

Teaching Philosophy

The Role of the Teacher:

Oscar Wilde once said, “Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.” Wilde may have been spurning the very idea of formalized education, but I believe that teachers can, and should, take a great deal of their teaching philosophies from the idea that a great deal of worthwhile knowledge cannot be explicitly taught in the classroom. There are some aspects of each content area, such as grammar rules or historical events, that every student should learn in school, but teachers should not view education as just teaching students facts and figures.

Learning objective facts and figures is an important and necessary aspect of education, but it is not the only, or even the most important, aspect. Students need to learn how to think for themselves, how to ask questions, and how to work toward changing things with which they disagree. Teachers need to create an environment that encourages this behavior.

I do not believe that a teacher’s job is to create a desire to learn in students, but rather to tap into the curiosity and thirst for knowledge that are inherent traits in all human beings. Students should feel a sense of ownership and responsibility toward learning. Although parents, teachers, and society all play important roles in the education of America’s children, it is ultimately up to each individual student to decide the desired outcome of his or her education. This could entail being a global citizen, gaining a better understanding of the world, or simply achieving their greatest academic potential. Until students decide to take responsibility of their own learning, they will simply be going through the motions.

Unfortunately, American society has been conditioned to not question the status quo, and the majority of students are content with simply doing what they are told without giving any thought to the reasons behind their actions. Therefore, the majority of students do not understand or take responsibility for their learning and do not receive the best education possible. Consequently, the formal school system is often not used to its fullest potential. Educators need to teach their students to ask questions and to decide for themselves what their education means to them. The purpose of education will be different for every student, so it is important for each student to figure out this purpose for his- or herself. Teachers should serve as guides along this road toward self-discovery.

Student Involvement in the Curriculum:

I believe that there are certain aspects, a “canon”, in each particular content area that should be taught to all students. However, I believe that each individual student is different, and, therefore, each individual classroom have a different dynamic as well as students with different interests and learning styles. Teachers need to be aware of these differences and adapt their teaching styles and the curriculum to match student needs and interests. In order to do this effectively, I believe that students should have the opportunity to contribute their own ideas to both how and what they are going to learn.

Student involvement in the curriculum does not have to be major. It could range from giving students the choice between two poems to read, to letting students pick whether they want to do the odd or even book problems, to simply allowing students to choose between learning concept A or concept B first. Allowing students to make choices in their education gives them feel a sense of ownership of what they are learning. When students feel as though they have a

say in what they do and what they learn, they will be more likely to participate and to put forth the effort necessary for success. Increasing student choices increases intrinsic motivation, which leads to more successful, and usually happier, students.

Student Involvement in Management:

I believe that student involvement in classroom management should be handled much in the same way as student involvement in the curriculum. Students should be given choices and made to feel as though they have a certain amount of say in how the classroom is run. Coming up with rules as a class and letting students who misbehave come up with their own consequences are both simple ways to give students a sense of responsibility when it comes to both their behavior and the behavior of their peers.

Giving students choices also lets them know they have the respect of their teacher. I believe that respect creates respect. If teachers hold their students in high esteem and exhibit their respect frequently, students will be more likely value their teachers. This concept of “treat others as you would like to be treated” is drilled into children from an early age, but teachers often do not know how to partner being an authority figure with showing respect to their students and valuing student opinions. When students do not feel as though they are being respected, there is no reason for them to show any respect in return.

It is also very important for teachers to realize that all students are different, and different students may need to be treated differently. In some instances, treating students equally may be completely unfair. As Jim Fay and David Funk write, “‘Fair’ is often not identical treatment, but, rather, giving what is needed” (Fay, 100). I believe that classrooms should be managed less with an explicit set of rules and more with a set of expectations or principles that all students are

expected to follow. Instead of creating specific rules about every type of situation that could conceivably occur, students in a classroom should simply be expected to treat others with kindness and respect. This way, teachers do not need to foresee and make rules for every instance and students do not have an explicit set of rules to break, because, as all students know, rules are meant to be broken.

I also believe that, because students are all different, consequences of misbehavior or disrespect of the expectations of a classroom should be created on a case-by-case basis. I also believe that students should have a say in the consequences that are placed upon them. For the most part, students are able to come up with creative and appropriate consequences. Students who are given the chance to create their own consequences are more likely to accept the repercussions of their misbehavior and learn from their actions. These students are also less likely to see their teacher as the “bad guy”. Instead, they recognize that the consequences are a direct result of their own actions.

Works Cited

Fay, Jim, and David Funk. Teaching with Love & Logic: Taking Control of the Classroom.

Golden, CO: The Love and Logic Press Inc., 1995.