

Professional Philosophy

Eilisha Joy Bryson

EDUC 545-631 Leadership for Middle School

Science

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As an undergraduate at West Chester University, I was introduced to Vygotsky, Piaget, Gardner, and many other philosophers of education. Their ideas about education were the only truth I knew, and became my ideas. Eventually, I was required to write about my own philosophy of education. This seemed impossible because I did not even realize that I could have my own philosophy; only old men who have researched in the field of education were allowed to have a philosophy of education, right? Regardless of this, I formulated a statement with pride and enthusiasm, all the while not having an ounce of experience or a clue as to how one's philosophy fits into life as a teacher. Now this

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University of Pennsylvania

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While I was an undergraduate at West Chester University, I was introduced to Vygotsky, Piaget, Gardner, and many other philosophers of education. Their ideas about education became my ideas. Eventually, I was required to write about *my* philosophy of education, but at that time I did not realize that I could have my own philosophy. This seemed like an impossible task; only old men who have researched in the field of education were allowed to have a philosophy of education, right? Regardless of this, I had to formulate a statement, and I did so with pride and enthusiasm, all the while not having a clue as to how one's philosophy fits into life as a teacher. Now, after teaching students for eight years, being an aunt for

question shows its face again, but I am able to answer it from a different, more experienced point of view. My experiences after teaching for seven years, being an aunt for 16 years, and being a mother for three years, have shaped my professional philosophy of both education and teaching.

I currently teach middle school math, but the way that came about is still a mystery to me. I majored in Early Childhood and Elementary Education as an undergraduate because I was not sure which age of students I would want to work with, but I did know that I did not want to work with older students. God had something else in mind for me though. When I arrived at my current school my principal said that he thought I would relate well with middle school children. I have taught all subjects for middle school, and my love for math led me to get certified in middle school math.

As I was teaching science for a few of my years, I realized that I needed help. After entering the University of Pennsylvania for science for

17 years, and being a mother for four years, my professional philosophy comes from a different, more experienced point of view.

It is my profound belief that teaching is based on a complex blend of art and science. For several years, would-be educators are required to learn the science of teaching. We take courses in child development, effective strategies, sociological theories, content knowledge, etc. Learning those things continue to help me make sound choices while teaching my students. I believe that staying abreast of content knowledge and pedagogy contributes to my success and effectiveness as a teacher, and consequently my students' achievement (Rice, 2003). Beyond the science there is also an extraordinary, indescribable talent that teachers possess that refines itself over time; many people say that we are born with it. This includes things like creativity, patience, understanding, and the desire to help and inspire other people's children. People, usually those who are not educators, often express their opinion about how teaching is such a simple

middle school students I realize that science is a different subject than I was giving it credit to be. My lack of a science background was more common than I realized. Science was not a priority in schools, and is still struggling to find its value in education.

The most profound thing I believe about teaching is that it is a complex art and science that takes time to develop. I have found that people think teaching is such a simple thing to do. I disagree wholeheartedly. I value the system that educators must go through in order to become a certified teacher. For several years, would-be educators must learn the science of being a teacher. We learn about child development, effective strategies, sociological theories, etc. These things help me make sound choices while dealing with my students, and what they are learning, and they were required in order to successfully pass the required certification tests. Understanding the science of teaching is not quite enough though.

Teaching is also an art, and like artists,

thing to do, assuming that anyone with knowledge, or anyone who enjoys children can automatically and effectively teach. I disagree wholeheartedly. Good teachers develop over time by nurturing both the craft and the science of teaching.

Effective teachers must consider the things that motivate her students. Generally, I find Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) as an important theory that helps me understand the motivation behind student behavior. His pyramid explains how people's physiological needs are greater than all else. After that, the need for safety, love, and esteem should be addressed in order for a person to achieve (Huitt, 2004). In terms of motivation that I can control in my classroom, I find it hard to try to motivate students, especially at a middle school level, by giving over-the-top praise for things that they are expected to do. I feel that this establishes false rewards that are not reflective of reality. Instead, simple, honest, and specific acknowledgement of positive behavior and achievement is the best way, in my opinion, to give feedback and reinforce those behaviors. I feel

teachers have extraordinary, indescribable talent that takes time and practice to develop. People assume that anyone with knowledge can automatically and effectively teach someone else. Teaching is not that simple. Just because you know something does not mean that you know how to teach it. Likewise, just because you enjoy children does not mean that you have the skills to teach them. Good teachers nurture and develop the craft of teaching as well as the science of teaching.

After seven years of teaching my philosophy of teaching has developed to include some things that have worked well for me and for my students. I have found that it is necessary to change my style of teaching to meet the needs of my students because their learning styles are different. Students learn in a variety of ways, and it is my belief that a good teacher will figure out a way to help a student learn no matter what their learning style. It is important to try different ways of teaching because your students may not learn in just one way. Howard Gardner says that there are

that this encourages students' intrinsic desire to achieve, which has more benefits than trying to motivate students through extrinsic means (Lumsden, 1994).

