

Philosophy of Education Steven DeGeorge Ed.D.

OVERVIEW

I believe that education in good schools should be driven by the dynamic tension between the importance of content and a deep respect for the individual learner. Any serious educator must feel this tension and thrive on keeping it in balance. To neglect one side of this equation is to do a disservice to the other. One should view the learner as an individual whose gifts, graces, and interests need to be recognized, respected, and cultivated. This must be done in the context of that learner's age and level of development.

On the other hand there are basic constructs in both content and process that are foundational to success in learning and cannot be neglected. These building blocks, though usually taught in a structured way, are the very tools that will make it possible for the learner to grow and become independent. They are the "keys to the kingdom" so to speak. Good schools therefore must be both student-centered and content-centered.

A SUMMUM BONUM

I believe that teaching is a transformative process in which the teacher and the learner engage in a relationship that changes them both for the good. It begins with natural curiosity and a contagious passion for learning. This is a quality that all teachers must have to be successful. They must also find a way to spread this passion to their students. If this is done well, even the most challenging content can be tackled with enthusiasm. Without it the most interesting things can seem dull.

This maturity takes into account all aspects of the developing person. In that sense it can be called holistic. For me this is based on the biblical model presented by Luke (2:52) in the only statement we have about the adolescence of Christ. "And the boy increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." According to Luke's account Jesus was developing mentally, physically, socially and spiritually.

KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

I believe that although there is much mystery in the world, and that mystery is often what keeps us motivated to learn, there is also some objective truth to be known. As a result I believe that schools should inculcate certain values in their students. There are timeless truths that are the building blocks of a good life. The late Francis Schaeffer referred to these things as "true truth" or truth which exists outside of one's self. I do not, however, believe that an educator is at liberty to create a curriculum for his or her students based on personal ideology. I believe that educators should work in a community of learners whose basic values are confluent *with* their own and even then be very careful when discussing personal viewpoints.

THE LEARNER

I believe that each student is a work of God with great gifts and tremendous potential. It is with great awe that I approach the teaching/learning process. I take seriously the warning in James (3: 1) that not many "should presume to be teachers knowing that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

I lean toward a constructivist view of the learner and the learning process. I am eclectic in method, however, and feel that some techniques work for reasons other than what the current

wisdom would have us believe. I appreciate some experimental teaching techniques as long as sound methods are not set aside.

CURRICULUM

These days it is prudent to state what might have been unnecessary a generation ago. I do believe in curriculum as a roadmap for teaching in a school. I acknowledge that there is an informal curriculum which is often as significant to the learning process. But, in my view the formal one must be well-thought out and rigorous. I believe that the school's curriculum is a living document that should be both followed and revised regularly.

The key words in my view of curriculum are balance and integration. I believe that the various disciplines need to be considered as an integrated whole so that a mature student can see, for example, the resemblance between a Baroque clock a piece of Baroque literature, and a piece of Handel's music, Students should be considering their own worldview as they gain knowledge of these things.

I am an advocate of a strong literature component in reading instruction and an early emphasis on writing, foreign language, and STEM skills.

INSTRUCTION

I am an advocate of differentiated instruction which can be based on many models, but cannot happen in earnest until a teacher knows his students well as learners. The core of differentiation in my opinion means working in the recognized domains (cognitive, affective, psycho motor) and I would agree with recent theory that interpersonal while it may or may not be considered a "domain" is extremely important.

One of the great clarifying theories of teaching and learning in my opinion is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development expressed by Lev Vygotsky. This idea of finding the middle ground in which a student can learn with assistance and teaching in that zone is vital to motivating students to grow in all areas.

ASSESSMENT

While we know that standardized testing is here to stay, but it is my considered opinion that assessment is more than testing. I believe that formative assessment needs to be a part of every lesson and that it is done through careful planning of "Check for Understanding" (CFU) activities.

I am also a strong believer in "Authentic Assessment" in which we use a variety of methods to evaluate "Content, Process, and Product". All assessment, whether formative or summative should generate data which are used to improve instruction and by extension, learning.

SUMMARY

This is a snapshot of my educational philosophy. Actually, I hope that this document raises as many questions as it answers. It does, however express the basics of what I believe as an educator.