My Pedagogic Creed

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INTRODUCTION

I believe first and foremost in freedom. I believe in a personal freedom which is being able to constantly be in pursuit of the best possible version of yourself. I believe in not being satisfied with the stagnant and the awareness of the need to break free from the automatization of the routine. I also believe in a sociological freedom that allows us to strive for a better world; a world that is continuously evolving and progressing not just in a technological and structural sense but also toward a critical awareness of how we are to thrive as cooperating societies. I believe that only through education do we have the means to achieve this freedom. We not only have the physical capabilities to achieve both of these freedoms but we have a responsibility to be discontent with anything less. I believe that education within the individual is distinctive and unique in the way that it is systematically received and transferred. I believe that it is each persons’ unrepeatable perspective that shapes his or her self education as well as how they educate others. The exploration of this individuality is to me, the basis of the human experience. We waste it completely if we do not realize the importance of it and how we can each contribute to furthering and educating our society.

There are many proponents of this call toward freedom that have greatly influenced me and my pedagogical understanding. Maxine Greene is a philosopher and art educator that has dedicated her life and work to this calling and has been a source of motivation for me in my pedagogic journey. John Dewey has influenced the way that I think about pedagogical practices through his ideas of social consciousness and the role of the community in education. Another
great influence throughout all of my education and in my personal metacognitive understanding is C.S. Lewis. His views on our world’s movement toward “the elimination of every kind of human excellence - moral, cultural, social or intellectual” (Lewis, 1965) as well as his beliefs on Christianity and the role of religion in education has been significantly inspirational to me.

ARTICLE ONE: WHAT EDUCATION IS

I believe in free, equal education, in that education should not be limited to people because of race, sex, religion, class or demographic. I also believe that we have to turn away from equality in education in the sense that all learners are different. We are raised with different values, we believe in different gods, we have our own individual political affiliations and I believe that we have the right to choose how we are educated and how we educate our children according to these differences.

Education begins from the moment we are born and continues, hopefully, until our last day on this earth. In tandem with common instinct, it is the foundation of all that is in us and that makes up this world. Some education is subconscious and is merely the result of living. Our bodies instinctively educate themselves physically as we grow, and adapt us to getting older, taller and bigger as well as to our changing internal and external environment. Certain early learned practices aren’t instinctual but are somewhat subconscious like language. It is the conscious however, and the development of one’s own metacognitive responsibility that is going to bridge the gap between ‘civilizational malaise’ (Green, 1977) and a deliberate, meaningful existence.
I believe that education is the tool through which we build imagination. I think that in order to improve our culture and our environment we have to be able to imagine a world that is better. We first however, have to understand the nature of the one that exists and how we got here before we can begin to see that there is a problem with our current state. Our historical timeline is proof that improvement can always be made. When we reflect on a social issue like women’s rights, we see a group of women and men who were not satisfied with a world in which women could not vote or could not contribute outside of their assumed roles. This group was only aware of their discontent because they could imagine a future that was different. They envisioned their ideal future and the change that needed to be made and then figured out how to get there. Education is the foundational element that provides the means for the development of this imagination.

I believe that education is not a privilege. It is a right that is available to people of all economical and cultural backgrounds. There are resource limitations that can hinder educational development in certain socioeconomic areas but the foundations of education are free. Education goes beyond the classroom and outside of the school and is achieved through self exploration and through the exploration of others and the world around us. Before there were state and national educational standards and before there were budgets and curriculum requirements there were parents and grandparents telling stories. I believe that the foundation of education starts in the home with parents establishing effective methods of learning through example and through sharing past experience.
I believe that education is not limited. Every minute we are awake and are actively participating, there is opportunity to learn. It is impossible to know everything about all subjects but we should approach living in a way that imagines that to be a possibility.

ARTICLE TWO: WHAT THE SCHOOL IS

I believe that the school is an establishment within the community that provides a comfortable, safe environment that stimulates learning and exploration. The school is there to equip students with the necessary tools, physically and cognitively, to motivate them to take learning into their own hands. It is a place where students aren’t afraid to ask questions and figure out how to answer questions. The school is a protected workshop where learning through failure is okay. Failure should be thought of as an opportunity to grow and to learn more from a now higher platform of knowledge that is only strengthened and broadened through exploration and risk taking.

