

Statement of Educational Philosophy.

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Abstract: With the use of personal perspectives, this essay examines the motives, rationales, personal philosophies and core values of Montcalm Community College faculty member; Seth Thomas Sutton and his educational philosophies.

Keywords: Constructivism, Education, Learning, Teaching Philosophy

Since *teaching, learning, education and knowledge* are key ideals in this essay, I feel it necessary for me to define them, briefly, before I can proceed further.

Learning:

I feel the most critical aspect of learning is the change that is achieved through individual successes and failures. Learning can be seen as a process that brings about behavioral change. This change in behavior is a result of external and internal experiential and informational events. It is the ability to acquire facts, skills and methodologies that can be related to and, when needed, called upon to problem solve in real time.

Teaching:

Teaching denotes a process that facilitates learning, presentation of knowledge, and the demonstration of abilities and skills. I feel that effective teaching enables students to draw connections between past and present experiences to form a new set of experiences and criteria for which to examine the world around them. This is why I feel that competent teachers play such a crucial role in the advancement of their communities.

Education:

Generally, the aim of education is to impart desired knowledge or relevant skills to a group of learners through a process of systematic instruction. Through the process of education, students enhance their critical thinking skills and ability to make well-informed decisions. Education can be provided not only formally by instructors/teachers, but also, informally, through the application of knowledge.

Knowledge:

I feel that we gain our knowledge through how we process experiences. Facts, information, and skills attained by a person through experience is the root of knowledge. Knowledge is defined as, *“the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association.”* – Webster’s Dictionary

Constructivism:

My own educational philosophy is embodied within a *constructivism* framework. This is a style of learning that describes the process of knowledge formation. In constructivism learning styles, students learn actively, rather than passively. The process of learning is a mental construction which takes place and is facilitated by collaboration. I develop my own understanding of the world through experiences and reflection thereof. When I encounter new information, I then reconcile it with my previous ideals, constructs and experiences to determine if the new information is relevant or not. It is then stored away or discarded. In either scenario, I am an active participant in creating my own knowledge. In order for me to do this, I must question and assess what I know. In my classroom, this means encouraging students to use active learning techniques to create new experiences and when reflected upon, discussing how their understandings and experiences have changed from where they started.

The concept of making the student take responsibility for their own education is not meant to dismiss the value and/or role of the teacher, nor devalue the knowledge and expertise they bring to the table. I feel that the teacher is a guide who provides the tools that allow the students to construct knowledge rather than mechanically recite information. In my classroom, I give my students inquiry-based projects in which students need to communicate their collective knowledge in a collaborative learning environment. This elevates the student from passive recipient of information to an active participant in the process. They become engaged with the content by applying their existing knowledge and real-world experiences to formulate new outcomes.

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My mission as an educator is simple, I want to promote a learning environment that is active, constructive, collaborative, goal-oriented and most importantly, meaningful. When I think about my role as a teacher, I believe that the core principle of my task is to provide my students with the necessary skills and knowledge base to become effective, contributing members of their communities.

I strive to make my classroom less of a *class* and more of a community learning environment where ideas are shared through collaborative means and encouraged through active learning techniques. Students are given opportunities to express themselves positively and cooperatively so that the free exchange of ideas can take place. I do think that our youth will change our world for the better, if given the proper tools needed to succeed. This challenge, in part, is one of many aspects I enjoy teaching at the collegiate level. The maturity of these students gives them the ability to clearly articulate their own thoughts and feelings.

They are at a particular age where they are starting to have an understanding of who they are and realizing that they will need to consider who they want to become. This is a key step in personal development and one that I appreciate. With a thirst for acceptance and desire for recognition, a single event with a disappointing outcome can prove catastrophic to the student. I want to foster a desire for students to take control over their own success. As a teacher, I understand the importance of building a support network for students and realize that I may be the first to initiate that teamwork.

I think that a skillful educator sets the tone for the classroom community, where the teacher and students base their relationship on mutual understanding, respect and trust. When both the teacher and student understand each other's goals and points of view, the building blocks of mutual respect are developed. We both deserve respect as human beings and individuals. In order to gain a students' respect and trust, I must, as an effective teacher, communicate my expectations, and at times start the lines of communication. Having a sincere attitude towards my students, showing interest in their class work as well as their lives is key in gaining students' trust; being careful not to cross the line of professionalism.

I feel that a classroom should have an atmosphere that is welcoming and accessible. The Visual Arts department is a place where students feel comfortable and confident in knowing how to use the resources that are provided. It is a place where students, as well as faculty, can celebrate diversity. I advocate and facilitate critical thinking and cooperative learning in my classroom by providing opportunities to improve their writing and oral presentation skills while enhancing their course content skills. I feel that it is vital that learners are able to communicate their idea effectively across a broad communicative spectrum. I place great emphasis on giving recognition to different learning styles that exist among students and those who come from diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

In order to foster learning, I will be enthusiastic about the content being presented, even if my students are not. I will be open to diversity and set classroom standards to ensure students respect and trust each other as well. I will be open to change and compromise but be firm in my decisions and promises. I will conduct myself in a consistent and professional manner while sharing my passion for the content. I will continue to build my knowledge base through continuing education, workshops and conferences in order to best inform my students with the most up-to-date information. I will also be open to criticisms about my teaching practices and be willing to change and adapt to new style and practices to best serve my students' needs. This can be achieved through student feedback, faculty reviews as well as curriculum development.

My philosophy of education is based on my experiences from my career and life to this point. I realize that each teacher has their own ideas about how to facilitate learning as well as having their own set of beliefs and concepts of what teaching and learning should be. For myself, teaching provides an opportunity for continual learning and growth. One of my hopes as an educator is to instill the love of learning in my students, as I share my own passion for learning with them. I feel there is a need for compassionate, strong, and dedicated

individuals who are excited about working in the education field. In our competitive society it is important for students to not only receive a solid education, but to work under someone who is aware of and sensitive to their needs. I am such a person and I will always strive to be the best educator that I can be.