

Running Head: Philosophy of education

Philosophy of Education: Building a Tool Belt of Skills

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ATSL 5700 R50

"Philosophy of Education: Building a Tool Belt of Skills"

One of the most important jobs that anyone can undertake is to teach something to someone else. The transfer of knowledge is the catalyst that shapes the world. Teachers must build a "tool belt," of skills that allows them to effectively teach. The tools include, but are not limited to, reflection, portfolio development, evaluation, and planning. Some people decide early in life that they want to be a teacher, and spend time to achieve that goal. Others feel a calling later in life and decide to make the transition to teacher. Sadly, some just want a job and do not care if they actually impart knowledge. No matter when the decision occurs, the person must then begin to prepare their tool belt. I decided while in college that I needed to become a teacher because I desired to change lives. I changed my major not knowing the rules and guidelines that would govern my life as a teacher. I saw some items as dumb and I decided I was smart enough to skip some steps. I did not realize that I must use what I learn to build my tool belt. Finally, I was forced to reflect and to prepare a portfolio. It was during those times that I realized it was not enough to "teach," but that I had to

continually make myself better. My students will only learn from me if I take the time to evaluate what I am doing.

I progressed through a tough teacher education program and eventually entered student teaching feeling anxious. It was during that time that I learned to plan and reflect. I graduated confident that I would gain a job and life would be perfect. I would be teaching, my students would be learning, and lives would be changed. God had a different plan, and I am still without a "teaching" job. I did gain a job that allowed me to see what it is really like to be in a school. Through working at Educational Talent Search, I saw what makes a good and bad teacher from an adult standpoint. I decided that I wanted to begin my Master's degree to increase my knowledge, and to earn additional certification. I chose the Regents Online Degree Program (RODP) and once again began a program blindly. It was here that I learned about National Board Certification and the larger rules governing what teachers should do. I had completed a student teaching portfolio that seems childish compared to what I have now learned about portfolios. This reflective paper will look at how I progressed in my thinking over the past five years as I began my journey into the profession of teaching. I will also examine how my

learning and life experiences have influenced my
"philosophy of teaching."

My grand dreams after high school included becoming a civil engineer and making lots of money. That lasted for six weeks before I had dreams of being a teacher. I changed my major to education, and then told all the professors that I would probably change back. As a beginning education student, I knew nothing of reflection, professional development, classroom management, or licensure. I thought I would take some classes, get a degree, and then enter a classroom to teach whatever I wanted. Now I realize how wrong I was, and wish I could travel back into time and change the courses that I took. Many of my entry-level classes I took for a joke. My first portfolio was finished the night before it was due and only then by "borrowing" papers from a friend who had previously taken the class. I learned how to write lesson plans, or at least I could write one if I had the template in front of me. I never committed any of my learning to memory. I merely used it to complete the coursework. I now see the error of my ways, and hope my mistakes will make me a better teacher. I left the first three years of my teacher education program with no tools.

As an upperclassman, I took things a little more seriously because I wanted to graduate quickly. I began my student teaching shortly after my twenty-second birthday, and I was somewhat scared of only being four years older than my students were. During the semester of my student teaching, my father fell critically ill and then died. This had an important impact on my teaching style. I would say that I grew up a little more and began to take things more seriously. In my first student teaching assignment, I was lucky to plan more than a day in advance. I would work what I would do in class the night before. This was not beneficial to me, or to my students.

When I arrived at my second student teaching assignment, it was a week late because of my father's funeral. The teacher handed me the teacher's materials and told me I had to cover four chapters of Tennessee History in six weeks with breaks for Terra Nova's included in my planning. After three days I had decided what sections I would cover each day, when I would test the students, and had an idea of which activities I would have the students complete. This master list became the biggest lifesaver for me. Activities had to be juggled around because of snow, school assemblies, and a soccer game, but I did not have to stress over what I would do with my students daily. I

learned it was easy to deal with life when I prepared the materials I needed a week in advance.

It was also during my student teaching placements where I learned to reflect. I had several students who had IEP's, and I had to modify the assignments and tests for them. I found myself thinking about how best to help these students during my drive back to campus. I learned that reflection was an invaluable tool for me as a teacher. I found myself growing and becoming a better teacher because I reflected on how effective my lessons were. I had a break between the classes I taught and I would use that time to reflect on how the students reacted to my presentation.

Tennessee Tech assigns each student teacher an evaluator who is responsible for monitoring their progress and assigning a grade. I was lucky to receive an "exemplary educator" from the state of Tennessee as my advisor. She had been teaching for many years and had numerous tips to share. I was scared before my first evaluation, but I quickly learned that I had nothing to fear. I began to look forward to my evaluations because it gave me a chance to see my strengths and weaknesses as assessed by a true professional. I am a perfectionist and used the evaluations to help "perfect" my teaching skills. My thinking changed

from dreading evaluations to using them as another tool to help my students.

