The Philosophy of a Beginning Teacher

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What is teaching? I am sure that every educator has his or her own personal definition. I hope to find teaching a wonderful challenge. I hope it is my way of making a mark on society and making this world a better place. In what other profession can one person inspire hundreds, perhaps even thousands of people with her thoughts and ideas? I can think of no other profession where there are thirty listeners trusting in everything you have to say on a daily basis. I have taken this challenge upon myself and hope to inspire many young people in my era as an educator. I know that I am idealistic and perhaps naive. I am enthusiastic and have a great love for the profession, even though I am just embarking on my career. I feel that the desire, motivation, and enthusiasm I have for education would be an excellent prerequisite for all those entering the teaching profession. For that reason, I feel that I will give one-hundred percent to education. I only hope that other beginning teachers have as much to give. I am sure that what I am about to face as an educator will be an uphill battle. I know that I will fail at times and maybe even regret my decision to educate. However, I am equally sure that I will have more successes than failures. Even if I make a difference in one child's life, I think I will have had a positive affect on society. The possibility that I
could affect hundreds of lives in a positive way fills me with such a wonderful high. I feel that all educators must feel as I do or they could be successful in their careers as educators.

I believe that all children need teachers. They need us to protect them, to care for them, and of course to instruct them. Teaching is not a part-time job; it is not a job with set hours. Teaching is a way of life that can take up 100 percent of an educator's time. The teacher that can go home and not think of the children in her classroom and their problems is not a true teacher. Children need people who are ready to dedicate much of their lives to their well-being. If a person is not willing to dedicate that much of themselves to this honorable profession, they should consider finding some other line of work. Not every one can be a teacher. Not every one should be a teacher. Only a select few, the best, should educate.

For the above reasons, I have chosen a career in elementary education. When I commenced my education at Ball State University, I had many ideas about what a career in education would be like. I thought teaching would be thrilling and rewarding. I am still sure of these feelings, but my eyes have been opened concerning the roles I must play as an educator to my students. As I have worked my way through the necessary requirements to be certified as an elementary education teacher, I have discovered many characteristics about myself and my teaching ideas. I have
developed ideas and thoughts about education through my classes, participation experiences, student teaching, and volunteer activities. I have learned what a teacher is expected to do and how to perform. However, I feel one of the most important ideas I have developed have come from what I do not want in my classroom.

I have discovered that as a teacher I will have many obligations to fulfill for my students. When I first started my education in the teachers' college, I believed educating students to be the sole responsibility of a good teacher. However through my experiences outside the teaching curriculum (volunteer experiences, participation and student teaching), I have realized that teaching goes way beyond that task. If all teachers had to do was lecture on a specific topic area, teaching would be one of the easiest professions. However, teachers are called upon to do much more, and that is why teaching is such a bitter-sweet challenge. This challenge I have chosen as my career and a major part of my life.

Young learners need teachers to take on many roles in and out of the classroom. As a beginning teacher, perhaps I have naive ideas of what teaching should be. I have come to realize that as a teacher I would like to be aware of as many personal problems or distractions my students might have. If a child in the classroom is not mentally ready to learn because of a problem inside or outside of the school, I would feel unable to teach the student successfully. At
this point, I would like to determine what role I could play in helping the student solve his or her problem that may be inhibiting learning. I realize that most teachers have between 20 to 30 students in a classroom, but I hope to come to understand all of my students and their problems. Perhaps this cannot be done overnight, but with the enthusiasm, motivation, and energy I have, I hope to come close to accomplishing this goal.

