

TEACHER & STUDENT-CENTERED PHILOSOPHIES OF EDUCATION

Teacher-centered philosophies use traditional means to discipline students and test their appreciation for the knowledge gathered from past scholars in order to maintain cultures and ensure a successful future. Essentialists teachers lecture on the major academic subjects and skills. Perennialists also push students to excel, but believe education should go beyond memorizing facts to learning how to develop thoughts. In perennialist classrooms, the teacher guides discussions of great works of literature and helps student search for deeper meanings.¹

Philosophies that believe it is necessary for students to shape their own learning experience use more democratic and experimental methods to help generate self awareness, skills to tackle real-world challenges, and tools to change past beliefs. Progressive teachers try to recreate real-world situations where students can answer their own questions from observations and scientific exploration. This prepares students with social and technological skills needed throughout life. The approach of social reconstructionism is to teach students that the knowledge they gain from their classroom subjects can, and should, be used to correct the inequalities and injustices they observe in the community. Existentialism helps students explore their personal beliefs and abilities with little structure or guidance. Teachers only provide opportunities.¹

From my experiences, I feel social reconstructionism reflects my views on education best. During family and classroom discussions I retained more when information was presented in a way that made me passionate about a social or environmental issue. Although I love literature and believe it is important to learn to develop reasoning skills, I least agree with perennialism because it encourages learning for the sake of learning. I think that when you are given the opportunity to educate yourself, you have a moral responsibility to use that knowledge to improve the lives of those who are less fortunate.

¹ Sadker, D.M., Sadker, M.P., & Zittleman, K.R. (2008). *Philosophy of Education. Teachers, Schools, and Societies.* (pp. 314-348). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

A DEBATE ON SCHOOL ELECTIVES

In the debate following the student proposal that the school offer an elective on the achievements of African Americans in history, I felt that the academic freedom of the instructors had been endangered. This right ensures that teachers and students have the opportunity to “learn, teach, study, research, and question, without censorship, coercion, or external political or other restrictive influences”.¹ Although no decision was reached, the order by our Department Chair that we follow the out-dated curriculum and include only the state approved text severely restricts classroom discussion.

Despite increased standardization pressures, many institutions have adopted policies encouraging student academic freedom through opportunities to choose school and course enrollment.² It is important for students to take interest in the subject as well as be exposed to various perspectives. If no electives were made available in addition to required courses, I would include the contributions of minority groups through extra readings and activities. I would also have the option to wait for the board to review and update the curriculum or to encourage a broader, more inclusive list of required texts.

Although academic freedom frequently draws support from the First Constitutional Amendment, court decisions have not set a fixed guideline for the extent that it applies. As experts in their field, teachers are better able to determine what is important to their study than policy makers. However, teachers are subject to hiring contracts and peer review. In *Mayer v. Monroe County* it was federally upheld that teachers must stick to the approved curriculum.² I believe that the inclusion of minority contributions is both relevant and non-disruptive. However, if the majority of the department concluded that the students request was unsubstantial, I could be fired or fail to have my contract renewed.

¹ Levinson, R. (2007). *Academic freedom and the first amendment*. Retrieved February 10th, 2008, from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/protect/legal/topics/firstamendment.htm>

² Sadker, D.M., Sadker, M.P., & Zittleman, K.R. (2008). *Philosophy of education. School law and law ethics*. (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

IN RESPONSE TO 9/11

As a teacher it would be important for me to adapt to the diverse needs of my students as they coped with the uncertain future of American society. Ignoring the events would offend students who were concerned for the lives of their friends and family. However, I wouldn't have adequate information to give and it would be inappropriate to show news footage that could intensify the fear and tension the students were experiencing. In this position, I would try to engage my classes in discussions of comparable global events in history and how different groups have responded to feelings of shock, anger, and loss. Students could evaluate whether they believed the right decisions were made given the knowledge at the time and in retrospect. For example, we could examine the reactions to Pearl Harbor and discuss the later apology issued by the President. This exercise would allow the students advocating retaliation to consider a situation where they were less emotionally invested and to realize their initial responses could have unanticipated consequences. Introducing the perspectives of different societies could help relieve the hostility towards students of Middle Eastern or immigrant descent.

