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My Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy of teaching can best be summed up by the statement that all students have a right to learn, to an education, and more importantly that all students can learn. I believe that every student can learn and be successful and it is up to the teacher to find a way to reach each student. Too many students are too often passed through the system without acquiring the knowledge necessary to move to the next grade or class. Students may pick up some of the information and facts being presented, but when they are not truly learning and gaining knowledge, and cannot take the information being presented and connect it to their own lives and experiences, they will never be successful learners. Our system has ignored these students who are often labeled as difficult or hopeless, and allowed them to drop out of school at a young age or finish school without gaining anything from the experience. These students become educational nomads who won't continue their educations or be able to take advantage of the majority of jobs in our country which require an education. I was privileged to grow up in a family where the decision of whether to attend college wasn't even a question; my sisters and I were never asked if we were going to go to college, but where we wanted to go to college. Unfortunately, too many students do not grow up with these advantages. I want every student who wants to get an education to be able to do so. I want education to be a priority in our country instead of being one of the areas in which money and resources are often cut when governments are having money

troubles. I want people to “put their money where their mouth is” and not pay education such lip service. Everyone says they want good schools, but few actually do anything about it or really support schools in the way they need. The often quoted line from the Whitney Houston song, *Greatest Love of All*, “I believe that children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way” should not be a punch line, but a policy statement. We spend trillions on “defending” our country, invading other countries and building bombs, but we can’t give teachers the resources they need to actually teach students. I believe that we have come to a precipice in education; the way we’ve been doing things for many years isn’t working and we need a BIG change; education, can and should, be the tool for that change.

I believe that students learn best when the instruction is tied to their experiences, is student-centered, actively engages them, and when they have a stake in the process. These components can make for a successful learning environment where students have the freedom and safety to really engage in the learning process. We must block out the outside world while we are in the classroom and tackle the huge challenge of helping these students attain an education.

Success will happen much more easily when learning is taken out of the traditional classroom and formed into a more collaborative, student-centered, environment where students actually learn and can take the information and use it in other areas of their lives. There is a lot of ingrained opposition to this approach; many educators are very accustomed to, and comfortable with, teaching by traditional lecturing. This often does not work for the students very well and treats them as empty

vessels to be filled instead of active participants in the learning process who have valuable things to add to the class. I believe in focusing on the process more than the content; the content because the means to an end instead of the end itself. We must teach students the process of learning and discovering for themselves. My teaching focuses on information literacy and I want students to learn the process of effectively and efficiently finding, critically evaluating and synthesizing information. I want to work with students on understanding the process of discovering the information they need for their research instead of just showing them a bunch of places to go to find information (databases, indexes, library catalog and other library resources). If students can understand and master this process, they will be able to take it and apply it to other research they are doing, and will do in the future. The content can no longer be king; the process must be emphasized and understood.

I believe teachers can reach students only when they know where they are; I think David Ausubel in *Educational Psychology: a cognitive view* said it best when he stated, ““The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly.” I believe teachers must adequately understand where students are, where they’re coming from and what experiences they’ve had in order to reach these students and start building bridges to the places the instructor wants them to be. I have an activity in my classes that tries to accomplish this. After we do the initial activity in class, I put the students in groups and have them search for a background source, article, book, opinion or web site. I tell the students to go where they would normally go to search for that type of resource. Most,

if not all, students go directly to the web and start searching on Google. I then have one volunteer from each group come up to the front of the class and share the resource they found. We discuss the resource and talk about the pros and cons of it and then I try to “bridge the gap” and show them a parallel library resource that can give them the same type of information, but is usually more reliable, authoritative, etc. This activity gets at the heart of what I am trying to do by seeing where the students are (where they go to find information for their research) and taking them where I want them to go (library resources).

I think students learn best when they are actively engaged. They have been treated as passive vessels to be filled for too long and we must change the game, and our expectations, for students in our classes. By making the classroom a learner-centered environment, and changing our expectations of what students will actually do in our classes, we shift the onus for learning onto the students and give them a larger stake in the process. I believe that students learn by doing and by being allowed to have a natural process of discovery. Students have become passive learners because we have forced them to; we’ve talked at them for their whole lives and just expected them to listen and learn from it, but it hasn’t worked well. Students need to be actively engaged in the process of learning in order to learn the problem-solving, critical thinking and information-processing skills they will need to be successful lifelong learners. I use a few different active learning techniques, tools and strategies in my classes like clickers and the Cephalonian Method and I am continually trying new things and looking for new

ideas and approaches to take. These tools are not only fun for the students during class, but a valuable learning experience.

I believe in continuing my own education as much as possible. I fully embrace the lifelong learning goal and plan to continue engaging in professional development activities until my time as an educator ends. I believe that a teacher is never perfect and is always able to learn and improve in their teaching. I will attend conferences and teacher training sessions and take advantage of other professional development opportunities as they arise. I will deliver presentations to other librarians and educators on teaching related topics and ideas I am passionate and knowledgeable about. I also plan to continue reading and learning about education, teaching, educational psychology, etc. I also plan to continue my pursuit of a MAED and possibly a PhD. I love to teach and I am good at it. I am continually striving to do better and will work hard to do my very best for my students.