During the spring of 1991, I had the pleasure of working with a small group of elementary school children. These children were indicated as at-risk for various reasons. My general purpose was to help these children with their school work. However, as I found myself taking on the various roles of a teacher, I found a deeper purpose. These children allowed me to explore through my experiences with them the many different kinds of roles they need a teacher to play. I found myself asking many questions about the roles a teacher can play in a child's life. Can a teacher do her job successfully if she simply instructs her students? Do children need continued guidance from influential role-models such as teachers? To what extent, if any, should teachers be involved in their students' personal lives? Do educators have a legal and/or moral obligation to become involved in their students' problems? Through the use of research and personal experience, I hope to find some answers to these questions.
Concerns of Children Today

As a teacher, I hope to have a great influence on the children I am in contact with on a day-to-day basis. I know I will many times be the adult person with whom they spend the majority of their time. A single teacher and a group of students spend eight hours a day, five days a week, nine months a year together. During this time many events can happen in a child's life. Not only is the child experiencing all of the anxieties of a changing body and mind, but he is also dealing with more stress, responsibility, and emotional concerns than the children of a generation ago.

Children of today are dealing with complex, frightening issues. Much debate exists over the role the school and teachers should play in dealing with these societal problems. These problems are a part of all of our lives and definitely concern children in every classroom. These problems are therefore in existence in our schools and classrooms. School systems are part of society and cannot adequately meet the needs of students without considering the society to which these children belong. I feel, as an educator, that I need to be aware of the societal problems that exist today and which are in existence in my classroom.

Being abused either sexually, physically, or emotionally can be devastating to a child. According to an article in the "Christian Science Monitor", about 200,000
cases of child abuse are reported in the United States each year (Bencivenga, 1983). Many more that do not come to the attention of authorities are thought to exist. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that a child is abused every two minutes in the United States. Over five thousand children die each year from some form of child abuse. At least one girl in four and one boy in ten will be sexually abused before they are eighteen years old, and the most usual abuser is a parent. In the United States, one million children are abused each year (Powell, 1978). In most instances, the offender is someone the child knows and trusts. Children often do not have an adult in their lives that they can trust. The problem is very likely to exist in many classrooms. I need to be aware of the problem and what I can do and must do to help the students in my classroom.

As a teacher, I do have certain legal obligations to my students. If a child comes to me and tells me he or she is being abused, I have a legal obligation to report it. I also would be obligated to report child abuse that I even simply suspected. All 50 states have legislation that requires teachers to report instances of suspected child abuse. In 32 states, including Indiana, educators who fail to report such cases are subject to criminal prosecution (Bencivenga, 1983).

One main reason for reporting suspected child abuse is of course to protect the young person involved. Any citizen in the state of Indiana who suspects a child is being abused
or neglected is legally required to report the abuse to their local child protection service or law enforcement agency. Teachers need to report this information to their principals and follow up on the report. The informer needs to report the name and address of the child, the age of the child, the name and address of the child's parents or caretakers, why he thinks the child is being abused or neglected, any other information that may be helpful, and his or her name (optional). The report will be investigated whether or not the reporter's name is given. If the informer's name is provided in the report, the child protection worker will be able to contact him or her for more information.

According to Thomas Sefcik, coordinator of Project Children at the Quinco Consulting Center in Columbus, the law requires every citizen to report suspected child abuse on penalty of a $1000 fine and/or 180 days in jail (Powell, 1978). He continues by saying that as long as reports of abuse are made "in good faith", the teacher or citizen will be immune from criminal or civil liability.

As an educator, I would also need to be aware of the symptoms of child abuse in order to report the suspected child abuse. According to Dennis Jackson, a DPI consultant, children who have been abused will exhibit some of the following clues: consistent inappropriate dress for the weather, gloomy countenance, no-smile, indifference to or constant craving for affection, hopeless "whining", an older
"watchful" look, an apathetic or expressionless look, hyperactivity and a tendency to cling to the parents.

Abusive parents also have specific characteristics of which teachers need to be made aware. Abusive parents have a history of "hospital shopping." This means that parents take their abused children to various hospitals whenever their child is severely injured. They do this to prevent doctors and other hospital authorities from tracking the child's medical history. This method is slowly becoming ineffective because many hospitals are now using city-wide record keeping.

Abusive parents are also very hard to contact. A teacher could often have to try for days or even weeks to locate these parents. These parents are often personally misusing drugs and/or alcohol which might lead to more frequent abuse. These parents might also have unrealistic expectations of their children. They might have also been abused when they were young. A teacher should be aware that these symptoms could and probably do exist in abusive parents.