Today's schools must adopt a multicultural approach to education by expanding the curriculum to reflect diversity, adopting different learning styles, familiarizing teachers with different backgrounds, and actively working to redress social injustices.¹ To tackle the issue of diversity my school might add programs, such as Women's History Month, which would increase awareness of different cultural experiences. Another project would be to incorporate different ethnic perspectives into the curriculum by using resources available in the community. The school would collaborate with community organizations to conduct workshops and experiential learning opportunities. Key cultural community members, such as artistic performers or religious professionals, could present different interpretations of topics that are studied.

¹ Sadker, D.M., Sadker, M.P., & Zittleman, K.R. (2008). *Philosophy of education*. (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

A NOTE ON LEGISLATION & STANDARDS

The Virginia General Assembly is a bicameral legislature with 100 districts represented in the House of Delegates and 40 members in the Senate. The primary responsibilities for this body are to create laws, represent citizens in shaping public policy, approve the state budget, administer taxes, and elect judges. These decisions often greatly impact public education. The state representatives for the district I am registered to vote in are Delegate Robert G. Marshall and Senator Charles J. Colgan.¹

Another Virginia delegate, Margaret Vanderhye, strongly believes that high standards in education should not be achieved by depriving students of a sense of achievement and purpose. In her proposal for improving educational policies, she encourages the state to revise the current system of standardized testing, encourage small group learning, and add lessons on personal responsibility to the curriculum. She also states it is important to improve recruitment, training, and salaries for teachers.²

I think the greatest weakness in her position is that she presents a very simplified view of current issues. She fails to address funding, safety, charter programs, nutrition, access to early education programs, and the affordability of higher education. Another important consideration is ensuring that schools are equipped with modern resources, facilities, and technologies.

However, I support her position to redraw state-wide testing policies. I think she gives strong arguments for the antagonistic effects the requirements of No Child Left Behind and the Standards of Learning have had. She believes these obligations have put too much stress on teachers, students, and families.² These policies have made it difficult to develop creative and explorative classroom environments. I also believe that a good educational experience depends on the quality of teachers. I agree that it is necessary to set high standards and to create programs that will attract skilled, motivated teachers.

¹ Commonwealth of Virginia. (2008). Virginia General Assembly. Retrieved March 16, 2008, from <http://legis.state.va.us>

² Friends of Margi Vanderhye. (2007). Margi on education. Retrieved March 16, 2008, from <http://www.vanderhye.com/Education>

DISCUSSION BOARD PROMPTS

1. Using no names, select your favorite teacher from elementary school, middle school, high school, or college and identify what that teacher's specific educational philosophy might be given your observations and what you've read about philosophy in Chapter 8 of your text. On what basis are you making this identification? Describe how this teacher influenced you.

My favorite teacher passed away two years after I sat in his seventh grade math class. His last lecture is still on the chalk board in my old middle school. Every time the administration discusses wiping it down to allow the other teachers that come and go through the classroom use of the board, the current students protest. They remember him without ever having listened to his lectures, come to him with their concerns, or tried to make him laugh the way we did. In the same way, I knew him before I was ever officially enrolled in his class. It was the one secret older, wiser students would reveal to the incredibly nervous and awkward incoming students. "Go to Mr. L."

His first lesson – don't always rely on your first impressions. He was a short, tough looking man with no neck. He had freckles and glasses but carried himself like a former college wrestler. You could hear him yelling from down the hall at students, teachers, and parents alike. He was blunt and rude and smelled like cigarette smoke after lunchtime. His favorite weapon was a small piece of chalk that would strike the quiet students, the ones that never complained or asked questions, as well as the little speaker box above the door whenever the afternoon announcements started in the middle of what he was saying. But despite his rough edges, he was the most forgiving person I have ever met and someone who had tremendous faith in the good in human nature. He was a fan of the underdog and took in the school misfits, the class clowns, the nerds, the one's who came with bruises every morning, the serious delinquents, the kids on free lunch. He was the Father of the Middle School Mafia. The principal and teachers pretended to put up with him, but secretly they respected him too.

