

Core Beliefs

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Abstract

The following essay is a personal reflection on what the author believes to be the fundamental principles of becoming a teacher.

Core Beliefs

I believe that all students are capable, and that they are the biggest reason to teach in the first place. As I have learned more about the educational system, too often, the conversation became a philosophical debate. What methods should our teachers use? Where should we allocate our financial resources? What is right, wrong? In honesty, this was something that concerned me greatly. I was interested as a professional who will inevitably be a voice in these conversations, but the issues were so far removed from what I really cared about, the students and their success.

Stop feeding me the statistics of failure, and the encompassing reasons of why, because the truth of the matter becomes clear under a political lens. If we want our students to succeed then we have to stop collecting them as stat sheets. We are talking about people, specifically the young impressionable minds that will inherit this country, this world. Far from empty containers waiting to be moved through assembly lines, these are individuals, and we have been teaching them that they are failures. We have taught them that their destinies are entwined with a socio economic status. Neither of these things are any form of the truth. Everyone has the capacity for success, and it can be taught. It must be taught, and it must be taught in a way where success is not a derivative of materialistic middle to upper class societal norms. We are not here to reproduce the inequalities of our society, we are here to question and to change them.

I believe that knowledge, the truth, and beliefs are nothing without relationships. They are constructions, conversations, and inherently subjective. I am unable to feel like I could teach if I was not teaching people to deconstruct and question these, often authoritative, entities. For as long as we represent a system that caters to status quo and stability, we will have a system

that inevitably fails. But, it is not as if this idea in itself is completely original. Many theorists and philosophers have echoed the need for dialogue, fluidity, and production.

A number of theorists have argued that the subject areas can be viewed as spaces in which knowledge is produced or constructed, rather than as repositories of content knowledge or information. Even more important, knowledge production in the disciplines needs to be understood to be the result of human interaction. (Moje, 2008, 100)

If there is any truth to be had henceforth, it must be the truth of the question. It must be the co-constitution of knowledge, the instability of what is. As a teacher then, our responsibility lies in the stirring of the pot, and the encouragement to act out against definition. We have the challenge of building a bridge over an ever shifting tide and anchoring it to the shores of relationship.

If the above declarations are to take hold in any way, then they must be reflected in the teacher that I want to become. But I am lucky in this, because it is a large part of who I already am. I believe in fluidity, and you need that. The effective classroom has little place for rigidity. Surely there is room for establishing routine, respect, and a sort of coziness. But, that does not entail the ways that you illicit interaction, nor the content that fuels the dialogue, and certainly not the methodology. Change is the inevitable factor. Instead of resisting the fires, we should be the ones who spark the flame. To stifle originality, and to evoke the spirit of outdated authoritarian institution, can only bring you to the limits of what is known. Or more correctly, what was known in the case of precedence. True thinking is exactly what goes beyond that realm, pushes against its boundaries, and makes new. Embrace the phenomenological construction of reality, dissect it, and discuss it. Relate.

Relating to someone can be the most difficult, or the easiest thing to do. Difficult if you are set hard in your beliefs, stapled to your ideas of relevance, and concrete in your choice of text. Easier if you start by asking, "What are you into, who are you?" It becomes vital to

realize that people's interests differ, especially in a world that moves and communicates trends so quickly. Blink, and you can miss it. In the classroom this can be pivotal. Kids do not want to learn if they are not interested in the first place. Luckily, there is usually a bridge. There is a point of commonality that links music to poetry, to art, to language, to math, to science, and each one of us to the other. As information is shared through an interconnection between people and their ideas, so too is it created. It is important not to forget that.

If there is something else not to forget as a teacher, it is that you are an integral part of the relationships you are working to create. It may seem obvious, but bringing your true identity to the classroom is the only way to forge meaningful connections with students. This sense of self is best described to me by Parker Palmer who writes:

By *identity* I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others, and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human. (18)

No one of us can be confined to a simple definition. No student, and no teacher. Life is intricate. When we deny ourselves, it often leads towards dissatisfaction and a lack of personality. I am kind, patient, and at times, very funny. I have succeeded, and I have failed. I am changing all the time. Realizing this allows me not only to bring my own spirit into the classroom, but the room to grow and be affected by the people who have entrusted me with their education. It allows me the space to question myself, my methods, and my own sense of happiness. It allows me to adapt, become fulfilled, and relate.

Before I conclude, it is important to give thanks to the many people ahead of me in the occupation of teaching who strive for their students. Those who bring the entirety of their

vulnerable selves to the classroom every day. I recognize those who constantly refine the science of their practice in order to become better at their art, and of this sort there are many. This is important, because if I want to leave any images at the end of this piece, they should be those of hope and progress. If my beliefs are expressed in any negative terms, it is only because I am passionate in working to become a teacher that does not settle for presubscription. I refuse to become something inanimate, a figurehead, or some sanctified distributor of outdated norms. I believe in the power of originality. I believe that if I recognize the individuality of my students along with their ability, and meet them with my own, than I can teach them to succeed. I believe that I can make a difference.

References

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