

## **My Educational Philosophy**

Carrie Elizabeth Reno

I believe that all students are capable of learning when instruction is given in meaningful and appropriate ways. I also believe that it is not enough to be exuberant about teaching but such exuberance must be tempered by discipline and reflective practices. The theories that largely drive my beliefs are those of Lev Vygotsky and critical thinking.

Lev Vygotsky believed that the best way to teach a child is by a gradual release of responsibility. Initially, a child must be taught in explicit ways through modeling a focused task designed to develop a specific skill. As a child develops their abilities, the instruction must match that student's needs. In other words, my role as a teacher is to assess what abilities the student already has and work to enhance the development those abilities. This assessment must be based not only on the state standards but an understanding of child development and goals based on that student's individual needs. The end goal is to guide a student to a point where more of the responsibility for the successful application of the skills taught is the student's responsibility rather than the teacher's.

In order for me to teach in this way, I need to be reflective about my practice. I need to ask myself, what about my teaching was successful, what was not and how can I improve the instruction so that my teaching better matches the needs of my students individually and as a whole? If the majority of the students are struggling with a particular lesson then chances are there is something wrong with the lesson itself or the way I am teaching it and not the students. If the students overall are successful then perhaps they are ready for more challenges. I believe that it is only through consistent reflection, observational notes, work samples and review of students' performances that I can truly gauge the effectiveness of my instruction and the progress of the students.

Critical thinking skills are important to developing a life-long desire to learn. The skills required in critical thinking are those that can be explicitly taught. These skills would include concepts of social, emotional, communication and global perspectives. By teaching these skills we are allowing students to see purpose in what they are learning. What can they do with the knowledge they have gained? Do they have the ability to see issues or ideas from more than just their own perspective? What evidence are they using to support their beliefs? Are they able to

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articulate their ideas and opinions in effective, meaningful and appropriate ways? Can they understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors? It is through the use of questions that I hope to encourage these skills. I want to not only ask questions that encourage deep thinking but also encourage the students to develop and ask their own questions as well. Questions I believe are what can propel learning. Most of us enter the world brimming with curiosity. It is my responsibility to encourage, develop and direct that curiosity into meaningful learning.

I believe that these skills can be taught through developing a classroom community. Only by explicitly teaching such skills and allowing students to practice those skills in a safe and comfortable learning environment can we prepare the students to apply what they know. This means that I will be responsible for determining the best ways to establish a safe and comfortable environment. I will need to make the learning and behavior expectations clear. Each student will be expected to put forth effort with regards to meeting those expectations. It is my goal that by creating such a welcoming and safe environment, where students feel comfortable taking risks in the audience of their peers, effective learning will occur.

By the end of the school year, I will have worked towards the goal that my students can all move to the next level in their education as confident and engaged learners. I intend to develop students who view themselves as life-long learners. Students who realize that knowledge is never stagnant and that they are ultimately responsible for what it is they learn about in this world and the actions they take to contribute to it. I am determined to help them become exuberant learners with the discipline and focus to make the world a better place. I intend to do what it takes to model such beliefs through my own practices. I will never stop learning and will always question what it is that I can do to improve or hone my skills and my practice for the benefit of my students.