Whether you came to him for help with homework or an extra dollar for a snack to get you through detention, you walked away with a life lesson. His student-centered approach to learning was evident in his emphasis on the value of the everyday things learn from individual experiences rather than text books and exercises. He taught students to forget the grades and honors and to learn from a desire to go through the process of setting your own goals and finding the motivation to overcome obstacles. He forced you to realize you can't lean on teachers and parents and the administration to push you through school. Learning was something that had to continue even when the world changed, your role models became too busy, and you had to leave your instructors behind. He respected students and was willing to admit he had something to learn from their experiences as well.

After reading the Philosophy of Education chapter of our text, I think my favorite teacher's philosophy was social reconstructionism. His class did not resemble the typical social reconstructionist classroom. He didn't outright ask us to evaluate a particular injustice in society or grade us based on a report successfully promoting change in the community around us. Yet, somewhere in the variables and lines that are still scratched on that same chalkboard, he taught us to become more observant of our surroundings, to at least be curious of different perspectives, and to solve problems efficiently. He guided us by example in his relationships with others to demand equality and disdain ignorance. I remember very little of the problems we went over or the equations I somehow memorized. I remember his tangents and stories and news tidbits and complaints. I remember the pizza box for the boy that never wanted to go home because there wouldn't be dinner at home. And I remember the nerds who would spend the first few minutes of class learning how to at least talk about wrestling. I remember standing rigid at a podium because he talked me into running for a class office, saying I could really change our, somewhat little then, but significant world.

I am very grateful for how he has impacted my educational experience. I am a biology major now. From his lessons I learned that the subject you study, what challenges you and interests you, doesn't matter. Anything can be applied to making changes in society for the better. My textbooks and lecturers now teach me that humans are inherently harmful to the planet and that society teaches us to ignore the insufficiencies and disparities that exist. This one teacher encouraged me to believe that if I can spread awareness and a passion for learning more about these issues, then, through gradually changing the mindset of one person at a time, society can make the necessary changes to improve life for everyone.

2. Consider the following Supreme Court cases: *Edwards v. Aquillard* (1987) and *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* (1969). How do you think these cases have shaped the thinking about the issues of religion and the schools and students' rights in our country? What are the wider implications of these cases?

The Supreme Court cases *Edwards v. Aquillard* and *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* both considered the extent to which the First Amendment to the Constitution should be applied in public classrooms. This amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech."

In the 1987 case, *Edwards v. Aquillard*, the court ruled that it was unconstitutional to require teachers to cover creationism and evolutionary theories equally, if at all. The majority believed forcing teachers to present Biblical creationism promoted one religious philosophy over all others. The judges concluded that teaching a variety of theories of developmental biology approved by the scientific community was valuable for student learning and would not violate any constitutional rights. The case also brought up the issue of academic freedom. It was debated whether the state legislature had actually given teachers a greater ability to determine curriculum.

Edwards v. Aquillard demonstrated that while freedom and diversity are widely valued in the United States today, the country was founded from a largely conservative and Christian society with many persisting ideals. Early schools were primarily intended to teach Puritan beliefs to children and some conservative philosophies of education continue to consider the primary role of education to pass on traditional morals and values, often rooted in religion. On the other hand, many fiercely defend the separation of church and state and believe that the inclusion of a particular faith in education would prevent children from thinking critically and might encourage religious persecution.

The decision of the Supreme Court in *Edwards v. Aquillard* has other implications for today's increasingly global and technological world. It may serve as a guide for how the federal government will respond to the growing number of conflicts between the moral values held by individuals and advances in science and industry. These debates include genetic engineering, industry emissions contributing the global warming, the use of fetal tissues and embryonic cloning. The courts will have to decide between the knowledge and widespread benefits to society to be gained from scientific research and the ethical problems studies can raise when dealing with human populations.

On August 3rd, 2005, an article in the *Washington Post* discussed the debate that followed the comment made by George W. Bush that intelligent design theories should be taught along with evolution. I think children in schools should be exposed to a wide variety of different ideas, but I also question who should decide which ideas are the most valuable and intrude least on individual freedoms. The statement by our President is a great example of how Americans will be forced to think about the issues that divide our culture and redefine their beliefs even after decisions in the Supreme Court have limited legislation that may be passed.