Another strategy that helped me to be more effective is to consider the learning styles of my students. It is important to try different ways of teaching because your students may not learn in just one way. Howard Gardner says that there are many ways a person can display their intelligence (Veenema, Hetland, Chalfen, 1997). I agree with that, so it behooves me to allow students to be successful through their intelligences. This is proven to be more difficult with certain subject matter and with certain curricular restrictions (Hoerr, 2002). My students have helped me learn that they are more cooperative in the classroom if they can be engaged in activities that are challenging or that they enjoy. Planning and preparation are essential when organizing activities that are differentiated and engaging, often taking thought and preparation beyond what a teacher's guide might say. Preparing meaningful

many ways a person can display their intelligence. I agree with that, so it behooves teachers to allow students to be successful through their intelligences. My students have helped me learn that they are more cooperative in the classroom if they are engaged. This is something that I know will not always happen, but the students appreciate doing interesting activities. This leads me to my next point, which is that planning and preparation are important in regards to being an effective teacher. Organizing activities that are differentiated and engaging often takes thought and preparation beyond what a teacher's guide might say. I have found that no matter how much preparation a teacher can do, teaching every student is not an easy task.

It is my philosophy that one's classroom management strategies are very important. Establishing a routine and being consistent with it and with disciplinary issues is very important to the environment of the classroom. The students know what to expect and then they are able to focus on being successful. It is my philosophy that

lessons and making sure every child learns is no easy task, but is one that high quality teachers are challenged to achieve.

Such lessons become meaningless however if a structured classroom management plan is not in place. Establishing a routine and being consistent with it and with disciplinary issues is very important to the environment of the classroom and to being an effective teacher. I believe that when students know what to expect, then they can focus more on being successful. With this in mind, maintaining a stable learning environment, one without distractions, is one of the rules that I require my students to uphold. Making sure that my students know that they have a role in this is an important piece of effective classroom management (Cotton, 2000).

I believe that coupling good management and teacher quality with reducing the number of students in a classroom is an ideal way to increase student achievement. Research studies conclude that 15 to 20 students is the ideal class size that yields an improvement in students' success (Picus,

smaller class sizes make a tremendous difference. I have been the teacher in both small and larger sized classes, and there is so much more that you can do with a smaller student population. In regards to their academic and behavior management, I believe that students should be acknowledged when they do something positive. I do not believe that students should be praised for doing what they are required to do, but simply and honestly acknowledging them is a positive reinforcement that children need. I believe that students need some type of reinforcement; the best type of behavioral reinforcement depends on what works best for the child. A good, experienced teacher will be flexible in order to address the students' needs.

I tend to lean towards Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to help me understand the motivation behind student behavior. His pyramid explains how meeting the physiological need is greater than all else. After that, the need for safety, love, and esteem should be addressed in order for a person to achieve. This makes perfect sense to me. I can

2000). Some argue that the achievement strides due to reduced class size are not great enough to outweigh the expensive costs of hiring teachers and finding classroom space to make it work (Finn, 2002; Picus, 2000). Those obstacles are realistic and unfortunate for both the students and for the teachers because I feel that the quality of my teaching was better when I had fewer students. I was able to address their needs better, assess their understanding quicker, give more one-on-one attention- the list seems endless. Reducing class size is usually not a choice that most teachers can make; so one goal I have for myself is to establish small groups within my class more often. Research shows that within-class grouping is more effective than traditional methods of teaching (Slavin & Karweit, 1985).

I continuously strive to improve my effectiveness as a teacher, and although a highly qualified teacher means different things to different people, the following statement is imperative to note. The quality of a teacher, as Rice (2003) reported, is the most influential

personally attest to the fact that when I am hungry or tired that I am not worried about doing my best at a task. I have a student whose family is on the verge of being separated. Her main concern is not her achievement in school. I keep these ideas in mind in my classroom. When I have a student who needs to use the restroom or did not eat breakfast, I try to remember that when those needs are not met, then the student cannot work to their fullest potential. This is an important idea that I believe in.

As I think my professional philosophy as an undergraduate in college, I recall feeling puzzled as to how there could be so many theories about teaching and learning. I wrote an answer to please my professor, not truly grasping how my own philosophy influences my teaching and how that would in turn affect my students. A teacher's attitude and beliefs are communicated to her students, be that verbally or non-verbally, and one's personal philosophy should be taken into consideration. It influences the activities you choose to do and the way you think about your

predictor of student achievement, more important than school quality, teacher education and experience, or classroom size. Ironically, those less important factors have improved my quality as a teacher. For example, I gained an appreciation for my education career only once I began working in a quality school that cares, mentors, nurtures, and appreciates learning, and values their families, students, and teachers. Prior to that, I worked in a school that was drastically different, and I considered quitting. Another thing that increased my quality as a teacher was the choice I made to further my education to learn more about the art and the science of teaching. The knowledge I gained improved my confidence and skills, and enables me to appreciate such things as working in a classroom with a reduced number of students. My quality continues to improve as I gain more experiences from my own classroom. A quality teacher is a product of her knowledge and experiences, and continues to learn from those experiences.

As I think of my professional philosophy

students.

as an undergraduate in college, I recall feeling puzzled as to how there could be so many theories about teaching and learning. I now realize that every teacher has her own beliefs about teaching. Her attitude and ideas are communicated in the way she teaches and acts towards her students, be that verbally or non-verbally. Every teacher's classroom is even unique, and all of these things are reflective of her philosophy of education. Realizing this, I find it important to analyze my experiences and beliefs as a teacher to ensure that my philosophy is one that reflects the positive and effective teacher that I want to be.

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