

Teaching Philosophy

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Literacy can define how one interacts with the world as well as how one views the world. The portal through which we gain access to the benefits of literacy is mainly accomplished through knowledge we gain when we read or write. A large part of an educator's task each day is engaging young learners, in an attempt to further their understanding of the world around them. This can include sharing the joys of reading, as well as becoming a higher level thinker and improving reading achievement. Often, educators will question if the selected and assigned reading material, acting as a catalyst, will be enough to capture interests of young minds or will the students simply brush the materials aside. Guiding my practices in engaging students in my classroom are theorist such as Timothy Shanahan, Cynthia Shanahan, L.S. Vygotsky and Nancie Atwell.

Teaching in the Zone

On one of my earliest days in teaching I was given a copy of Nancie Atwell's, "Reading Zones" by an English teacher/mentor. Atwell has guided not only the physical structure of my classroom, but also my philosophy on engaging students in personal reading throughout the year, not only on school days. In her instructional manual, "Reading Zones" Nancie Atwell (2007) prescribes "Reading in a workshop", a reading program she has designed to engage kindergarteners to eighth grade students in daily immersion of personal reading activities. She documents that "by June each boy and girl will have finished at least thirty books; a few will read and record more than 100 titles (2007, p.12)". Through 20 years of research involving engaging young students in personal reading Atwell finds that "reading books correlates with

high levels of performance on standardized tests of reading ability (2007, p.12)”. I have used Atwell’s techniques and theories throughout the last 10 years of teaching young readers, some of whom had never read a book before entering my classroom. Atwell’s teachings have been a cornerstone in the development of my overall philosophies on teaching both reading and writing.

Sociocultural Awareness

One of the facets to unlocking the mysteries of literacy enhancement in the classroom lies in understanding the human mind and psyche. As an educator, one must first gain a highly developed comprehension of individual student motivation as well as their personal history. Through an in-depth study of L.S. Vygotsky’s sociohistorical theory, an educator can further grasp the world that surrounds our students and what forces control their lives. “A major element in Vygotsky’s thesis, that a human mind must be understood as the emergent outcome of cultural-historical process.” Centered on a belief that each student is an individual, and that we must engage them where they are, our outlook on this is crucial to meeting and understanding the minds of our students. Knowledge of how to incorporate Vygotsky’s theories into our pedagogies can help guide students both academically, as well as psychologically. In his work “Vygotsky and Pedagogy”, Harry Daniels (2001) states that “Vygotsky discussed the way in which the psychological implications of social, cultural and historical factors could be theorized and initiated in the development of appropriate methodologies for progressing the creation of appropriate forms of investigation and intervention” (page 7, pedagogies). Gaining insight and developing a repertoire that hinges on Vygotsky’s theories regarding humankind, will not only pave a way for educators to enhance our pedagogies and heighten student academic levels, but is

also a humane outlook to approaching practices that affect students' way of viewing the world of academics.

Unique Learning Paths

Knowledge was once thought of as a static, a one dimensional way of approaching a body of information that may be available on a limited basis to a select few, elite thinkers. Our classrooms have moved in a highly drastic direction, in that bodies of knowledge have taken on various dimensions and are readily available to nearly any student who seeks them. Much of this approach to learning has been brought to light, recently by two theorists, Cynthia Shanahan and Timothy Shanahan. Through their research Shanahan and Shanahan have developed the theory that encompasses disciplinary literacy. This theory rests on the idea that knowledge can be gained through more than just what is on the page or information found in printed media. “Disciplinary Theory refers to the idea that we should teach the specialized ways of reading, understanding, and thinking used in each academic discipline, such as science, history, or literature” (Shanahan and Shanahan, 2014). Flexibility is an essential component to working with at-risk teens. By incorporating the facets of disciplinary literacy an educator can branch out on ideas to engage a variety of learners. Through the application of disciplinary literacy in the classroom an educator can reach students and demonstrate new directions of learning that lie in “the unique tools that the experts in a discipline use to engage in the works that discipline” (Shanahan and Shanahan 2012). The distinct learning approaches that disciplinary literacy provides are ideal in a at-risk, secondary English classroom.

Through the last 10 years of teaching I have grown exponentially, as an educator. My research in these areas has assisted me in providing an optimum education for my English students. I hope to gain more insight in the future as both research and technology improve.

Next steps:

After attaining my M.Ed from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas I plan to pour and enormous amount of energy, time and effort into my position as the Literacy Specialist at Delta Academy Charter School. I am a product of Las Vegas and Clark County School District, this is my passion and my home. With my B.A. in English and my M.Ed in Curriculum and Instruction I plan to use my gained knowledge regarding literacy as well as the forces that have shaped me, to bring passion and purpose to at-risk students in our inner city schools. In addition to focusing on our students, I also plan to bring a literacy awareness to my fellow educators through the creation of captivating professional development activities that inspire other educators to engage in a higher understanding of how to incorporate quality literacies into our settings.

References

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