Philosophy Of Teaching And Learning

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Education is the foundation for empowerment and success. A solid education will open doors of opportunity, create positive citizens, and establish life-long learners. I believe a primary role of the teacher is to create a social learning environment where students are engaged and knowledge is constructed. I also believe teachers need to differentiate instruction to make content available to all students. Assessments are necessary in education, and it is essential for assessments to reflect learning objectives so that students can demonstrate authentic understanding within the context of established goals. Student engagement and motivation is one of the largest factors in learning. Student engagement and motivation begins with the teacher making teaching and learning active rather than passive activities. I believe character education is becoming increasingly important in education, so students can be prepared for success in life and digital life. By addressing these factors in online and face to face classrooms, a teacher can create a dynamic, student-centered classroom focused on the growth of each child.

I believe students construct knowledge through hands-on learning, social interactions, and authentic experiences. The teachers role is not to impart knowledge. It is to create situations where students learn by active involvement in meaningful activities, reflection, and collaborating with others. Peer learning is a foundational block of constructivist philosophy. If given the opportunity, students will observe, interpret, process, test theories and gain knowledge through social interactions (Swan, Garrison, & Richardson, 2009). This can create an environment where students are empowered with the confidence to apply knowledge gained in a peer teaching role. I believe mixed-ability grouping is most beneficial because of the multiple perspectives and learning potential. Ally (2008) supports this by stating, "When assigning group work, membership should be based on the expertise level and learning style of individual group members, so that individual team members can benefit from one another's strengths" (p. 31). Reflection time must also be built into the routine so students can make generalizations that can

be applied to new situations (Benander, 2009). I believe incorporating a multiple intelligence

approach is one way to effectively address different learning modalities and assist in

incorporating constructivist practices in lesson planning. The Internet provides a platform that

honors these multiple intelligences- abstract, textual, visual, musical, social, and kinesthetic,

and lends itself to personalized learning experiences. When selecting digital tools it is important

to consider using a variety of resources that cater to the multiple intelligences. As Brown,

(2000) states, "As educators, we now have the chance to construct a medium that enables all

young people to become engaged in their ideal way of learning" (p. 2). I believe learning

activities should be sprinkled with music, movement, media, and cooperative learning so all

children can be successful, regardless of their learning style. When teachers scaffold lessons

so students construct knowledge and personalize the information gained, an environment of

active learning has been obtained.

Effective unit planning includes learning objectives, standards, and assessments that are

tied to a sequential and scaffolded plan of lessons with clear and defined objectives. Designing

curriculum with a variety of forward-looking assessments that are intended to guide instruction,

monitor student progress, and provide students an opportunity to show what they know, sets the

stage for an enhanced teaching and learning environment. First, I believe learning objectives

need to be tied to standards because standards provide a purpose; a scaffolded roadmap of

where students need to be. Formative and summative assessments are necessary in unit

planning and delivery. Teachers should plan formative assessments and feedback for more

than just data driven instruction. Teachers need to reflect on the effectiveness of their delivery

or teaching strategies and assessments can assist in this reflective practice. Additionally, I

believe the best formative assessments are educative assessments which are designed to

enhance the learning process by providing opportunities for teachers to conference with

students. As you can see, educative assessments are more than a record of student progress.

It is a deliberate act of monitoring progress and establishing student learning goals in a way that is learner centered. I am a firm believer that summative assessments are more than tests. Summative assessments should include multiple mediums where students have the opportunity to show what they know in a variety of formats (written, audio, pictorial, etc). I also believe assessments should be more than assigning a grade. The feedback that accompanies an assessment is an opportunity to build mutual respect between student and teacher and confidence in students. To establish this rapport and focus on building off positive attributes, feedback must include praise and applause, highlighting the things students are doing well" (Fink, 2013). If students are going to really listen to teacher feedback, they must feel valued as an individual, as rules without relationships usually equals rebellion. By providing learners with timely, specific feedback, students can use the information to improve their efforts or redirect energy. Assessments and feedback are valuable tools for both the teacher and the student and are an essential means of measuring progress and guiding future learning.

Student engagement and motivation is one of the largest factors in learning. Engagement is more than the ability to stay on-task and complete assigned work. It is about passion, and it revolves around decision-making authority, personal interest and the perceived value of an activity. Ally, (2008) supports this by stating, "Assignments and projects should allow learners to choose meaningful activities to help them apply and personalize the information (p. 31). Student engagement and motivation begins with the teacher making teaching and learning an active rather than passive activity. Attitudes toward school often act as filters that enhance or inhibit learning. Engaging students is at the heart of what teachers do daily and is what differentiates the good teacher from the GREAT. Engaged students are curious about what they're learning and therefore motivated to put forth the effort to understand the material. In my opinion, the single biggest factor in motivating students is making the learning fun. "Fun" depends on the learning styles and interests of the individual student, but

generally involves authentic learning experiences, games, experiments, student choice, hands-on activities, themes or projects that allow students to move around, work together, get their hands dirty and thereby learn trough active inquiry. I believe that Project Based Learning (PBL) is a great constructivist strategy that is a good framework to increase student engagement. David, (2008) defines PBL by stating, "The core idea of project-based learning is that real-world problems capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking as the students' acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem solving context" (p .82). Authentic, hands on learning is the essence of PBL, and inclusion of these elements can naturally lend themselves to a more engaged classroom of students.

Youth of today live in an on-demand world and the Internet supports networking on a global scale. I believe it is essential to teach character education beginning in elementary school, including: citizenship, digital ethics, Internet safety, and social and legal issues. Say, show, do. These three words summarize constructivism and good teaching. If we want kids to walk in a quiet, straight line, we tell them what we expect, demonstrate what it looks like, and then let them practice in real world context. Why then would we expect kids to be good digital citizens without explicit instruction and guided practice? We create a taboo around the Internet when we tell kids they should pursue digital interests outside of school, while adults aren't present. I believe in the one-life perspective as it relates to character education. Educators need to help students live one, integrated life, by teaching and encouraging appropriate technology use at school as well as discussing it within the context of community and society. Ohler, (2011) states, "We need to not only help students learn to use these tools in smart, productive ways, but also help them place these tools in the larger context of building community, behaving responsibly, and imagining a healthy and productive future, both locally and globally" (p. 2). This can't be achieved if the use of certain technology is outright banned from their school lives. The digital world of today has forced us to think more critically about

ownership, privacy, identify, social interactions and more. I believe it is essential for teachers

model ethical behavior by managing and maintaining a positive digital footprint and abiding by

Federal laws that are aimed to protect student privacy. But, teacher modeling of an online

presence is not enough; it is just a start. It is essential to scaffold curriculum around the one-life

perspective. Digital tools and resources are being utilized by young children inside and outside

of school. It's time to remove the taboo and start conversations and explicit instruction.

Lawsuits and immoral behavior can be expected to continue unless we take our heads out of

the sand and teach students how to be mindful World Wide Web citizens.

     Together, these elements are the building blocks of a dynamic, student centered

classroom focused on the growth of each child.

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