

“Children of the World”

An Educational Philosophy Essay

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Abstract: Personal Philosophy of Education, focusing on Adult and Community Education, based on the model designed by Roger Hiemstra for development of a personal philosophy.

Children of the World

Every life, every beating heart
Has a searching soul inside
Ever needing, ever seeking out
The meaning to life

I refuse to believe we're only here to live and die
In the futile haze of faithless days
Never asking why, why I
When I've felt the hand of eternity
It's a legacy I will leave, I want to leave

For the children of the world
Every single little boy and girl
Heaven plants a special seed
We must have faith for these

I will stand for the truth I've seen
So the truth is seen in me
I will give from the source of love
So all that I believe is handed down
For the road that's yet to be travelled
By the ones who will carry on, I'll carry on

For the children of the world
Every single little boy and girl
Heaven plants a special seed
And we must have faith in these
Red and yellow, black and white
They are precious in the Father's eyes
That they have a destiny
And give them the love of light to lead

Through the darkness around us now
To a place where hope is found
For the children of the world

-Tommy Sims, Wayne Kirkpatrick, Amy Grant

(http://www.lyricsfreak.com/a/amy+grant/children+of+the+world_20007666.html)

Introduction

Based on Roger Hiemstra's model of developing a personal philosophy, the following four reasons present an introduction to my personal philosophy of education, and why, as an adult educator, it is important to articulate this philosophy.

Human relationships: What part do human relationships play in my philosophy of education? Human relationships are important for an enduring collective dialogue and meaningful communication between individuals. In so doing, through this cooperative discourse, an individual presence is encouraged within all of humankind. Each person is then part of the sum total, but also invited to be unique. As an educator, it is my responsibility to encourage and facilitate a shared classroom presence, as well as to promote critical thinking and processing within the individual students.

Positive human interaction: Positive and thoughtful human interactions are vital to a comprehensive community conscience as well as affirming the uniqueness of each individual's special contributions to the world. Having positive human interactions does not mean we all concur on a topic, but rather we respect and proactively dialog through our differences, sometimes agreeing to disagree. As an adult educator, I am responsible for leading by example and participating in positive human interactions with my students.

Personal values: Personal values are part of the philosophy of education for the purpose of describing the investment an educator makes to the students, as well as the ethics for and commitment to a holistic educational process. Personal values also expose the set of standards and principles an educator holds as benchmarks for facilitating student success. I am and should be held accountable for those things shared in class, by myself and by my students. I also must lead by example in how and what I contribute while projecting an open, yet professional presence in the classroom.

Flexibility and consistency: Flexibility and consistency are vital in the philosophy of education because of the life experiences, and the inimitable qualities and abilities each student possesses. Flexibility allows an educator to meet a student at a specific point of need and adjust facilitation practices according to those needs. Consistency allows students to be treated fairly and with dignity, thus celebrating the differences in student learning and comprehension of information. I am charged with treating each student with respect, with regard for what is already known and what needs to be learned, and to be an effective leader with constructive feedback on a timely basis.

Remarks: As Dr. Hiemstra suggests these four reasons for creating a personal philosophy, should they merely be taken at face value, or should there be a vested interest on the part of the philosophizer? This question is also one our students should be asking as we lead and guide them to their academic accomplishments. Should they simply believe and not question what teachers say as gospel truth, we have not taught them how to think and reflect critically. Therefore, this could ascertain an additional reason for developing a personal philosophy: developing and instilling the ability to think and reflect critically, in myself first, then in my students.

Personally, these four reasons prompt a new way of thinking and analyzing what my heart feels and believes. They are a springboard for productive thought and self-awareness. They also support whether or not my philosophy will in the long run meet the needs of those I am commissioned to coach as they prepare for their careers and life goals.

Philosophical Beliefs and Professional Practice Values

The philosophical beliefs shared in this paper are based on my personal philosophical system, the meaning of education, what constitutes reality, and the nature of being human, which are the four belief components of Hiemstra's model in articulating a Philosophy of Education. In addition, Hiemstra includes Professional Practice Values as part of this articulation process: educational aims, educational methods, and educational content.