Schools are also now being encouraged to become involved with incest cases. Incest has been a significant health problem throughout history and today affects an estimated 10 to 20 million people in the United States (Riggs, 1982). According to Riggs, the school's role goes beyond that of education; the school can also serve as a resource in the community for meeting the various needs of
children and youth. He goes on to state that the average age of incest victims is ten years old. With the amount of time teachers spend with their students, they are often the first to know or suspect something is wrong. Through teacher observations, incest is more likely to be detected. According to Riggs, school personnel have both a moral and a legal obligation to help these traumatized students. The school can later provide support and counseling for the family as they assist the child welfare agency involved with the case. I hope to play an important part in the detection, recovery and prevention of incest or other forms of child abuse for my students.

Children also have to learn to handle the stress of step-parents and step-siblings. According to the 1980 census, a child has a 35 percent chance of having a step-parent. Children are now spending a great deal of time alone. They go home alone after school, sometimes for several hours. They may have to provide care for siblings themselves. The numbers of these so-called "latch-key children" are on the rise due to the number of working parents and single-parent homes. For the first time in 1979, more children lived in families with a mother in the labor force than in families with a full-time homemaker (Leo, 1982).

Because the average family in the United States is changing so much and so very quickly, I feel I will need to be flexible with situations I encounter involving parents
and the family. I also realize that in the case of divorce, both parents will have to be kept in communication with the school and myself if at all possible. I believe that teachers will have to give a little more of their dwindling supply of time to dealing with many family members as families continue to extend.

At many of the schools in which I have participated, latch-key programs have been implemented. These programs provide after-school care for students. Many times the students can go to the local YMCA or other such organizations as part of the program. I talked with a mother whose children participated in this particular latch-key program. She told me that at first her children were hesitant about going to the program. After they realized that many of their friends also participated in the program and that they could play basketball or swim, they were excited about attending. Solutions to this societal problem do exist; many school systems have experimented with different methods of solving the latch-key problem. Many of these methods have been successful. If the school system of which I am a part has not tried any of these methods and I notice that a problem exists, I will present some suggestions to the principal and perhaps volunteer to start a committee to address this and other problems affecting the school.

Children must also find a way to deal with the problems of their parents and the community. A financial strain at
home can cause strain on a child. Divorce can also cause a child to be upset, even blame himself for his or her parent's problems. According to the Census Bureau's chief demographer, a child born in the 1980's has a 45 percent likelihood that this parents will divorce (Leo, 1982).

Community problems such as a strike on the part of a large number of workers in the area or high unemployment rates can cause a child to worry. Recently, I was discussing birthdays with a fourth-grade student. She told me that she was poor and would not be getting any more presents. She went on to explain to me that her parents were laid off from their jobs at one of Muncie's larger corporations. As a teacher, I also hope to be aware of problems in the community and in the nation in order to better understand the concerns my students may be having. Setting aside an hour or so a week to talk about local and national concerns could be advantageous to creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom. If children realize that other children are experiencing some of the same worries and problems, they may be more comfortable with the emotions they may be experiencing.

Children have many concerns and problems that many adults would find difficult to handle. These children should not be forced to cope with these problems alone. In fact, if a child does not have an outlet for stress, he could damage his mental or physical health. An educator could become aware of these stresses in order to aid the
Often a child has no adult with whom to discuss his problems. His parents may not be interested in the child or may even abuse the child themselves. Brothers, sisters or other close relatives may be non-existent, not interested, or abusive to the child as well. Of course, the most natural person for this deserted child to turn to for help is the person with whom he spends the most of his time, his teacher. Many times, children come to their teachers for advise and counseling. I hope to be the kind of teacher that will do more than listen. I hope to help my students solve some of their problems by taking on many roles as a teacher.

The Many Roles of a Teacher

"Teacher" has been defined in many ways throughout history. According to Webster, a teacher is defined as "one whose occupation is to instruct." However, educators have found themselves taking on the roles of care-giver, model, creator, inspirer, storyteller, authority, actor, learner, evaluator, counselor, and friend as well as teacher. I have learned through my training to become a teacher that I need to take on many other roles to be successful in the classroom.