The school is a place of social interaction that prepares students to learn and live effectively in a community, being respectful of others and helping those in need. I believe that educating students in this is the primary role of the school and of the teacher. The school should provide properly educated teachers that understand the importance of preparing students to be aware of the needs of others and considerate in their actions. In a time of family and community deterioration, however, teachers have been forced to take on a greater responsibility when it comes to their positions at the school. They are faced with students who have had little or no foundational social education at home and before they can expect the student to learn anything
further, they have to first teach them basic methods of social interaction. This way, the student may actively contribute to the system of learning within the school.

The school is also a centerpiece of the community. It is a gathering space; it is a place used to bring families together; it is an instrument of outreach and an instigator of social change. The school does not take over for education in the home, but works as a partner with the family to provide constant education. The school should be an example to the students and families of what it means to be good neighbors and should provide opportunities to help those in need within the community as well as in surrounding neighborhoods. The school should provide education in global outreach as well as domestic and should teach students and families that our ‘neighbors’ extend beyond our borders.

The school is a safe haven for those students who don’t feel safe at home or on the streets and through community involvement it should help provide safer streets and a more vibrant economy. It is a place to go for advice and for help when things get tough. It is a community within itself that provides a sense of relevance and belonging to those involved.

ARTICLE THREE: THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF EDUCATION

I believe in creative education. I believe that art, music and other forms of creative expression is how we explore our world and present our findings. I think that art gives us inside information on other cultures that allows us to step in for a moment and see things through the eyes of others. We bring with us though, our own interpretation of these other world views and then in turn, use that as a building block in our own creative projections that are now that much more informed. Educating students in the arts and giving them to tools to unleash their own
creativity is a necessary part of training them to exist in a way that can initiate change. Maxine Greene states in her essay on Releasing the Imagination (Greene, 1993) that:

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not enough for us to reproduce the way things are.

In a world that is constantly changing, we should not be stagnant in our schools, our methods, or in our subject matter. It is one thing to teach our students how to use a computer but it is a completely new thing to teach our students how to figure out how to use a computer. It’s the proverbial ‘teach a man to fish’ example that should be an educational template for us in our school systems. Our surrounding world is constantly advancing and evolving and it is not enough to just keep up with that. It is our goal as educators to raise a generation of learners that are at the forefront of that change and are the ones that are propelling us forward. In order to do this we have to stimulate the imagination of students and teach them that imagination is the conduit through which any sort of change is made. We can not even be made aware of the depravities in our society without being able to first imagine a society without them. The way that we stimulate the growth of this imagination is through education in the arts. It is through exposing our learners to artists of the past and contemporary artists in our own culture as well as around the world that acts as fuel for building imagination and creativity.

I believe in the importance of foundational content learning as well. I know that students need to learn reading, writing, science and mathematics but I also believe that creative education and imagination doesn’t stop at these subjects. There are methods of learning that incorporate the
use of imagination to solve problems. While teaching math, you can educate learners by providing problems in context of real life scenarios. Students have to use creativity and problem solving skills, which they develop along the way, to figure out how to find a solution through exploration and discovery. Building these sets of problem solving skills is the desired result of education. While content learning is important, these life skills are what allow students to exist successfully in their communities and conduct themselves in a way that allows their influence to be effective.

I believe that the study of our history is an integral part of education and that through the successes and failures of those who have gone before we can avoid the repetition of mistakes. The timeline of our history is full of change. Some say that history is cyclical and repeats itself which is not entirely true. There are, however, definite patterns throughout human history because human nature never changes. Through the study of history we can see these patterns and make connections that lead to discovering why these patterns exist. Our pursuit of absolute freedom can only be a realistic pursuit if we understand who we are, where we came from and why we are driven. History is the story of us and it is what shapes our beliefs and our understanding of our world. We can not hope to move forward unless we know that path from which we came. Our students need to be taught, not only our history but why it is relevant and how we can use it as a tool.

I believe that we have a responsibility as educators to teach our students morality and establish a foundation of values from which they can form their own opinions and beliefs. I believe that in our current state, morality and religion have been intertwined, and by separating religion from our schools, our students have lost important moral training. Dr. Ronald Nash
refers to this as a ‘value-free education.’ He states that ‘A value-free education is described as one in which students are supposed to be free from any coerced exposure to the values of anyone’ (Nash, 1991). The argument is that because America is made up of so many different groups of people with many different values, we cannot, in fairness, teach the values of one group and not the values of another. Our solution to this is to just ignore any value based education altogether. I don’t see how we can afford to lose this integral part of education. I believe that our values and our religious beliefs shape who we are and influence all of our actions. It is not something to be ignored when it comes to education. I agree with Nash when he argues that any education that ignores religious beliefs cannot qualify as quality education. He goes on to say that by being required to omit value education completely, we are actually being forced to integrate someone else’s values.