My Personal Philosophical System of Education

Education and getting an undergraduate degree was a key turning point in my life. Until I started attending college, my life was fraught with anxiety, bad choices, and the kind of consequences that result from making bad choices. I didn't know any different. I am a first generation college graduate. College was not an option or a requirement in our family. We never discussed having careers, and the purpose I saw in my life was getting married and having children. If that was good enough for my parents, it should have been good enough for me.

However, because of abuse in my early childhood, I grew up trying to please others, putting their needs and wishes before my own, and believing I had no special purpose in life. Yet deep down there was a hunger for more, a yearning that I couldn't explain. I loved reading, learning, and I especially loved helping and teaching others. Throughout my life, people have gravitated towards me with questions in a variety of places. This has happened at school, in church, in the grocery store, riding a bus, and simply walking down the street. I can only assume I have a face that says, "If you are lost and don't know what to do, ask me!"

My personal philosophy of education stems quite naturally from the branch of my life where I had no direction as to where I was headed, but was serendipitously drawn to teaching others of all ages. I never paid attention to the part of my heart that was joyful and satisfied while creating new ways to teach others. I didn't understand why I got excited to see the joy in their faces when they learned, and see also the constant drive in my own soul to learn new things. I didn't fully see this ambition till I began my role as the Associate Director of Career Services, my current position at a local community college. I had no clue what career services was about, but I somehow knew I had beaten my way down a path that brought me to that point in time. I had been teaching computer classes prior to getting this position, and met many of the displaced workers from the RV industry. I saw their despair and fear in following their dreams into careers that had meaning. They had only known factory work all their lives and believed that was all they were capable of. I wanted to make a difference in their lives, as well as the lives of others.

When I am in front of a class, I feel like I am at home. I feel like I am revived and have renewed energy after being with students. I love walking down the halls and catching up on their lives. I love coming up with new and fun things to do in class to make the class meaningful and enjoyable.

My personal philosophy of education is a result of this love of and passion for knowledge. I want others to get excited and see the joy in discovering new parts of the world they didn't know before. I want them to follow their dreams and become all they were intended to be. I want to help develop their self-esteem by becoming aware of the unique potential they have, and celebrate the differences that make them the only one of their kind. I want them to see no matter where they came from, they can be anything they set their minds to being.

The Meaning of Education

According to *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia, "Education in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to another" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education>, May 31, 2011). Although I typically do not encourage my own students to rely on material obtained from *Wikipedia*, this definition seemed to encapsulate my meaning of education. It includes the mind, body, and soul of an individual through the educative process. Each person comes to the point of wanting to change and seeks education to learn how to accomplish that task.

In the book "Principal Centered Leadership" by Steven Covey, he says, "In school, we ask students to tell us what we told them; we test them on our lectures. They figure out the system, party and procrastinate, then cram and feed it back to us to *get the grades* (emphasis my own). They often think all of life operates on the same short-cut system" (1991).

If "getting the grade" is the end goal of education, it is no wonder students do not invest in anymore than rote and memorization. It is not surprising they find lectures boring. If students miss the true value and sense of satisfaction in having a formative effect on the mind, as shared in the definition of education above, how can we expect them to make academic goals, persevere in the tough road of learning, and then go out into the world to be productive? If the knowledge they were exposed to has no lasting importance or is retained for future use, what was the use of being involved in adult education? Even more, what does that do for future generations?

What Constitutes Reality

I am reminded of the movie "Beautiful Mind" when considering reality. The movie is based on the life of John Nash, a Nobel Laureate in Economics, who was afflicted by paranoid schizophrenia and lived in a land of delusions ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Beautiful_Mind_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Beautiful_Mind_(film))). As the movie progresses, it seems as though Nash is a genius and a hero, blessing the world with his brilliance. However, he is actually only living the fantasies of genius and heroism in his mind, while in reality he is destroying his life and the lives of those around him. His reality was made up of delusions of grandeur. However, that

was his reality, whether the reality matched that of the rest of the world. Nash was a genius, yet was riddled with an incurable personality disorder.

Although Nash's life is a harsh example of how reality can vary from one person to the next, reality to each individual is the sum of life experiences and the personally relative interpretations of the meaning of those experiences. Where one person may see the proverbial glass as half full, another may see it as half empty. Which reality is accurate?