Teacher as Caregiver

I also realize that as a teacher I would often be
called upon to act as a care-giver to my students. If my students complained of hunger, lack of sleep, or injuries repeatedly, I would certainly search for the causes and possible solutions to their problems. I have been in educational situations where children have come to me to borrow money for lunch. I'm sure events like this happen quite often in a classroom with thirty children. My major goal in teaching is to make the students more competent adults. This goal cannot be met if the teacher does not take a personal interest in her students lives.

I believe that as a teacher, I have an obligation to my students to make sure that they are physically able to learn in my classroom. If they are not able to learn because of a physical discomfort, they are functionally excluded from the class during the time of discomfort, which could last an hour, a day, a week, or even the entire school year. Young students have many health needs that must be met before any kind of learning can take place for that child.

Students need sleep and food before they are able to learn. The school provides at least one meal for children. In some schools, breakfast programs are now being implemented. According to Suston, one out of eight children under the age of twelve are hungry and one out of every four children are suffering from food shortage. Also hungry children are two to three times more likely to have health problems such as unwanted weight loss, irritability, headaches, an inability to concentrate (Suston, 1991) In
1984, the President's Task Force on Food Assistance recommended that schools expand their breakfast and lunch programs (Suston, 1991). Many schools now also provide dental treatment for the students. In several schools in which I have had teaching experiences, the children are given fluoride treatments once a week free of cost. In one school system in Muncie, Indiana, an actual dental facility is located in one of the high schools. The facility was donated in the will of a dentist from Muncie. Local dentists volunteer their time and services in order to provide dental care to students who might otherwise never receive professional care. In health lessons, I will need to provide instruction on how to perform proper personal hygiene. Instruction on how to avoid major health problems will also be give to students during health lessons as early as kindergarten. Teachers are required be most health curriculums to explore these health ideas.

Teacher as a Guide

I also hope to help children solve their educational problems. For example, if a student is unorganized and unable to produce completed homework, I need to interfere in order to help change that specific behavior. Young children need guidance. They look to teachers as role models. They often need help to determine what their specific problems are and how to solve them. In this case, I might actually have to explain to the child that because he is not keeping his homework organized he is not succeeding at school.
Children might not and probably do not know exactly what their specific educational problems are. I need to continue by offering solutions to the child. A teacher that simply says "you need to be more organized" is not helping the child at all. The child needs to think through with the teacher's assistance what he can do to organize himself. I might offer possible solutions involving a checklist at the end of the day, specific folders for homework, or extra help from his mom, dad or another classmate. Perhaps after these attempts at organization, the child will become a more competent, independent student. The teacher can act as a guide to see that the student does become more competent.

I hope the above example indicates how I feel a teacher could become involved with her students' academic problems. Some might say that this behavior on the teacher's part would be time-consuming and take away from educational time. However, if the teacher is able to help the child solve his problem, time in the classroom will actually be saved in the long run. The teacher will not have to search through desks and books to find missing homework. The teacher would not have to run-off copies of lost work sheets. Most importantly, the child would not continue the behavior at the next grade level, which will benefit not only the child but all of his future teachers.

Teacher helping to shape the future

I feel that considering the future effects of teacher intervention should be done by every teacher. I think often
in education, especially at the primary level, teachers think only of the here and now. They do not project into the future and to how they can make the child a more competent human being. They often get involved in individual assignments, but do not realize the long-term effects. If the major goal in teaching is to make the child a more competent human being, long-term goals must be considered. Teachers need to realize the problems that they have in the classroom with specific students do not disappear after the child has moved on to the next grade level. The next teacher will have the same problems and so will those that follow. One of these teachers, in fact, all of these teachers, need to take a closer look at what their students individual needs are and work on making the students stronger in their weak areas. I hope that as an educator, I am able to see that what I do with the children today will have an effect on their future lives.

