Educational Philosophy Statement

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I believe that education occurs both in and out of the academic setting and it is my responsibility to provide my students with the tools to take advantage of any and all learning situations. It is the knowledge of how to learn and how to use information to enhance their lives that is of utmost importance to my students. As their teacher, it is necessary that I provide those skills through the teaching of curriculum materials and classroom activities. A secondary responsibility is to help my students use their learning to help better the society in which they live.

In order for children to learn they need to have a physically and psychologically safe environment where they can take risks to gain experience and knowledge. Safety in a classroom is created by setting rules and routines early in the year and reinforcing those rules and routines until the class can maintain momentum through the bumpy changes in the school year. Predictability creates a comfort zone in which taking risks is a safe enterprise for the student. Activities need to be designed to meet individual student needs and learning styles allowing all students to be successful.

The teacher’s duty is to provide a safe, secure environment within which students can learn to learn about themselves, the subject matter, and the world. We, as teachers, need to nourish our students, help them exercise their wings, and then push them from the nest so they may SOAR!

All this being said, let me elaborate on some of the finer details posed by the essential questions of my *Foundations of Learning* course regarding the learner and learning, content, learning facilitation, and professional responsibility.

Teaching is the act of providing information and opportunities for students to embrace that information. That embracing (and, hopefully, memory retention) is the act of learning specific data. It is a simple relationship between teacher and student until you examine the true purpose of learning which is to provide connection points between the known and the unknown as entry points to expand understanding and illuminate relationships between unlike things. Can we teach and students not learn? Yes. Can students learn without us teaching? Yes. What we provide as teachers to our students is a scaffolded experience that cooperatively builds their foundations to increase the connections available for them to link with learning and experiences yet to come. One aspect of teaching/learning that teachers need to be aware of is the different ways students learn. Teachers do this by noticing when/how things “click” with different students and when students are successful. Even more important than identifying specific learning styles, intelligences, or preferences is to try to present material in a way that makes sense to students and/or has some real meaning to them. This focus will help increase memory retention that leads to better learning in the future of related information. The key to all successful learning is to bring the teaching to the student’s figurative home. Students are not cookie cutter figures, identical in all aspects of life, but are individuals with distinct past experiences, future aspirations, and current social situations. It is the teacher’s responsibility to take the best of what is seen in each student and use it to help shore up where the student has less desireable attributes/experiences. We should always make our students feel that they are absolutely perfect just the way they are and that everything we do is not to change them but to ensure that that perfection continues as they grow and learn. Students should be able to access more help in certain areas without being labeled as lacking by remembering to celebrate the greatness of those students not just focusing on the weaknesses. Part of our education system is the unwritten social education that occurs in the classroom and beyond. It is that element that can be lost when coded students do not participate in a classroom setting but it is important to balance that need with the need for the rest of the class to be able to take advantage of their opportunities of learning without being distracted when there are student attention/behavior issues. Ultimately, an effective learning environment is a place where students feel safe enough to take risks in learning while knowing that they are valued and staff cares that all basic needs are taken care of for each student so they can focus on the incredible task of blossoming into their future selves.

Standards are a tricky thing because they are subjective based on who is deciding what should be. As an individual there are certain standards expected but there are also school, district, community, state, and national standards which may be the same, complementary, or completely at odds with our own personal standards. As teachers, we need to provide opportunities for our students to meet the standards expected of them to the best of our abilities. Many of the standards will be dictated based on the organization through which we are employed and that organization may decide for us what to teach and when. In most areas, we still get to choose how we teach the material but the expectation is that our teaching methods will bring our students to the developmental levels of learning required to meet the standards by which they will be judged. And those standards will change! Just as our educational needs have changed as we have moved from an agricultural age into an industrial age into a computer age and on into a conceptual age that relies less on adults that can run assembly lines and repetitive action jobs and more on adults that can think outside the box and create interpersonal connections through design, story, and empathy. 21st century learning goals are fast moving beyond technology skills and on to traits and ways of working/thinking that have previously been be less valued. Our students will move into work worlds where they need to be inventive, creative, and imaginitive in order to have a better, more meaningful, and productive future. Yes, being tech-savvy is important to student success but so is learning to think for themselves and imagine solutions where only problems exist. They need to be their own champions rather than feeling they are entitled to having answers given to them or waiting for the world to save them.

Classroom management is one of those catch-phrases that really means: how do you provide an enriching, positive, learning environment which meets all students individual needs without impeding any students rights to feel in control of their existence. The key word here is “individual!” No one plan will work for every teacher, class, or student. What it takes is recognizing the positive attributes of each student while seeing the areas of need/issue and planning activities that build on the former and lessen the impact of the latter. It also requires flexibility in action as circumstances can change quickly requiring a teacher to adjust (or scrap) a lesson. By knowing our students well, we can find ways to assess their true strengths and abilities that may not be demonstrated through a cookie cutter test assessment approach. I favor choice and real-life activites when it comes to assessment. Allowing students to choose their method of presentation provided that certain aspects are included through use of a checklist and/or rubric gives students a sense of control and builds their connection to the assessment thereby providing a better analysis of their knowledge than a standardized, impersonal evaluation.

Learning is much like looking at the history of education. Some of what is learned is forgotten or discarded. Some is reconnected to new learning and some is created in a completely new and unconnected way that eventually resolves itself into the picture as a whole. The impact and importance of individual educational theories and pioneers ebbs and flows as societal changes take place and those in power push those theories they feel strongly about. Historically, very few were in charge of deciding the educational path of the masses but that has changed as we’ve moved through the ages into the conceptual age where there is abundance in choice and therefore theories/policies help consumers determine which method of education will work for their own children. In the past, there were public schools and private schools but only the well-off or those with connections had access to the latter and most people were complacent about drastic changes. Many generations felt that if it worked for them it was fine for their kids and that would hold true today if the society and global culture had remained the same. Now we look back at what was wrong with our education and strive for something better for our kids. We question if the current schools can be fixed or should they be scrapped and if not these schools then where and how would our children learn. This society stresses being #1 to the point that the ideal is unattainable to most, but not because they are less but because what is being judged is not the totalness of them being their best but one aspect that those in position of power have determined to be most critical. Now the question is whether powers that be have truly factored into the equation the minor detail that these are individual human beings with human frailities and abilities in unique combinations that can hardly be accurately measured by one standardized test. The authorities have dictated standards and requirements that ultimately impact each teacher whether it is requiring certification, professional development methods/hours for re-certification, and highly-qualified status to allow us to teach or penalizing schools/districts for lack of progress on their standardized testing. The field of teaching is like most fields of employment: you either acquiese to the powers above or move out. Which brings me to the characteristics of an effective teacher. An effective teacher needs to have a drive for the profession that exceeds the drain caused by non-student issues. An effective teacher tends to have an outlook that the students’ success is paramount to any recognition or success he/she may receive. And, most importantly, an effective teacher needs to feel that his/her students deserve her best regardless of whether they present their best selves. When I look at what I believe makes me an effective teacher, I know that it begins with a deep-seated desire to help students find their own “ah-ha” moments in learning. My own love of learning leaves me open to trying new methods and designing activities that will assist my students in their journey of learning. Because I am so determined to facilitate my students’ success, I am constantly observing and modifying my ideas and plans to account for individual student needs and interests. I am my students’ voice until they can take on their own advocacy and I must take on that responsibility with respect and honor knowing that, for some kids, I may be their own voice and their only chance at creating a foundation that will lead to a productive and meaningful adulthood.