

A Journey towards Effective Teaching

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A JOURNEY TOWARDS EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Abstract

Determining my core beliefs seems, to some degree, a fool's errand. I am only just beginning the process of defining myself as a teacher. Despite my hesitance to embrace an authority I am not certain I have earned, it is important to reflect on where I am now and where I hope to be very soon. I believe that a collaborative, student centered, education is empowering. I believe teachers have an obligation to respect students enough to hold them to high expectations, while also providing them with the practical tools necessary to achieve those expectations. At the same time, teacher must make spaces for multiple ways of understanding and knowing. Beyond all else, I believe a teacher must approach the classroom with humility, knowing that there is no predicting the turns the profession can take and acknowledging their own status as a continual student.

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Title

When I was young bedtime meant Snuggling in the top bunk as I listened to stories of boats and the people on them traveling to far off places. After the lights were tuned off after particularly tense chapters I would wait long enough to hear my brother snore and then, with all the care a small child can muster, I would sneak down from my bunk, find the book, and abscond to the nearest room with a door: the bathroom. There I sat of the floor, linoleum sticking to the pads of my feet as I drew my knees to my chest, and tried desperately to figure out what would happen next in the story. Now as I sit at a desk and consider my core beliefs as a teacher I am faced with similar emotions of anticipation and confusion. I do not know yet, the twists and turns this journey will take, but every journey, voyage, and adventure needs a starting point. As I begin this venture into the unknown I take with me beliefs that education needs to be student centered, enabled by teachers who maintain high expectations while recognizing the integrity of the student, and who approach the profession with a humble spirit that seeks to learn as much as teach.

I believe an effective teacher empowers students to embrace learning by facilitating their agency within the educational process. This does not mean ceding control of the classroom, but rather sharing control of the intellectual work. Reflecting back on my own educational experiences I found myself re-evaluating my work with oral histories. There is a shift that can happen in the middle of an interview. After a rapport and trust has been built between the two parties, facts and liner recitations fade away and something different emerges; moments are put into context, unconscious connections deeply felt. History becomes powerful and emotionally charged. Both the interviewer and the interviewee are active participants in making meaning of this transfer of knowledge. Students enter the classroom with “knowledge and cognitive resources they already use throughout the many non-school aspects of their lives.” (Schoenbach,

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Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012, p. 7) As a teacher I hope to engage students intellectually, to share in the process of learning, help them take ownership of it, and together create an environment of collaborative inquiry.

I want to challenge students, to help them realize the fullness of their mind and their potential through consistent, high expectations. I also believe that such a lofty goal requires practical execution that takes into account the uniqueness of each student. Learning in a classroom need not be directed from the top down, but knowledge from the bottom up can be likewise limiting. A “gradual release of responsibility” provides students with the supports necessary to grow into independent learners. (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008, p. 372) Without guidance students can feel discouraged and disillusioned with the process. Modeling, scaffolding, and providing texts sets are just some of the ways I can give students opportunities to develop constructive learning skills which allow students to become independent learners, both in the classroom and beyond.

(Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012)

I need to keep in mind, however, that an emphasis on technical skill should not supersede the value of simple understanding and complex creativity. Providing multiple opportunities for success within a discipline is not only important but necessary. The field of history requires certain convention be learned and followed, particularly in the way research is understood and documented. In my experience, however, the most impactful historical analysis is rarely the most formal, and almost never covered in jargon. In my classroom I would like to create a more personal space for writing about the past, or at least one with more personality.

I believe an effective teacher is humble. I worry about being perfect, though I know it is impossible, and I worry about making mistakes, though I know it is inevitable. Rather than let those concerns and anxiety eat me alive, I must accept them as certain realities to be encountered

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and overcome with humility. I need to be patient with myself when I don't meet my own standards. I have to acknowledge that more than being a teacher, I am a student myself who does not hold all the answers but is actively trying to find them.

The people in my bedtime stories had maps to guide them across the world, but even the best cartographer cannot fully capture the dynamism of the water and land. I find the medieval maps warning of dragons beyond known spaces much more accurate as documents of emotion. Standing on this edge of unknown worlds those dragons feel real. In a year's time, in a month's time, the world will shift in unimaginable ways. I doubt my map will ever be complete or fully capture the depth of experience. This starting point may come to feel outdated and of another time, but it still exists as an important reminder to embrace what I can see, and cannot see, from where I stand now.

Reference Page

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