In the 1969 case, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District*, the Supreme Court concluded that students should remain entitled to the freedom of speech while they are in school as long as it does not significantly disrupt classroom activities or prevent other students from learning. The case was prompted by the suspension of three Iowa students for refusing to remove arm bands in protest of the Vietnam war. In the U.S. schools officials may not voice many opinions that would effect the personal political, religious, or moral views of the students. However case like this one have given students the right to pray in school, create special interest groups, and protest.

There are still many situations wear it is appropriate to limit the right's of students that would not necessarily be prevented outside school boundaries. A student's behavior should not prevent there from being an open and safe learning environment for others. Hateful speech could cause students to feel rejected or to fear abuse. Forms of speech that incite discrimination and violence are still legally prohibited in schools. The issue of student rights in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* also has implications student internet use and what responses the schools should make to forms of speech such as symbols of gang membership.

[#2 Continued in response to online discussions]

I agree that students have the right to an education that provides them the opportunity to encounter a wide variety of perspectives and worldviews. These topics capture student interest and promote classroom discussion because they address basic questions that students will face throughout life in defining their beliefs and purpose. Learning different philosophies of religion, which often cross ethnic and political boundaries, also encourages tolerance, understanding, and respect for others. I also agree with you that instructors should have a certain amount of freedom in the curriculum they teach. Teachers should be able to react and adjust to their students and the dynamic classroom environment. Also, teachers often have a particular area of study that they have specialized in where they can express information clearly and explore an idea more thoroughly than standardized curriculums may allow. I think the little extra students learn from this approach contributes to creating a society where people have a diversity of knowledge they can share with each other. We do not have time to absorb all the facts and wisdoms that have accumulated over the thousands of years of human existence. I believe it is better for there to be some variance in the educational experience people have than for each individual in society to have and identical but only surface understanding of each subject.

However, I agree with the ruling in *Edwards v. Aquillard* and with the application of a separation of church and state to public schools. I believe freedom of religion in this country not only grants individuals the right to worship as they choose, but also the right to live in a society free from religious oppression of any kind. If government sponsored institutions favored one religious truth over any others, it would alienate citizens who are of a different faith and create a legal basis for differentiating between people in places of work, education, and politics. This could cause people to psychologically distinguish the state sponsored worldview as the only correct belief system. I believe this would ultimately lead to discrimination and oppression. In the case, the state legislature required teachers to give a balanced presentation of both creationism and evolutionary theory when either was taught. I believe this act was unconstitutional because it listed only one philosophy of education in its requirements. I think the state of Louisiana also failed to provide teachers with greater academic freedom. They limited the curriculum to presenting human development in two ways or none at all.

I do not mean to say the government should completely remove religious discussions from schools. I recognize that learning different worldviews is valuable for a child's development, but it can also be harmful to society if we do not take great care to present them in a balanced and objective manner. In the *Edwards v. Aquillard* case, I think it was inappropriate to teach creationism as the only spiritual viewpoint on human development and to include it in a science curriculum. In our schools most scientific studies focus on teaching children the experimental process as a way of critical thinking.

In most religious philosophies, on the other hand, ideas are derived from historical or mythical events found in sacred texts and from individual spirituality and faith. I think it is more appropriate to include creationism in the context of a humanities class that presents a greater number of diverse, cultural views on the origin and purpose of life on Earth.

I think the ruling of the Supreme Court in *Tinker v. Des Moines* could actually support the separation of Church and state. It defends the right of students to the freedom of speech on the grounds that entering school they remain individuals in society. Students have the ability to pray and share their beliefs with other in the classroom as long as they are not preventing other students from learning or inciting violence. However, it did not necessarily grant public school teachers, as representatives of a government sponsored institution, the right to impose their viewpoint.

3. Reflect on viewing of the films *Eye of the Storm* (1970) and *A Class Divided* (1984) describing Jane Elliott's brown eye/blue eye experiment with her students and their later reunion.

