

My Educational Philosophy

By: Michael Ricke

Education in its simplest form is the process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge. But to me education is much more than that - education is the process of preparing a student for their future. Education teaches a student how to think, rather than telling them what to think. Education cultivates the mind of the individual student by using a variety of different teaching strategies and methods. Education involves helping students understand right from wrong. Education helps an individual acquire social skills necessary to function in the classroom, school, community and the world. Education develops a student's creative thinking skills and imagination. Education builds resourceful human beings gives students a sense of personal fulfillment.

I believe that all children are unique individuals whose learning styles and attitudes reflect his or her own interests, strengths, challenges, background, beliefs, experiences and personality. Students at every level are growing intellectually, emotionally, socially, and even physically. It is my job as an educator to help students in all of these areas by providing a classroom setting that is safe, secure, caring, inviting, stimulating, non threatening, and supportive. I believe the classroom must be a place in which students want to learn. They must feel a sense of belonging and pride; both pride in their work, and pride in the classroom itself. I want my classroom to be a place where learning will take place willingly and naturally.

I believe that students learn in a variety of different ways and it my job as an educator to try and help each child learn in the way that suits them best. Some students learn best by doing hands on activities, others by working in smaller groups that incorporate peer teaching, still others learn best when we use visual media and the internet, and yes, some students do learn best when a teacher presents the information to them in a lecture type format. It is not an easy task to find the method of teaching that works best for each student; but taking the time to talk with my students, listen to them, and observe them in the classroom proves invaluable for me in terms of evaluating their individual learning styles and attitudes. In turn, the knowledge I gain aids me in reaching them on an individual level. It is not realistic to think that I can accommodate every learning style in every lesson, but it is important for me to do whatever I can to enhance the learning of each one of my students.

As an educator, it is hard for me to tie myself into one particular teaching philosophy. I believe that a good teacher is always evaluating and tweaking his or her philosophy based on the needs of the students that come into their classroom on a given school year. As I went through this class and learned about the different teaching philosophies, I feel my beliefs on education are most closely aligned with the constructivist approach to teaching and learning. I say this because I believe that students learn best when they are able to make connections in their learning with past and present experiences. When

students are able to “tie in” new information with information that they have already acquired, it gives the information relevance and leads to a deeper understanding and internalization of that information.

As a result of this belief, I feel that the education of the student needs to tie into the social experiences of the student. Like it or not, students are greatly affected by the world around them – not only by what they experience in their school and classroom, but also by what they experience outside of school – at home and in their communities. To simply ignore the world of the student and just continue to “teach what I’ve always taught” or focus exclusively on covering just the content standards is not only impractical, but irresponsible. If I can somehow connect what is going on around the student – their social experiences – to their learning, it will not only make the learning relevant to the student, but it will also build a relationship with that student because you are showing them that you are taking an active and personal interest in their learning.

It is this same thinking that makes me believe that the No Child Left Behind Act is irretrievably flawed. While I do think that the idea of NCLB was noble, the implementation of it was swift and not well thought out. All educators want students to be successful or “proficient” as NCLB would call it. However, to expose students to an unprecedented number of tests in order to prove whether or not that child is “proficient,” I believe, has set education back many years. Teachers are losing their creativity as a result of the pressures of meeting AYP at their grade level. Many of the activities that promote high level thinking and learning have been substituted with activities that teach test taking strategies and even “teaching to the test.” The high stakes testing that is associated with NCLB has shifted the focus away from learning activities that are meaningful, fun and interesting to students to learning that will achieve the highest score on a test – learning that often involves memorization and repetition.

As a teacher that aligns himself with constructivist thinking, I want to make my classroom as democratic as possible. While I don’t believe that there can be a “Truly Democratic Classroom” in the literal sense, I do think that we should allow students to have some “voice and choice” in different aspects of the classroom and in different activities that take place in the classroom. I am a big believer in giving students choices. I believe that when a child feels that they have a little “power” when it comes to their learning, they are more likely to engage themselves in their learning – the result is a student who has found meaning in their learning and will retain that information over time. I feel that if I can give my students a little bit of freedom and choice, I will also help them to become better citizens who are more prepared for the “real life” outside of the classroom.

In conclusion, I have always been a big believer that teachers have to have a “student first” attitude in everything they do – from setting up their classroom to planning their lessons to deciding on activities.

What is best for the student is not always what's easiest or most convenient for the teacher. Educating a student is much more than simply providing them with information. I am charged with the challenging task of helping that child to grow intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically. It is my goal as an educator to use all of the resources at my disposal to maximize student learning and prepare them for their future.