Educational Philosophy

by Heidi Hutchison

Over the years, my beliefs about teaching and learning have changed a lot. I began my career as a teacher and thought I knew what education was "supposed" to be like because I had gone to school myself, and not much had changed since I was a student. The classrooms looked the same, the desks were very similar to what I experienced, the schedule was the same, each subject was still in separate silos, and at that time, the technology was not much different. Although some schools had computers as a limited resource for teachers, students certainly did not have them. I knew I wanted to teach differently than what I had experienced myself, but didn't quite know how I would accomplish this task.

As each year went by, I realized that students do not learn from what you tell them, they learn by what you do. I trusted my administrators not because of what they said, but rather because of what they did. Leading by example has been part of my teaching pedagogy for my students *and* my colleagues. I love learning, I love taking risks by sharing my learning, my mistakes, and my passions. I believe in servant leadership - respecting learners by listening to their needs and then supporting those needs. Most importantly, my experience as a Quaker educator for the past twelve years has profoundly influenced not only my beliefs as an educator, but how I live and learn as a human being. Seeing the "light" in each individual, respecting and celebrating our differences, striving for simplicity, seeking truth by listening to the wisdom of our community, and creating regular time for reflection have become integral parts of who I am as an educator.

Learning is a highly personalized process and a unique experience for each individual; each individual is highly complex and capable of learning. Although this is a unique experience, it can be a social and collaborative one. It is imperative we are culturally responsive to meet the needs of all students in our communities. Nurturing the gifts each student brings fosters trust and creates a foundation to build relationships. Students need to be active participants in their own

learning and they must have a voice in the direction they take with furthering and extending that learning. Students are not empty vessels waiting for us to pour what they need to know into them. They are critical thinkers, problem solvers, collaborators, and as [Zoey Weil](), co-founder and President of the Institute for Humane Education suggests, students are "solutionaries!" Project-based learning and experiential learning are excellent methods for students and teachers to engage in experiences that support learning by doing. Students are empowered and develop their own agency to problem-solve. Often these experiences can lead to service learning opportunities. One excellent way to foster service learning and engagement with social justice issues is to take advantage of our own city or town as our "other" classroom. In doing so, we can actively engage with organizations and the people that live in our community. Our communities offer rich opportunities to discuss issues of equity, racism, diversity, and culture. We need to utilize regular reflection and create safe spaces where students can make sense of these important experiences. These methods require that teachers play the part of facilitator. They no longer steer the ship for the entire learning journey, rather they co-pilot the voyage with the student.

Leadership that fosters creative and progressive learning communities is imperative today to a school's success. In order to prepare students for a world that does not yet exist, educators, meaning teachers *and* administrators, need to take ownership of their own learning by having a growth mindset. Administrators need to be lead learners for teachers and teachers need to be lead learners for students. In addition, recognizing and supporting our students' first teachers, their parents, is perhaps our most powerful tool in educating our students. By being proactive in creating positive relationships with parents and by listening to their needs, we build a bridge from students' homes to our school.

Preparing students to be excellent global and digital citizens is another responsibility of our schools. One way we can do this is by creating a diverse environment. By learning about each other, we grow in respect, tolerance and empathy for one another. Global citizenship skills are extremely important in preparing our students for their future. Connecting with other classrooms from around the globe should be a part of their educational story. Many times, opportunities for collaborative service learning are born. Students are empowered to make a difference and it's meaningful. These types of experiences can also be interwoven with digital citizenship skills while utilizing the most effective technology for the task.

As a leader, it is important to model the effective and responsible use of technology for teachers, students and parents. Technology has the power to help us save time, communicate more quickly, and tell our own story as a school. In addition to traditional vehicles of communication, utilizing social media to promote the positive events of the day not only reaches a wider audience, but helps educate the stakeholders in our school community.

Lastly, as a leader, it is my responsibility to *serve* and support our teachers by inspiring self-directed learning and providing professional development that is relevant. It is my

responsibility to be a curricular leader by walking the talk and by being a reflective practitioner. It is my responsibility to listen and develop leaders. In doing so, I am not a better leader because people know my beliefs, but rather because they see what I do.

"A pseudo leader always leaves you with a feeling of their greatness, while an authentic leader always leaves you with a feeling of your greatness."

-Author Unknown