**My Philosophy of Education**

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**Introduction**

My personal good, or greatest goal as a teacher is positively impacting my students through offering them a redemptive view on education. The greatest achievement I can attain as a teacher is for my students to realize that education is a tool for them to learn the skills they need to glorify God in their personal calling (Knight, 2006). This I believe, allows them to not only excel at their education, but desire to do well, and such an attitude will have a positive impact on their ability to continue to be lifelong learners.

I see education as more than just the memorization of vital information necessary to be a well-functioning adult and see it as an opportunity for students to learn about the world that God has created, and where they fit in this world (Graham, 2003). Education also allows for them to learn of the wonder of the intricate world that He has created to inspire further worship in their lives.

For me, to be educated does not mean to have the various head knowledges required to pass a standardized test, or state standards. Instead, being educated to me means cultivating skills and interests in students so that they are able to become lifelong learners, with desire to solve problems on their own beyond their involvement in formalized education. This in my mind leads to holistic wellbeing and curiosity for creative outlets, like God has created humans. This lines up with statements by Thomas Jefferson about the idea of education. As a Christian, one must carefully strain Jefferson’s deist ideals out of his philosophy, but I believe he got it right when he stated that education needed to be broad and lead to self-education (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019).

**Nature of the Learner**

It is important in a discussion about a philosophy of education to discuss the nature of the learner held by the one whose philosophy we are scrutinizing. Thus, I have provided my thoughts on the nature of the learner, divided into the categories outlined below.

**The Nature of Mankind**

If we read Scripture, we see that mankind is naturally bent towards evil. As Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” This means that not just mankind in general, but also the students within our classrooms are naturally evil through the Fall. Once mankind was able to know the difference between good and evil, all of us are naturally inclined, like Paul says in Romans 7:19, to be unable to do the good we wish to accomplish. Thus our learners, being human, will also struggle with these aspects of their nature.

With this in mind, we must however realize that humans are still capable of knowing what is good and what is wrong. Thus, it is possible to teach a child what it means to have a moral compass and model good decision-making skills. This lines up with what Donovan Graham states in his book, *Teaching Redemptively*, when he speaks of modeling for students how God created humans to behave (Graham, 2003). However, it must be kept in mind that it is not possible to teach the broken nature out of a human. We cannot as educators hope to teach our children into a state of being “good.” Rather, we can and should point them towards good behaviors and soft skills such as integrity (Dow, 2013).

**Unity and Diversity in the Classroom and the World**

It is imperative to realize that each student is an individual, and thus will not learn exactly like their fellow students. The ethics of teaching from a Christian worldview demand that the educator offer the same opportunities to all their students, no matter their race, age, gender, or perceived ability (Knight, 2006). This creates unity within the classroom, and a model where students can engage and learn together (Cooney et al., 1993).

While the same opportunities ought to be available, and while all students ought to be treated with the same respect, it is not wrong to recognize diversity in the classroom through accomplishments, culture, etc. No teacher ought to single out a student so as to embarrass them or their classmates, but there is a time and a place for encouraging an individual student in their learning path, and to realize that each child will not understand or comprehend concepts the same due to individualized previous knowledge constructs.

**Development / Learning Style**

The nature of the learner is one of infinite potential (Knight, 2006). This means that any student is capable of learning, and capable of doing it well. Subsequently, there is more to an education than such pieces of knowledge as arithmetic, historical dates, etc. Students need to learn virtues so that they may wisely use the gifts they have been granted by the Lord for His service (Dow, 2013). It is my belief that students must be taught the skills of right and organized thinking to fulfill the purpose they have in God’s creation, and thus it is my job to meet those needs through my teaching style and methods.

As an educator, I must also keep in mind that each student will have a unique learning style, and this will mean differentiation within my classroom. This is a natural part of a classroom that, while it can be tricky, is vital to understand and accommodate. It is my job as a teacher to ensure that I am familiar with each child within my class and have an idea of how they learn best. I must then be able to offer projects, assignments, and learning opportunities that allow for all students’ interaction and successful involvement.