Jane Elliott was a third grade teacher in an all white, all Christian community in Iowa in 1968. The day after Martin Luther King was killed, a student approached her and asked "Why'd they shoot that king?" Her class had recently named Martin Luther King their hero of the month and they were confused by the what could possibly motivate someone to attack such a man. Stirred by the arrogance and ignorance with which adults around the country were responding to the event, she wanted to move beyond talking about racism in her classroom. She decided to conduct exercise that would really allow the students to engaged in discrimination in order to gain a real understanding of the effects it has on both people who feel prejudice toward others and are the objects of those feelings. "A Class Divided" recounts a reunion of a class that took part in her experiment that was documented in 1970 as "The Eye of the Storm". Mrs. Elliott had divided her students then into brown and blue-eyed groups that were alternating told on different days one group was "smarter, cleaner, more civilized" while the others were less desirable.

Although we are no longer at the forefront of the civil rights movement, diversity is an increasingly recognized issue in our society today. It effects business corporations, government agencies, schools, communities, and families alike. News headlines highlight the problems of greater immigration, insufficient services for people with disabilities, increasing numbers of working women and mothers, and stronger demands for the acceptance of gay communities. I think it is enormously important for educators to address diversity and prejudice to ensure their students are prepared to interact in this world.

Our society discourages open discussions on group differences to avoid offending others or initiating conflicts. I think a key to better communication on diversity is understanding that as individuals we are not responsible for the underlying misconceptions we have because many of them were instilled in us throughout our childhood from images in the media, family members, and peers. Prejudices are the preconceived ideas all of us hold about particular groups of people that come from our personal experiences and that are formed without reason or conscious thought. Discrimination happens when people act on their prejudices. Racism describes situations where there is institutional reinforcement of common prejudices and where the exclusion of a group of people is allowed to be legally justified. I think within this system schools occupy an interesting position. They can be powerful in promoting change from both a top-down approach and from the bottom up. Teachers and schools are perceived as leaders in the community. They have the ability to create policies that discourage discrimination and can use a variety of resources to promote a better understanding of diverse ethnic traditions to replace old stereotypes. Teachers are also able to influence students on a personal level and

serve as role models. They are able to show students that what they learn in the classroom can really help to correct the inequalities and injustices they observe outside the school as well.

It is also necessary to teach about diversity issues because without careful attention they can really influence all other areas of a child's learning. Mrs. Elliott's exercise revealed how showing bias toward a particular group, even when it is practiced for only a few hours a day, can have overwhelmingly negative impacts on performance, teamwork, and confidence. Later, she studied specifically how human understanding and acceptance related to the children's ability to engage intellectually, formulate thoughts, and retain information in a variety of subjects.

One of the most interesting parts of the video for me was how Mrs. Elliott's class exercise was received by an audience at a correctional facility. During a discussion afterwards, a person representing a minority group made this observation:

"most of the children, before the film started, they had played and lived together in harmony, and a certain action coming from teacher, and seeing the teacher as an authoritarian figure and someone to respect, they expected the views that was being given to them. But I think at the end of the lesson they could clearly see that prejudices and other forms of discrimination are things that people build within their minds, and they're not actual physical barriers that say 'Yo, you can't cross this street'."

I think the methods Mrs. Elliott used to tackle this issue were brilliant and surprisingly simple. I think it is very important to address discrimination when children are at a very young age because it can make such a lasting impression. It is easier to observe their natural reactions rather than the way they have been taught to react by society. I think the use of eye color was a wonderful example to show how arbitrary some of the ways we divide our society are and successfully created a distinct line in a class where there was not a great amount of diversity between the students. I thought Mrs. Elliott was very clever in using every word that was said and action that took place to reinforce the assumptions she had created about the two groups.