I left student teaching and college expecting to learn tons during my first teaching job. I was not able to land a job with a school, but I did become employed at Educational Talent Search. ETS is a government grant program designed to assist low-income students in attending college. I found myself as the middle school specialist, and I had four middle schools and one high school to advise. This job was invaluable in learning the nuances of being inside a school. I was able to observe the interaction between teachers and administrators.

This job sustained the work on my planning skills. I was required to turn in monthly planning sheets detailing the activities I would complete with my students at each school. I had to deal with different amounts of time, and the different rules of each school. My reflecting skills also grew stronger as I thought about how to best help these students. Many of my students have bad home lives and need all the encouragement and help my program can give.

ETS also allowed me to continue my practice of reflection. My schools are located in two different counties, and I drive many miles in a day. I learned to use this time to reflect on how the activity affected my

students. The drive time also allowed me to formulate a plan for changing the activity for the next group of students. These actions along with conversations with my director allowed me to be an effective advisor.

Evaluation was another aspect that I dealt with at ETS. Many people evaluated me informally at different times. I had to impress superintendents of schools, principals, guidance counselors, teachers, and my director. Without the support of the administration, I would not be able to gain entry into the school. The teachers allow me the time to meet with my students. As time progressed, these people offered me feedback that I considered an evaluation of my performance in their schools. The comments they made helped me to make decisions regarding my effectiveness. My director was responsible for formal and informal evaluations of my job performance. Her comments and assistance had a profound impact on my perception of the impact I made.

However, the biggest evaluation I passed came from my students. Each student had to complete an "end of the year" interview. Many of the middle school students did not take them seriously, but the high school students were brutally honest. Their acknowledgement of how I helped them, and what things I could have done differently helped mold the

planning I did over the summer. Their comments helped me to grow as an educator.

My graduate level classes have once again molded my thinking about planning and reflection. I gained a new appreciation into the work that goes into a making a professional portfolio. I was very surprised to learn about the standards imposed on teachers. I learned about state curriculum standards, but knew little about the National Board Standards. These standards interest me and guide the way I look at teaching now. The five core propositions from the National Board show what I hope to exemplify in my teaching.

The information provided by the National Board made me become conscious that other professionals think the same way as I. The core propositions are all goals that I had worked hard toward without realizing they existed. I have set the goal that I will receive National Board Certification on day, and will use the process as another tool in my tool belt.

My graduate level classes have added another element to my evaluation process. I am forced to evaluate my progress toward my degree without the help of a teacher. There is a teacher available to assign grades, but she is not aware of the impact the class has made on me. The RODP

has allowed me to gain a degree without forcing me to quit my job or move. At the same time it has removed the personal element that was so important in my undergraduate degree and my teaching process. It has also made me grow, as now I have to evaluate for myself the progress I am making.

The professional portfolio is an important aspect of National Board Certification and my graduate level courses. As I look at my student teaching portfolio I realize how little effort I put into it. My professional portfolio will be an indication of my abilities as a teacher and as an individual. As a result of my graduate class, I will not be afraid to make it slightly conventional. I am going to use my skills and talents to create a product I will be proud of, and in turn able to use to gain a teaching job. I will make my portfolio an important tool in my professional development.

Everything I have learned for the past five years about the field of education has influenced my philosophy of education. My development of skills such as evaluation and reflection has changed my thoughts on how students learn. I have learned that students learn best in an accepting atmosphere where they feel comfortable. I am a firm believer that students will learn while playing, and

should not be expected to learn in an environment totally devoid of fun. I believe teachers should always learn and modify their teaching practice, in order to best help their students. Teachers must be able to showcase their talents, and show proof they are working on their deficiencies. Teachers are governed by rules and guidelines mandated to ensure students learn the right material. My philosophy of education is a flexible statement that I will retune as I learn and grow.

Teachers face the task of influencing generations. The moment a person decides to become a teacher, they begin preparing for the task of educating tomorrow. Their undergraduate experiences help them to build their skills. These skills translate into the tools they will use to cultivate the next generation of leaders. The tool of reflection is invaluable to a teacher; it is through this tool they are able to modify their teaching style to help their class. Teachers can practice formal or informal reflection, but both methods help the teacher to grow. Evaluation is another item hanging from the tool belt. Negative evaluation can spur a teacher to modify their style, while positive evaluations can affirm the changes made after reflection. The professional portfolio is a tool used to prove the teacher is committed to the community of

learning. It is easy to show the product made by a craftsman, but the teacher must work hard to show the "crafts" they produce in the classroom. Planning is the most important tool any teacher will ever use. This tool allows the teacher to structure their instructional time for maximum benefit for the students. Without effective planning teachers will quickly face burnout. There are other tools, such as classroom management, that teachers will develop, but are dependent on the school in which they teach. Beginning and experienced teachers face each day with the tools they have prepared, hoping to influence a generation to greater and higher achievements.