**Needs, Motivations, Participation, and the “Ownership” of Learning**

According to Martha McCullough in her book, *By Design*, the learner is internally motivated to acquire knowledge, but this can be helped by both internal and external factors (McCullough, 2013). The idea is to help students not just memorize facts, but to be invested in their own education, to make knowledge their own. For my philosophy, this looks like including more to a lesson than a lecture. I couple this with ownership of learning, in that I believe that students ought to have to look up some portions of the necessary information for a unit of learning and should be presented with various projects throughout to help make the learning hands-on and personal.

**The Teaching and Learning Process**

The learning process can be divided into three major sections: 1) what motivates learners, 2) knowledge acquisition and construction, and 3) experiential learning. Each of these sections describes an aspect of how the teaching offered and the learning process itself, can and should positively impact the student.

**What Motivates Learners**

Students are human beings, but they are not adult human beings yet, and so they must be taught how to act as adults. This counts as the overarching need that should be built within the teaching/learning process. I personally greatly admire the teaching process as spelled out in *Virtuous Minds*, by Philip E. Dow. This style of teaching looks beyond the necessary material needed to meet state standards and digs into personal growth as well. It focuses on the cultivation of vital virtues, such as tenacity, integrity, etc., as a part of the deeper self that a student will become (Dow, 2013). As a Christian educator, I view the idea of character development as ideal to a holistic view of education. Corroborating this, Donovan Graham in his book, *Teaching Redemptively*, states that education is an option for redemption. We are broken beings, but an education that is focused on mind and spirit allows students to see where they fit in God’s plan, and how they can wisely utilize the gifts they have been given for His glory (Graham, 2003). With the idea that all students are in need of learning how to become fully functioning members of God’s kingdom, students need to have a variety of opportunities to think outside the box and grow their talents.

All human beings are born with curiosity, and this means that a teacher must not pretend that her students will be satisfied merely sitting at their desks reading textbooks all day. Instead, a teacher can tap into that natural curiosity and make education entertaining—a feat that will lead to lifelong learners, and well-rounded citizens. Students cannot and should not be expected to merely take information at face value. Instead, I believe they must be allowed to come to conclusions through exploration. When the mind is engaged, the brain remembers more, and positive implications are created for the idea of continuing education throughout the student’s adult life. As Martha McCullough teaches, the mind must be engaged, students should be required to dig out new information themselves, and they should be given the chance to try out fledgling conclusion building skills (McCullough, 2013). As well, Philip Dow espouses this idea that students must be given the chance to try out critical thinking skills in the classroom (Dow, 2013).

This does however lead to a problem to be solved in today’s classrooms. While McCullough argues—and I agree—that learning should not be performance based only, too often the modern teacher feels pressure to teach to the test or utilize a rubric that strangles the creativity out of their charges. In turn, this dampens the potential for relationship that the teacher might be able to cultivate with his or her students, since it is difficult to feel a connection with someone who is constantly grading your efforts.

It is my belief that a well-placed rubric makes life easier for a teacher. However, it is not good to create a loathing of learning in a student at such a young age, when they have so much of their life still to live. I propose therefore in my philosophy of education that while tests and performance grading is still necessary, a healthy relationship with your students is even more important. Like Dow, I argue that teachers are the role models for the young ones within their care, and it is the role of the teacher to instill a love of learning, and an understanding and desire to show proper behavioral virtues.

**Knowledge Acquisition /Construction**

Students are capable of learning because they possess infinite potential (Knight, 2006). While each student might learn differently and might require more or less time to reach a certain level of mastery, each child has the potential to learn. Within each classroom will always be a variety of learners, and a variety of developmental levels. As such, it is the teacher’s job to offer each major developmental level the hands-on learning chances described above. For my philosophy, this looks like offering repeated opportunities for struggling students to practice a skill until they have mastered it, and this in a grace-filled, constructive, and encouraging environment.