The brown-eyed/blue-eyed exercise was a great way to give students a better sense of understanding and sympathy towards oppressed groups and also to allow them to recognize the source of power drawn on by "superior" members of society. However, I think teachers should also develop a method that really gives students a solution and a positive way to channel the emotions they experience from encountering discrimination. The children in her class shook their head in agreement that verbally putting each other down and resorting to violence did not make them feel better. I would want to hear how they would have changed their reactions or see what kind of resistance would emerge if the activity had continued for several weeks. I agree that this particular activity could really harm a child if it was not directed carefully. I would not suggest repeating this experiment with all classes from different age groups and backgrounds. I think it useful just to watch the video. I think many people can relate to the children's feelings. The students' young age made their responses seem even more honest and persuasive.

[#3 Continued in response to online discussions]

I agree that globalization has really increased the urgency for teaching tolerance and appreciation of different perspectives and experiences. Excluding individuals is not only morally wrong and hurtful, but limiting because it takes away the ideas, emotions, and interpretations others contribute to the group.

I also believe Jane Elliott's brown-eyed/blue-eyed methods were influential in teaching her class a lasting lesson about diversity and prejudice. Her students were confused after the death of Martin Luther King partly because they lived in a society where they were not only members of the majority, but really had very little contact with people who were aware that they came from a different perceived race or religion. I think the exercise was very successful because the students had no idea what it would feel like to be isolated, judged, or rejected from the group based on a trait they did not choose and were powerless to change. I wonder what differences there would be in a setting where there was a history of

diversity and prejudice. Many times minority groups develop rules to respond to being judged and discriminated against, while the majority creates invisible boundaries to avoid confronting the emotions and conflicts associated with the inconsistent treatment of others. Would the exercise be less effective in these situations?

I really like your approach to opening communication by inviting others to share their different experiences. I was wondering, would it also be valuable to try to understand the experience of people who were born into being members of the majority of a society? Studies have shown that even the smallest, daily acts of discrimination can cause serious mental harm. Over time they change a person's values and self image. However, I am starting to think that this does not exclusively effect people who identify with minority or "victimized" groups. In my past experience, I have always gone back and forth between identifying with a minority and the majority. When I attended anti-oppression, cultural sensitivity, and diversity workshops in the past, I identified both with being Colombian (Latina) and American (white). Recently, I attended a week of events centered on environmental action that held a similar set of workshops. I had noticed before that most of the people I work with in the environmental movement feel like they represent the majority and it creates a very different atmosphere then when I am working with multicultural groups on campus. I'm not sure why its this way. In all the work they do, they stress that environmental and social injustices are almost always connected. During these workshops was the first time I had ever heard such a large group of people speak about and relate to the guilt they felt as a member of a privileged majority. Some people spoke about being judged also by their appearance and struggling to separate themselves from what was expected. Many also talked about feeling deprived of growing up knowing only one set of values and experiences. There was also a sense of responsibility to improve the conditions of minority groups and marginalized people. I think this is an interesting topic to think about when we are discussing diversity and prejudice in schools that is not usually considered.

4. Determine what professional organization is appropriate for your teaching area and find its web site. In your response do three things: 1. give the organization's name, its web site address and dues; 2. Describe three things you learned about this professional organization you didn't know before; and 3. give three reasons why you should join this organization.

The organization closely related to my teaching area is the National Association of Biology Teachers. (NABT). Information on the NABT can be found at the following web address: <http://www.nabt.org>. Through this organization over 9,000 educators, with experiences from around the world, are able to share their thoughts on developing effective teaching methods that would improve education in the biological sciences. To become a member of this organization, individuals pay a due of \$70 per year and organizations owe \$750 per year. The main office of the NABT is in Reston, Virginia. The organization issues many teaching awards each year to recognize innovative and effective teachers. It also provides information on many fellowship, work, and volunteer opportunities.

The NABT holds conferences each year to help biology teachers in their professional development. This year's conference will be held in Memphis. Previous events have featured workshops such as "Learning Evolution and the Nature of Science Using Digital Organisms" and field trips with the Center for Disease Control. I should join this organization because its many resources would help me to build a stronger relationship with my students, colleagues, and improve my knowledge in my field of study. Among its goals, the organization tries to help teachers become "bold, engaging, and creative. The NABT provides members with a great variety of instructional material. Many of these can be accessed very easily, from issues of The American Biology Teacher that arrives right at

your door after you subscribe to entire books that can be downloaded online. The NABT is also based very close to where I might obtain the rest of my teacher education and where I might work. There are many other organizations that provide resources for educators in the broader field of science and secondary education.

