Implicit Views of Teaching and Learning

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My implicit views on teaching and learning have been, and will continue to be, fluid as I look towards the future and reflect on my past. My pre-service internships and personal educational experiences have highlighted the areas that I value most in my daily approach to classroom relationships as well as what I consider being essential in a successful learning environment. My classroom will incorporate Kohn’s emphasis on community classrooms in which all learners feel safe and supported, Stiggins’ tailored instruction for every student through consistent assessment for learning, Kohn’s student-centered approach to motivating learners, and detailed planning and consideration to curricular outcomes while still considering the needs of learners requiring differentiated instruction. I strongly believe that the voice of the student is central to a successful and holistic learning experience as well as the creation of school communities that foster a love of-long learning and collaboration.

I have observed how a successful learning environment that is student-focused is one in which the students feel safe and their opinions are heard and valued. Kohn’s idea of the communal classroom, which places the interests of the students above those of the teacher, is an effective model for creating this atmosphere. In my own experience I had to actively work to ensure students had an equal opportunity to share their ideas and be praised for their accomplishments. I would often notice students raise their hands to answer questions to which they would later state “I forgot” or “I don’t know”. I tried to use these moments to encourage the student in their own ability to offer responses and repeat or rephrase any questions in a way that allowed them to offer a response. I want my students to know that I care more about their learning and growing as a whole person than anything else and I will make every effort to explain this to them. I believe students have a great capacity for learning and growing no matter their abilities and I think they deserve respect in all situations in the classroom. Even disciplinary situations are an opportunity for me to show students what it means to be in a safe and caring atmosphere. I intentionally never discipline a student without spending time with them and kindly having them reflect on the problem at hand and what they could do to avoid it in the future. Students who are actively a part of this process will take more ownership of their actions and learning. This relationship is the motivating factor for students to grow and collaborate in my classroom. I will not simply offer the answers, but instead prompt them through inquiry-based learning and praise them when they find solutions to the problems they created. It is important to me that my students understand that they themselves are not the problem, but that they can control the choices they make, good or bad, and who they become. I realized early on that I want to be an assertive teacher who clearly separates my classroom management from instruction and undergoes all my student, parent and staff interactions in love. I have seen through experience how this causes students not only to treat me seriously as an educator but they also began to respect me as they realize I care for them in spite of calling out their poor choices when necessary. I work hard to consider the emotional consequences to the student in what I say to note behaviour concerns, and I have found that even the toughest conversations can be done with kindness and consideration.

As a professional educator I greatly value the various forms of assessment and their ability to support and communicate student learning to all stakeholders. Assessment was a strong focus of my internship, as the formative groupings of a team-teaching room would not work without consistent formative, alongside summative, assessment. Stiggins notes the value of consistent assessment for learning that I want to carry into my teaching practices. This approach uses constant assessment, through methods that include, but are not limited to, observation checklists, guided grouping discussions using manipulatives, exit slips and subject journals. This assessment is then used to formulate lessons and changes in focus for students as necessary and is only most effective when the data is being used and students are receiving specific feedback on the goals they are working towards. The regular assessment feedback I provide a student, parent or administrator is designed to help students see how they are achieving the goals we have implemented collaboratively and what steps can be taken for further growth.

I know that not all learners are motivated the same way in any classroom; though many students value the intrinsic reward that came with successfully completing a task or gaining a new skill, I have seen some of my lower-level learners were initially motivated by small rewards such as stickers and then could learn how to be motivated by the relationship we built and the topics they were exploring. Kohn notes the role of motivation that is not focused on the rewards and punishments we offer students but on the relational community that is built in the classroom and the creativity of the learning environment, as noted by Kieren Egan; my lessons and interactions with students are creatively designed with my students’ personal interests mind for this very reason. It is evident to me that open and age-appropriate honest conversation with my students that shows a genuine interest in their lives is an effective approach to helping to create holistic learners who value learning for the rest of their lives.

To ensure the above-mentioned learning atmosphere is present while still inspiring students towards their respective curricular outcomes, I am diligent and considerate in my lesson planning and creation of the physical environment. Bruner notes that learners have various needs and interests and once I know these needs I can formulate ‘scaffolded’ lessons that are engaging and accessible by all my learners. Students will work alongside me to set out goals for their learning and use the feedback from the aforementioned assessments to improve in their attainment of these goals. Once a specific goal is met the plan will be entirely reworked for the next stage of their learning. My experience in classes and schools that offer formative groupings has taught me that if a student excels at a unit but not at another then they can change groups respectively and feel empowered by their personalized learning experience. Those who I was most concerned about, the lower groups that were assessed below grade-level, were actually empowered in the formative group where they became the leader to their peers and their voices could be heard. Students’ engagement increases tremendously when lessons are designed with student-specific goals and interests in mind. From unicorns to wrestling, for any level of learner, the students’ ideas and interests are the voice behind our learning endeavours. The physical classroom considerations are also tied to our lessons and the students themselves. I offer a variety of groupings and activities to meet these needs. Some methods and structures that may be the most common in my classroom include guided instruction, whole group mini lessons, stations, hands-on problem solving, and think-pair-share arrangements; all of these are flexible and fluid based on what the needs of my learners are at a given point in time. I recognize the value of Vygotsky’s one-on-one learning for students, while still noticing the realities of the modern classroom. For this reason I want to try and achieve as much of this kind of student-teacher interaction as possible. Though it is not possible all of the time, students will interact with me to create and monitor learning goals; assessments and lessons in guided groupings may be a realistic approach to this discourse.

Communication and collaboration play a large role in my continued learning as an educator, and I know that a continued dialogue on these teaching practices will help to make me the most effective educator. A successful learner grows in knowledge of the curriculum as well as in becoming a human who can actively navigate the realities of life with confidence and dignity for themselves and others; a successful teacher facilitates this kind of learning with love. Students can holistically flourish in a caring and safe community environment that considers student differences and interests and creates physical spaces, assessment and lessons that make use of this information for the students’ best interests. The success of this classroom depends on the teacher giving up their absolute control to allow the voices of the students to be heard and respected.

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