Each student can be internally motivated to learn, but it is important that the content they are learning is truth. As a Christian educator, I believe that there are absolute truths, and it is my job to help my students grapple with and come to understand these. I do not believe, however, that is my role to merely teach what is good, but rather, my students should have the chance to discuss and practice ethics in a safe environment. Through offering virtue growth (Dow, 2013), students can come to learn absolute truths through their own exploration and can be motivated through the excitement of discovery.

**Experiential Learning**

Overall, it should be clear that I view education as an active process, and students as active participants in owning their learning. I greatly appreciate how McCullough states it in her book, *By Design*. In her view, learning should be “actional,” where the student interacts through encouragement by the teacher (external motivation), and this chance to explore leads to internal motivation to make learning a lifelong commitment (internal motivation) (McCullough, 2013). This mix of external and internal motivators helps get students on the right path for learning, and for the key virtues that Dow argues are so important. By setting expectations for behaviors in a classroom, a teacher can externally motivate virtues and can then lead students into an understanding of why these virtues are so useful and beneficial.

**Role of the Teacher**

In discussing my philosophy on the role of the teacher within education, I have decided on three specific categories. It is my belief that a teacher is a role model, authority figure, and facilitator for each of their students. I will outline each of these below in their own respective section.

**Role model**

Teachers are humans, just like their students, and from a Christian worldview, this means that they are similarly—and most importantly—sinners made in God’s image. As such, it is the job of the teacher to model what a life yielded to Christ should resemble. According to George R. Knight, author of *Philosophy and Education*, it is the job of the teacher to “relate to the Master Teacher in such a way that he or she becomes God’s agent in the plan of redemption” (Knight, 2006, 213). Practically, this looks like how the teacher chooses to organize their class, how they teach, and how they treat their learners (McCullough, 2013). Teachers can and should model Christlike properties through gentle leadership that mimics His servant-leadership, and their honesty in the moments when they fail. Teachers offer the student a redemptive approach to education by such honest modeling, and can be specific, choosing virtues to ensure that they will not only discuss in class, but also act out through their behavior (Dow, 2013).

**Authority figure**

It is the teacher’s role to be the authority figure within the classroom. This means being authoritative not only of the students within his or her care, but also authoritative concerning the knowledge they are handling and imparting to the students.

 Authority should not be used to lord it over learners, but rather, should be the Christ-like servant leadership previously mentioned. The teacher must balance between overtly authoritarian approaches to order, and those that are too lax, each of which have their pitfalls. The best example truly is to follow the teaching style of Jesus, who was patient to even the most stubborn pupil, but did not accept or approve of chaos.

 Similarly, it is the role of the teacher to be authoritative in the material they will be presenting. It follows that if we would assume and expect that a professional athlete would practice before an important event, that the teacher would also view education with the same seriousness. To teach and mold the next generations is a hallowing career, and one that should not be taken lightly. Thus, offering misinformation to misguide students that are safeguarded to their care is as unacceptable of a teacher as it is for a premier league soccer player to not warm up before a game.

**Facilitator**

Finally, it is the role of the teacher to be the facilitator of the student’s success. This does not mean that the teacher is the only one responsible for the student’s ability to complete requirements or meet state standards, but instead, it is their job to make success something that can be grasped and desired. In the end, students will be held responsible for their ability or inability to meet requirements. However, it is the job of the teacher to come alongside students wherever they are in their educational journey and offer them the tools and opportunities necessary to allow them to comprehend content and replicate vital skills. This requires a teacher to know their students well, and to be able to bridge the gaps to build an environment where learning is provided for all (McCullough, 2013).

 It is not the job of the teacher to force instruction upon their learners, but instead, it is my philosophy that an atmosphere must be cultivated where individual needs are met. Both Locke and Montessori espoused ideas of education that were meant to be engaging, ones where students can become naturally inclined to learn for the rest of their lives. This relates to the idea of the learning process being actional and means that the teacher of these students must be taking the role of facilitator seriously.