**Teacher as Counselor**

A student's educational challenge can be obstructed by obstacles beyond the classroom. Often, children experience tragedies at home that make them functionally excluded from the classroom because their thoughts are elsewhere. We as adults do this when we have problems as well. How can we expect children to be any different? Perhaps this is when I could step in to help counsel the child. The student will simply be unable to learn until major life problems are solved. My duty as a teacher is to teach; I cannot do this
unless the child is able to learn. Part of the teacher's duty is therefore to see that the child is able to learn in her classroom.

For example, I was in a fourth-grade classroom once where I observed a child who could not concentrate on anything. He would practically bounce in his chair. His teacher finally took the time to observe the child. She even jotted down notes to keep as a log of the student's behavior. After she felt that this problem was severely inhibiting the child's education, she referred to the principal and the school nurse. The child was found to be hyperactive. After being prescribed to the drug Ritalin, the child's behavior improved.

Ritalin has been a controversial drug in the past, but has now been proven to be effective. As many as 10 percent of school-age children may be affected by attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a neurologic condition (Dyment, 1990). These children typically behave in such a manner as that of the child described above. They demonstrate difficult behavior and tend to be underachievers in school. They have usually been hyperactive for most of their young lives, and are impulsive and poorly coordinated, with a low ability to focus on anything. Statistically, more boys are affected than girls (Dyment, 1990). Ritalin, a stimulant drug, is prescribed as treatment for those diagnosed with ADHD. According to Dyment, approximately half of the children treated with Ritalin can benefit. Some
children diagnosed as ADHD may be in classrooms where I am the teacher. Being aware of this disorder and its possible treatments and side-effects can only enhance my ability to teach.

Teachers are often the people with whom children spend the most time. Naturally, they are the ones who are able to observe abnormal behavior in their students. They must at least discuss the child's problems with other professionals. Most of the time a teacher will not have the right to decide what should be done to solve the problem. However, at least she can make some effort to bring the problem to the attention of others. A child could be overlooked for many years before anyone would dare interfere to help the child. I believe aiding children with personal problems is a most necessary part of a teacher's job. Most adults cannot solve problems on their own; we should not expect children to do so.

**Keeping Up with the Times**

Education has been existing in our country since 1770. In the beginning of American education, the goals of education centered around religion. Being able to read the Bible was the primary goal. Girls were not educated as completely as boys were. Slowly with the help of such educators as Horace Mann, John Dewey, and Benjamin Franklin, education has evolved into an organized, successful system.
As educators, we have come far in what we have accomplished.

As an educator, I need to realize that teaching is not a stagnant profession; it is ever changing and teachers must keep up with the present as well as the coming changes in the future. Too many times, I have visited outdated classrooms. Teacher's notes, lesson plans, and educational materials need to be updated. I have actually witnessed a classroom where nine-year-old children were issued books that were twenty years old. I sincerely believe that much has changed in the past twenty years that needs to be taught to children. We need to move forward as educators, not backwards.

As a teacher, I believe in the necessity of continuing education. In-service workshops can be excellent methods for updating teachers and providing them with new materials. So much is out there to share with students and teachers. I believe another part of a teacher's job is to stay updated on current ideas and trends. If we as educators are not up-to-date, how can we expect children to be.

Take a look at the use of computers in the classroom. Many schools now have computers in each classroom and computer labs available for the entire class to use. One teacher I am aware of never stepped foot in the computer lab even though it was available to her at any time. She is an excellent teacher. Why was she not using this lab to further benefit her students? When asked, she said she did
not feel confident with the computer herself. This teacher and all others need to be aware of what a computer can do for the classroom and the teacher. As educators, we need to take the time to keep up to date on the latest educational techniques, such as the use of computers.

As a society, we are in the information age. Computers are everywhere and advancing every day. How can the adults of the future expect to compete if they have absolutely no training in computers? In my opinion, students need to be taught early in their education that the computer is an unbelievable tool that they can use to make their lives easier. The more experiences we can give our children with computers, the more competent they will be to succeed in the technological age. Isn't that what teaching is all about!