ARTICLE FOUR: THE NATURE OF METHOD

I believe that we are to establish a method of learning within our children that encourages exploration and discovery. It is the responsibility of the parents to provide, from birth, an optimal learning condition for the child that establishes habits of mind through which they can grow. Teachers should continue to build on this by providing an educational environment at school that promotes exploration and problem solving through experimentation. Problem-based learning is a constructivist learning style that empowers students to think for themselves and I believe that it is the most effective way to educate. Unlike information transfer, Problem-based learning (PBL) focuses on real world issues and prepares students by helping them to develop a skill set necessary for tackling problems they will face in the future. The students gain important
knowledge on the way to discovering the answer to the set problem. They learn what skills they can bring to a problem and how to work effectively as a team. They also learn to take control of their own education. I believe that we should teach our students how to educate themselves and that this education doesn’t stop when the bell rings at the end of the day. We, as teachers, should be constantly prompting our students to be in pursuit of knowledge. We should give them the foundational tools that allow them to be in this never ending pursuit. We need to equate for them, knowledge and freedom and help them to understand the power that lies within the journey towards this freedom.

I believe that problem-based learning (PBL) is an integral part of stimulating imagination not only in creative education but also in subjects like math and science. I believe that certain concrete methods and techniques need to be taught in order to give students the tools they need to take hold of their learning. I also believe that there are creative, interesting, hands-on ways to teach these techniques that will result in a more clear and permanent understanding of the subject matter.

We are in an exciting time, technologically speaking, where information is readily at our fingertips. I believe that teachers should embrace technology as a limitless educational tool that helps to promote active learning and investigation. We have immediate access to information and instantaneous links to other cultures. The term ‘global village’ has been popularized due to the access that we have through technology. Our world has been shrunk down through the use of the internet and other technological advancements. Cultures and people that we could only read about in books and encyclopedias, we can now talk and interact with via Skype and FaceTime. I
think that this technology will ultimately shape a new generation of culturally aware people who embrace our differences, and our world will continue to blur socioeconomic and cultural lines.

I believe that we should hold a higher learning and behavioral standard for our students. I think our biggest mistake as educators is assuming a limit of capabilities. I believe that our students only believe in themselves as much as their parents and their educators and their peers will let them. If we teach them that there is no limit to what they are capable of then they will always be striving for more. I also believe that while we are teaching our students that there is value in failure, we aren’t setting them up for complete failure. There is a delicate balance between setting high expectations and impossible standards. A quote that is commonly attributed to Albert Einstein sums it up by saying “Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing it is stupid.” We have a responsibility as educators to walk this balance beam of expectation for our students by giving them the right tools to excel and recognizing when they get frustrated and discouraged. The balance here is knowing when to keep pushing. I believe a way to keep this balance though, is through the method of scaffolding. The idea of scaffolding has been linked to the theories of Vygotsky and his zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky says in his Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes (1978) that:

[The zone of proximal development] is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Pg. 86)
I believe that taking into account this ZPD, we can provide levels of information and technique that act as building blocks to reach beyond a student’s individual capabilities and into a new realm of possibility.

CONCLUSION

I believe that education is about to turn a very significant corner. I believe that we have reached a tipping point where we are so concerned with equality and cultural and social sensitivity that we are raising up a ‘confederacy of dunces.’ We hold back the skilled, the intelligent, and the motivated in order to create an environment that allows for the idle and unmotivated to not feel bad about themselves. We give out trophies and prizes to those who just show up. We want our kids to feel a sense of belonging and to not feel inferior but where is the motivation to try to improve? Where is the desire for that sense of accomplishment and that satisfaction from the result of hard work? We set our standards at the least common denominator and those who excel are the ones that get held back. I believe that we are at a place now with public education that these issues are no longer dormant but are out there and being discussed. I see, even in my brief glimpse into our educational system, that people are calling for change and that if enough people want change we can make it happen. It requires taking back our schools and our communities and not settling for just meeting a set standard. It is having the ability to imagine a better future for our children and for our world and figuring out how to get there. They key is not in finding better solutions to our problems, I believe it is in finding the root of our problems and asking better questions.
References