**Ethics of Teaching**

While discussing the individual role of the student and teacher, it is also important to discuss the overall ethics of how teaching should be executed, how students should be treated, and how this ought to manifest in the classroom.

**Work Ethic**

Work ethic in the ethics of teaching means aspiring to excellence. This goes two ways: work ethic of the teacher and inspiring a good work ethic in the students. Philip Dow in his book, *Virtuous Minds*, argues that the ethics of teaching is based in teaching seven main virtues to students, and one of these is tenacity (Dow, 2013). Tenacity is part and parcel of persevering and giving everything one’s best. Dow goes on to argue that role modeling is important for teaching these virtues, as why would students desire to do anything that the teacher is not willing to try as well? Thus a good work ethic (or tenacity) is vital for both students to see and be expected to offer.

**Authority vs. Autonomy**

 It is my belief that teachers ought to be authoritative figures in their classroom, but not totalitarian in their approach. Donovan Graham puts it best in his book, *Teaching Redemptively*, when he states that teachers are like shepherds, modeling Jesus Christ to their students daily, and mimicking Christ’s life through imitating Him (Graham, 2003). This means that teachers are to lead with love, respect, discernment, compassion, and fairness, just as Christ led His Apostles (McCullough, 2013).

**Goodness, Fairness, Respect, Expectations, Discernment**

It is also vital for the student to be viewed as made in the image of God, and thus full of infinite, creative potential (Knight, 2006). This means that every student is capable of learning, no matter how long they must work at a particular topic or subject. I believe that teachers are to offer their students every possibility to excel, thus showing fair treatment. However, it is not enough merely to offer opportunities: the educator must be good and respectful in these opportunities.

**Social Responsibility and Core Knowledge**

Since students are future citizens, it is especially important to ensure that by the time they graduate, they are socially responsible, and capable of making well-informed, logical decisions. A biblical education model believes that there is more to learning than amassing head knowledge; instead, the holistic being should be addressed, in all its spiritual, intellectual, and physical needs (McCullough, 2013). For the Christian educator, this means that they must keep in mind that they are helping form more than just the next generation of global citizens, but that they are training people for the heavenly kingdom.

In helping students become the best earthly and heavenly citizens they can be, it is necessary for them to be afforded opportunities while in school to practice citizenship skills. This is still another reason that teachers must encourage students to have guided autonomy, as described above.

**Conclusion**

 To conclude this philosophy, I would like to point out that even though these are all various pieces of what it means to be an educator, they are all parts of one single whole. The ethics of teaching for example, must be based in the teacher’s perception of the nature of the learner, and the teaching/learning process will be determined by how the teacher views their role within said process. Thus for me, I view this as not only a philosophy of how I see education, but a holistic approach to the whole process of teaching and learning. In my philosophy as a Christian educator, it is imperative that I understand that all humans are special because they are made in God’s image; this will determine how I treat my students, and how I choose to treat myself and my sphere of influence on my students.

As so often pointed out in the various texts I have chosen to quote throughout this philosophy, it is the role of the teacher to be a servant leader, leading students to see a daily modeling of who Christ calls us to be. This means that I must daily look to live out the seven virtues laid out in Dow’s book *Virtuous Minds*, such as fair-mindedness, honesty, and carefulness (Dow, 2013). Subsequently, this means that in the moments I fail as a human being—and thus also as a teacher—it is my responsibility to apologize with grace, and model humble repentance and renewal (humility being yet another of Dow’s listed virtues).

Finally, in viewing this as a holistic Christian approach, it is vital that I not only look to implement this philosophy, but regularly review my actions as a teacher, to ensure that I am living up to the standard that it sets. Guidelines are useless if not enacted, and it is my goal that in creating this philosophy, I have been able to create a thoughtful, well-detailed, and prayerful approach to education, that will have a positive impact on any school system of which I may be a part, and any student’s life of whom I have the honor to interact.

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