

learning and loving to learn. My ultimate goal is to get students to want to and love to learn without holding anything back.

### **Resources**

McKeachie, W., Svincki, M. & Others (2006). *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory For College and University Teachers*. 13<sup>th</sup> Edition. Houghton Mifflin.

Palmer, P. (1998). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscapes of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pratt, D. (1998). *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education*. Malabar, Florida. Krieger Publishing Company.

Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.