

Opportunity for all to Learn:
Educational and Teaching Philosophy Statement
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“Bridge building requires someone to lay the first plank. Schools are often structured around the notion that the child should lay the first, the second ... it seems clear enough to me that the teacher must be the architect and the contractor who begins to build the bridge. [The teacher] must know the child in order to know where to put that first plank” (Ayers, 88). A teacher must learn to get to know their students, hope to make positive changes in their academic habits which lead to success, but also consider the realities of the world a teacher’s students are growing up. A teacher is not just a moderator of knowledge in a classroom but a role model, a guardian, a leader, a fellow spirit, a learner, and an explorer. You only have one year with each group of students as a teacher to make an impression upon and then they leave your classrooms. In order for a teacher to provide a memorable as well as successful education for all students, a teacher must try to make additional quality resources accessible. Furthermore teachers should make curriculum, assessment, and instruction related to practical life skills that students should develop in order to thrive in a globalized society. We are preparing their minds to become critically thinking and conscientious individuals not a memory bank of facts. Additionally, a teacher must foster diversity in the classroom, create realistic teacher expectations as well as pedagogy, and ensure an equal opportunity education for all students.

Before taking classes in the School of Education there were several perspectives I held about teaching as a profession, how teachers should conduct themselves in a classroom, as well as what I wanted to bring to the classroom as a future teacher. First of all, there were several teachers I viewed as more or less successful and others who I used as an example of ineffective teachers. Ideally I wanted to be a confidant for my students that they could confide in for traumatic or difficult situations in their life originally. I also wanted to tackle the harder topics to teach to prepare students with a solid foundation in each subject. Additionally, I want to try to give students a more advanced leg up in the subject(s) I teach. I felt there were gaps in my education that I want to prevent from forming in my future students’ lives. Furthermore, I always claimed that I did not and would not “teach to the textbook” (Rubbo).

Once I started the School of Education classes, my preconceived notions were either affirmed or contradicted. I still believed teachers were more than people who lectured in front of a class but teaching was much more complex than I imagined. For instance, I realized how a teacher needs to take some form of command over their classroom to keep order as well as gain respect. This does not involve running your class as a dictatorship, but making sure the students understand that you are their teacher and not their peer. Additionally, I want the freedom to teach what I believe is necessary for each subject rather than feeling confined to the content in textbooks. However, I will need to tailor my ideal curriculum in order to follow the school system where I teach. The School of Education classes primarily made me consider the contributing factors which affect the classroom environment.

Moreover, fostering diversity within the classroom is also extremely important so students may have a more dynamic and healthy learning environment. “Full inclusion ... will improve the educational achievement and social development of children with disabilities ... Also, it is hoped, bias against children ... decreases because of the interactions of students with disabilities with other students” (Spring, 119). This idea goes for inclusion of all types of students (with

disabilities or other types of differences) which can create a more welcoming and encouraging educational environment for all. Diversity comes in many shapes and sizes within a classroom. Whether it is the wide range of extracurriculars your students enjoy or your eye color; diversity is an important and complex idea to incorporate in your classroom. Teacher Jane Elliot used eye color to differentiate students in order to make a greater point about racism in society during a critical time in history for race relations as well as ignorance within her own classroom. In 1968 she developed an activity to show students that our differences are unique as well as important and to encourage students to go beyond the surface of our appearance (Elliot). Diversity has many faces: race, gender, age, passions, intelligence, aspirations, orientation, geography, and many others which make up who the student is, not just what they represent. You cannot just come into a classroom with preconceived notions and your personal set of biases to instruct your students and hope to get to know them as well as be an effective teacher. You will only limit yourself if you approach education that way. You should not “judge a book by its cover” you need to look deeper and explore your students in order to understand as well as teach them effectively (Eliot and James).

Making sure that resources are available for students is an extremely important yet daunting task. For example, this is especially the case in a low socioeconomic status (SES) area. As a teacher, trying to provide the necessary resources for students to improve their grade, or even pass the subject is critical for a successful year. This success is not limited to improving test scores in order to meet standards, but also realizing that your students grasped and mastered the concepts. Techniques which adequately help your students improve may include tutoring sessions, before or after school practice, homework, other study materials, and creative ways for students to encourage each other as well as help each other master the course material. Not only an abundance of materials and resources should be accessible but an arrangement of differentiated materials is important to accommodate as many students as possible. Teachers should strive for Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concepts and curriculum as an attempt to reach all students for as much of the content as possible. If a teacher tries to keep these ideas in mind and create opportunities for resources to be available to as many students as possible, the teacher will see the fruits of his or her hard work and create more successful students with their social as well as academic performance.

As you get to know your students, you should tailor your lesson plans as well as classroom expectations to cater to their certain needs. As a dance instructor previously, I started the year too relaxed with my students and had to sharpen classroom rules half way through the year. This was a tough transition and though it worked out in this instance, it might not be as successful in the future. You must communicate well-established expectations to your students and think ahead of potential problems, road blocks, or differences you should consider. Knowing your students helps you better prepare for future problems in your classroom. You cannot come in with a blank slate of ideas for how to run your classroom; you must come in with something but be willing to shape that something according to your students’ needs. Additionally when setting expectations and rules, a teacher must keep in mind the behavioral tendencies for the students at those certain ages, the makeup of their demographics, the influence of their demographics, potential home life advantages or disadvantages, and their likes or interests. All of these factors should feed into the way you conduct your classroom sessions each day. With the research I conducted for a research methods course, I found there are several factors that play into creating a safe and healthy academic environment. The research specifically deals with LGBTQ students and the research has found that using a three-pronged approach, all students

can have the opportunity to do well and feel comfortable in the classroom. This included well-designed policy made to ensure safety and rights for all students, supportive environments inside as well as outside of the classroom, and finally all- inclusive school programs.

As a future teacher I want my students to come away from my classroom(s) feeling as if they have learned something and grown in some way. It is hopefully what any teacher should wish to accomplish within their year time span that they work with a given group of students. They should learn not only academic concepts but life skills which prepare them to enter into the real world beyond the classroom walls. My passion for teaching encourages me to continue expanding my knowledge about effective pedagogy for my future students as well as ways to help them be prepared for their future lives, wherever they may go. “In all things, what may save you is your passion” (James). I want to teach what I believe is important for the subject, not just for the test or to raise my salary or keep my job at the risk of losing kids to the educational system. I want to provide an equal opportunity for all students to learn, feel welcome, have the ability to achieve, and foster a love for learning.

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