Teachers could also save themselves time in the future by taking advantage of computer workshops or classes. Many different software programs are available to make the job of educators easier. Electronic grade books are in existence and being used by many teachers throughout the nation. They are quick, easy-to-use, and actually quite affordable. Teachers are able to record, average, and print grades with ease. Think of the time educators could save. Also out on the computer market are analysis programs. These programs actually analyze the work of students. One such program is called Ghost Writer which is distributed by MECC. Ghost Writer actually analyzes the writing of students. A Fry readability analysis is done, and teachers and students are
able to actually see the progress of the student's writing ability throughout the year. This program allows the teacher to locate strengths and weaknesses in a very short amount of time. Computers can be used for drill and practice in the classroom. These programs are to be done independently by the student. One such program is called The Game Show, which is published by Advanced Ideas (1986). This program allows students to practice using knowledge about four different curriculum areas. What a wonderful idea for the student who never has enough to do.

The student who is competent with computers will be unafraid to conquer the ever-changing world of technology. Teachers need to provide this competency to their students. I would not feel I was a successful teacher if my students were unable to find the careers they wanted because of the lack of this ability.

As an educator, I hope to avoid what I call the readwork sheet approach to education. This is when teachers give a reading assignment and have the students answer work sheet questions based on their reading comprehension. I realize that this is many times the easiest way for educators to check for comprehension. This method is not very time-consuming, work sheets are easy to grade. Little instruction is necessary for these types of activities. However, children often find this method of learning boring and monotonous. Also, this method of testing covers usually covers only two of the thinking skills in Bloom's Taxonomy.
This method can be easily overused. Hands-on education is much more enjoyable for both the student and the teacher. Although discovery learning can take more teacher preparation when first implemented, the rewards are well worth the extra effort and time. The students will be able to recall information better if they actually work with manipulatives. Classrooms should contain learning and activity centers. Science lessons should be filled with experiments and projects that the children perform themselves. Discovery learning is exciting and innovative. When using this type of instruction, students often discovery events that teachers had not thought of themselves.

Discovery learning can also be incorporated with cooperative learning. Children working together in groups with specific tasks can all contribute equally to the experiment. They will learn not only from the experiment itself, but also from each other. They can learn science or math theories, and at the same time be developing social skills. Integration of any subject and social skills produces children who are able to function successfully in society.

Conclusion

I have come to the conclusion that teachers have a more than full-time career. I understand that many teachers feel they do not have the time to make learning centers for their
classroom. With the help of outside materials, computers, and the students themselves, teachers should be able to have at least two activity centers in their classrooms.

I have also come to realize that educators need to develop thinking skills in their students. Because our society is in a computer age, children will not have to have facts memorized. Soon classrooms across the nation will have databases that can provide facts on any subject within a matter of seconds. I believe that it is no longer necessary for children to memorize facts and information that they would not recall a year later. They need to be taught thinking and logic skills that will help them to figure out where they can find the answers to problems.

Education is changing all the time; educators need to change as well. I need to make the extra effort necessary to learn the latest about the newest techniques and materials. Going to in-service workshops, seminars and classes are all a necessary part in educating young people. I will need to take that responsibility on themselves for my students.

When teaching young people was just a thought, a dream of mine, I had certain ideas of what a teacher's roles are in the classroom. I thought that teachers were people to be looked up to and respected. I believed that teachers were supposed to be helpful and kind. I also had the conception that teaching was going to be a somewhat simple career.

After many experiences in classrooms, classes I have
taken, and volunteer teaching experiences, I have come to realize that my idea of teaching was not quite complete or accurate. It has taken me much self-analysis to determine what I feel the role of a teacher should be in the classroom. I have determined that the role is intricate and ever-changing. I now know that I will have to assess each individual instance in my classroom to determine which role I can play as an educator to be of the most assistance to those I teach.

Teaching is the profession that will offer the most rewards to me. This profession will also provide me with many opportunities to make mistakes. I can only remember those mistakes and try not to repeat them in the future. In my classroom, I hope to offer challenges to my students and to myself everyday. I know that I have set high goals for myself, but I want to be able to give all that I can to the profession that I have chosen.
References


