

Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

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“Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach a person to fish and you feed them for a lifetime.”

Developing a personal philosophy of teaching and learning refers to the perception of oneself professionally, and more importantly how they communicate that perception. By observing, assessing, and reflecting from experiences and feedback, educators can formulate a position, or philosophy to identify and align with becoming part your character. Being an educator, whom others aspire to be like, or learn from, is the goal of my educational philosophy. I want to be an active, reflective, and model practitioner for my students, colleagues, and those in my respected field. Terms such as inspire, empower, foster, and enhance are used in many philosophies, but these terms acutely guide my intentions as an educator and leader.

Numerous teaching models and theories exist to give relevance to teaching and learning but I embrace two: the ‘guided discovery’ method - which utilizes life experiences to assist in the development of those one teaches and leads, and 2) ‘experiential learning’ - which facilitates learning through optimum and heightened levels of safe, effective, and positive experiences. The combination of these two highly regarded teaching and learning methodologies allow for the above quote to represent my personal conviction in education. In my mind, the foundation of education is the primary and fundamental role involved in sport, physical education, recreation, and outdoor education. Skills and leadership habits are learned through comprehensive and positive environments where participants can practice and acquire meaningful skills from trained and experienced facilitators. Blending education with experiential leadership opportunities is a perfect relationship when there is a facilitator willing to ‘teach’ the skills needed to be successful. Great leaders are great educators, and great educators can be great leaders.

Society, however, has a definitive system when it comes to the leadership roles - lead or follow. Fortunately, in our public educational systems there are curriculum models which allow students to learn and understand complex leadership theories. My role is to provide and discuss all the examples allowing students to better understand and respond to the cultural and contextual dimensions of leadership frameworks. My work involves teaching and discussing differences not only in how people lead, but also how people, children and adults, learn. As I think of those who made an impact in my educational life, I have positive and constructive memories and I have been able to learn from both. My years in education have provided circumstances that impacted and challenged me to be an empathetic and empowering educator, continually developing a broad understanding to how people learn.

Former Mississippi State University President, Donald Zacharias, pointed out in a commencement address that, “by the time you finish four years of college, you will have had approximately 100 teachers in your lifetime.” While this is true, the reality is most people remember only one or two. This is where I want to be - the one educator in someone’s life remembered for making a positive difference and an impact which altered their life in a purposeful, meaningful direction. To accomplish this, I strive to impact the episodic memory, defined as a ‘one-shot’ learning mechanism. Memory theorists suggest most learners need only one dynamic exposure or interaction to remember particular skills and content, and the conceptual learning sequences involved in sport, physical education, and outdoor education are ideal platforms for this method of learning. Blending various teaching styles and systems with

instructionally and developmentally appropriate curriculum is where my philosophy truly becomes the epitome of a guided, experiential, and episodic-enriching education.

It is a privilege and responsibility to be involved in someone's education. I want to facilitate opportunities which foster successful and productive contributors to not only my field, but also a sustainable society. My experience teaching and directing programs has taught me that the learning environment should be developed around the overall collection of those involved. Our society needs programs that influence active-based educational opportunities providing the basics for sport, physical education, recreation and outdoor activities. An anonymous quote states, "teachers don't impact for a year or a semester, but for a lifetime." This quote speaks largely about the culture and environment of learning a teacher reflects. Theorists suggest learners not only learn more efficiently, but they retain more content in a fair, trusted, and empowering environment. The environment I create is conducive, motivating, challenging, and accepting promoting students take individual responsibility for their learning, yet challenging them to develop a passion for their craft and life ambitions.

By and large, however, successful teaching and learning is not solely about numerical results but encouraging participation in the process of learning. A sign hung in Albert Einstein's office stated, "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts." Education is a powerful tool and as educators we often look closely at data, numbers, and growth. Although I use data to help guide my teaching, I also focus on allowing and providing opportunities for all students, regardless of their race, gender or ethnicity to try new things that enhance not only their educational experience, but also by encouraging students to be active in their life as well.

My ethics, practices, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and life experiences are all part of my usefulness as an educational tool, cultivating interest and promoting successful programs and people. Metaphorically, I like to perceive myself as a Swiss army knife; although it has all the necessary tools, not all of them can be used at one time, and some are never used, but each tool on the knife is used for a specific purpose at a specific time. When the time is needed, those tools are there ready to be utilized by students. Like this metaphor, I aspire to be that educational device used in the learning process, continuing to contribute value and substance to my field, utilized by those willing to take what they want, how they can, when they need it.