In the field of education, one reality is the instructor's interpretation of what is meaningful information and needs to be passed onto students for future use. Another reality from the student perspective is based on life's current situations and challenges, hopefully securing a meaningful career, the instructor knowing "everything," fear of personal failure, feeling like other students are smarter and more capable of being a college student, balancing school with work and other life commitments, and possibly being turned off by adult education due to the effect school had during the elementary and secondary years of instruction. How can two opposing realities co-exist in a classroom and lead to effective transformation?

The Nature of Being Human

According to the Free Dictionary Online (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/human+being>) a human being is "any living or extinct member of the family Hominidae characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage" (May 31, 2011).

Being Human is also a science fiction television series based on the lives of a ghost, a werewolf, and a vampire who are trying to act "normal" (<http://www.syfy.com/beinghuman/about>, May 31, 2011). These characters possess superior intelligence, are able to speak well, and stand upright, yet are they considered human? As we know ghosts, werewolves, and vampires as portrayed in cinema, their norm is to terrorize and kill.

If a "normal" human being (not a ghost, werewolf, or vampire) terrorizes and murders someone, is he still considered human, despite his barbarous actions?

Perhaps the answer to the nature of being human lies in adding a supplementary list of characteristics or criteria to the above mentioned definition of a human being. What sets a human being apart from the lower species on earth? A human being has a conscience and has the capacity to use superior intelligence to make decisions that do not intentionally harm or hurt others. Perhaps rather than seeing the word human as a noun, it should be defined using an adjective, as being a humane human, respecting the earth and its inhabitants.

Reflecting then on this enhanced definition, in the world of education and in consideration of its philosophy, the nature of being human is a reciprocal relationship. The educator has an obligation to pass on the truth and to facilitate a successful and meaningful process to the student. Likewise, the student is respectful of the educator and peers. The student may see education as a means for a better career or simply as feeding a spirit hungry for knowledge. The teacher and the student should both see being able to articulate thoughts into words as the communicative process which binds them together in

a Gestalt fashion. Even if a student is self-directed and learns from reading books, there was still a driving force with the intellect to write the books that aid in learning the material.

Professional Practice Values

Finally, Professional Practice Values define the educational aims, methods and contents in a personal philosophy of education.

Educational Aims

The educational aim of the instructor is to make available and to effectively pass on to students the truth of the subject matter. The instructor's truth is based on comprehensive learning and experience in the field. The educator is also aware that there are differing personalities, values, beliefs, and life experiences represented in the classroom, and teaches with a respect for these variables.

The educational aim of the student in adult education is to become skilled, knowledgeable, and confident to pursue a future or enhance a current career of choice.

Educational Methods

The educational aim of students is not always apparent or understood by the students. Therefore well-thought-out and proper methods of instruction are vital for successful student engagement. If methods include simply memorizing information and listening to teacher lectures, students are not being properly engaged. Adult students need to see the value in what they are learning, and how it applies to the real world. According to one colleague at our community college, lecture time in a class should not be more than ten minutes of the entire class period, but if more lecturing is necessary and fundamental to learning, ten minute increments are acceptable with breaks in between for hands-on or group activities. Students need noteworthy moments to process significant information in the classroom.

Educational Content

Students need to be able to process significant information, so educational content defines what activities are most meaningful to encourage retention of information and to make the material in the class relevant to the real world. Since a student's "real world" is relative to that which constitutes reality, assuredly no two people learn or think exactly the same way because of their varying realities. A classroom should include activities geared toward visual, audio, tactile/kinesthetic, or any combination of these three main types of learner (<http://homeworktips.about.com/od/homeworkhelp/a/learningstyle.htm> June 3, 2011). Additionally, learning styles may include thinking, doing, feeling, or innovation, so again exercises that engage any combination of these types of learning styles should be included in the classroom setting (Downing, 2011).

Educational content is not a one-size-fit approach. Perhaps the greatest challenge in instructional design is creating enough variety to encourage student interest and promote further investigation of the subject, along with activities that encompass the various learning styles and types.

Conclusion

Although this paper could seem complete, it is not. A personal philosophy of education is not set in stone. When an educator is truly engaged in facilitating student growth, the work of learning is never done, especially for the teacher. There is always something to learn from the students, from other educators, and from the world in general. The things that do remain constant are values and ethics, commitment to professionalism, dedication to students in meeting them at their points of need, and treating the children of the world with respect.

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