Another organization related specifically to biological sciences, one that functions on an international level, is the Commission of Biology Education (CBE). The CBE was formed in the 1970's. One important focus of this organization is to aid communication and the sharing of ideas concerning biological studies between different nations and cultures. The CBE hopes that educators can achieve a broader academic perspective on issues within biology, such as environmental degradation, social health, and other topics that will especially help improve our understanding of the problems that face developing nations. Another big initiative was the use of education in biology in community development. Published reports made by the commission cover ideas such as sustainability, ethics, health, and the relationship between humans and the environment.

The CBE also provides models for new and valuable teaching strategies including the introduction of diversity in the curriculum and out-of-classroom learning experiences and field work. However, it is extremely expensive for teachers to become associated members of this organization. More information on the Commission of Biology Education can be found at this address: <http://www.iubs.org/cbe>.

DRAFTING A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Open-minded people experience learning throughout life, regardless of their culture, race, or economic status. Formal education helps children strengthen this curiosity. It opens opportunities to achieving their dreams and a better standard of living. However, access is limited by many of the current policies and practices of schools. Although I will adjust and build upon my philosophy of education as I continue in school and later enter the teaching profession, an underlying belief will be that children who are given the opportunity to educate themselves should be taught that they have a responsibility to use their knowledge to improve the lives of others.

What is the purpose of education?

Today Americans are being asked to redefine their unifying cultural beliefs and values. As the demographics of schools dramatically changes, it is important to help children develop a strong sense of self and an appreciation for diversity. Technology also gives us instant access to information and different perspectives. Schools must prepare students to approach the knowledge they are presented critically by strengthening thought processing skills.

Current debates highlight a concern whether the primary function of school is to transmit knowledge and cultural norms or to encourage personal growth, ethical thinking, and innovation. These include discussions on the standards movement, creationism, multicultural and bilingual education, gay representation, special education, and poverty.

In my opinion, students should shape their own learning experience through democratic and experimental classroom approaches to improve self-awareness, develop skills to tackle real-world challenges, and critically explore established beliefs. Following the social reconstructionist philosophy, I believe the primary purpose of education is to provide knowledge, resources, and support which allow students to recognize and challenge the inequalities and injustices in society.¹

What should be taught and why?

The curriculum should include subjects that are relevant to the natural and social world. Courses should include traditional math, sciences, and humanities and electives that capture student interest and local issues. Students should be able to identify relationships, apply the material to meaningful problems, and evaluate what they've learned by critiquing, justifying, or assigning value to the knowledge gained.²

What is the nature of the learner?

Students are responsible for having a desire to learn. Students are being offered more control of their educational path through choices in which courses and even school they enroll. In school, students are able to practice listening, communication, and relationship skills with their peers. Students should participate in open dialogues with administrators to voice their opinions of the curriculum and policies. Students should also initiate discussions with teachers who can share knowledge and expert advice in their subject.

What are the teaching methods that should be used and why?

Students should be given the opportunity to study in a learning environment free from boundaries created by discrimination or inappropriate censorship. Some effective techniques are group

¹ Bloom, Benjamin S. (1980). *Taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York, NY: Longman Publishing.

² Sadker, D.M., Sadker, M.P., & Zittleman, K.R. (2008). *Teachers, schools, and society*. (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

and community action projects. These require students to share ideas with peers from different backgrounds and participate in out of class learning experiences that address societal problems.

What is the role of the teacher?

Teachers help balance the different expectations for a child's education by facilitating communication between students, parents, and administrators. Teachers should work to ensure that students have adequate and equal access to the resources needed to grow and develop. The classroom environment they create should be able to continually adjust to the different needs of students. It is also important to help guide students towards their goals by providing regular feedback.

I believe that students who are empowered to bring about real change in and improve the world around them will be motivated to learn more than what is required to pass standardized tests. As a teacher, I think my primary goal would be to help my students reach their full potential as individuals who are able to lead change in their community and globally.