

My philosophy of education is stated in the mission statement of our school, “Where every adult leads...and every child succeeds.” I present curriculum that involves the interests of the students and make learning relevant to life. I incorporate themes, integrated units, projects, group work, individual work and hands-on learning in order to make students active learners. Students are dependent upon teachers to educate them in the ways of the world so that they can be successful adults in the future. Using Algebra in everyday life can help us shop wisely, buy the right insurance, remodel a home within a budget, understand population growth, or even bet on the horse with the best chance of winning a race. In the middle school curriculum, one of the big ideas in algebraic thinking is where:

- Students extend pattern work to include arithmetic sequence.
- They use linear functions and linear equations.
- They plot rational number pairs in the Cartesian plane. They simplify algebraic and numeric expressions.
- They explore the effects of change on related variables.
- They use and solve two-step single variable equations and inequalities.

For most students, algebra brings to mind memories of manipulating symbols, usually following instructions to “simplify” an expression, or solving an equation. But what remains a mystery for many of my students, is what do these expressions and equations represent? I try to solve this mystery by using the Connected Math Program and other resources in my classroom where Algebra is explored in our daily lives in the real world. It is my desire as a teacher to help students meet their fullest potential by providing an environment that is safe, supports risk-taking and invites a sharing of ideas

I was blessed to have two wonderful, caring and intelligent parents. My mother possessed the idea of allowing a child to learn by using daily problem solving strategies. My father on the other hand, took a more intellectual and structured approach to life. Separately, they possessed very different qualities but through their combined ideas, a strong and powerful learning environment was created. It has been through their examples that I have learned that every child, regardless of his or her background, race, disability, etc., who has the desire and will to learn should be given my attention and support in an effort to help them achieve his or her goals. I believe that each student is a unique individual who needs a secure, caring, and stimulating atmosphere in which to grow and mature emotionally, intellectually, physically and socially. There are three elements that I believe are helpful to establishing this environment (1) the teacher acting as a facilitator (2) allowing the student’s natural curiosity to direct his or her learning and (3) promoting respect for all things and all people.

I practice Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s idea from the theater in that every student who walks into my classroom will be given a “willing suspension of disbelief.” By doing this, I temporarily forget all that I may previously know about an individual and take what I see in front of me as the reality of who they are (Engell & Bate, 1983). Subsequently every student receives a new start and a clean slate the second they enter into my room.

There are five key educational philosophies recognized in the field of education. These include Essentialism, Perennialism, Progressivism, Existentialism, and Behaviorism (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 382-83). The three major philosophies that correspond to my ideas of teaching are Essentialism, Progressivism, and Behaviorism. Essentialists believe that teachers should instill such traditional American values as respect for authority,

perseverance, fidelity to duty, consideration of others, and practicality (p. 369). I serve as an intellectual and moral model for the students and the academic program which is rigorous for both the slow and fast learners. However, the rigor of this program, by itself, does not always allow for the interest of the student. This is where principles of the progressive philosophy come into focus.

Progressivism has a respect for individuality. It is believed that people are social animals who learn well through active interplay with others and that our learning increase when we are engaged in activities that have meaning for us (p. 372). In a progressivist classroom, I plan lessons to stimulate curiosity and push the student to a higher level of knowledge. Students solve problems in the classroom to those they will encounter outside school, which provides them with tools needed to become flexible problem solvers in preparation for adult lives (p. 362).

With the needs of the curriculum and methods addressed, I think it is important to include aspects of classroom management. That is where the philosophy of Behaviorism comes into play. Skinner, the father of Behaviorism, believed that proper motivation does not come from within, rather it is the reinforcing opportunities of the environment that serve to strengthen or reduce behavior (Cooney, Cross, & Trunk, 1993, p.220). Basically it depends on the skill of the teacher to create an environment where appropriate reinforcers exist that facilitate learning and establish acceptable behavior within the classroom. By positive reinforcement, students will behave well toward one another, sit quietly and listen, and participate when needed. These behaviors are just as essential as learning the curriculum (p.212).

For me, teaching provides an opportunity for continual learning and growth. One of my hopes as a teacher is to instill a 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 with adolescences. In our competitive society it is important for students to not only receive a solid education, but to work with someone who is aware of and sensitive to their individual needs. On the other hand, my students have taught me to open my mind and my heart to the joys, the innocence, and the diversity of ideas in the world. Because of this, I will never forget how to smile with the new, cherish the old, and laugh with the children.

### **Works Consulted**

Cooney, William., Cross, Charles. & Trunk, Berry. (1993). From Plato to Piaget: The Greatest Educational Theorists From Across the Centuries and Around the World. New York : University Press of America.

Engell, J. & Bate, W.J., (1983). *Biographia Literaria*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sadkwe, M.P. & Sadker, D.M. (1994). Teachers, Schools, and Society. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.