My Philosophy of Teaching

Scott Foster

Colorado State University

EDAE 620 Processes and Methods

Tobin Lopes, Ph.D.

March 11, 2011

Abstract:

As educators of adults, it is critically important that we understand our personal life and educational philosophies and how those philosophies shape our thinking, our actions, and our methodologies as we strive to facilitate the learning, development, and growth of our students.

I have identified the key philosophical elements of my approach to teaching as a hybrid of the Progressive and Liberal approaches, applied in varying degrees depending on the collective needs of my students, the learning context, and subject matter. In the application of my teaching philosophy, I strive to incorporate these principles:

* Whenever possible, relate the learning experience to practical application.
* Inspire an enthusiasm in my students to embrace lifelong learning.
* Make learning fun whenever it is possible, practical, and proper to do so.

**My Philosophy of Teaching**

This course has caused me to take time to reflect on and identify my personal life philosophy and how that philosophy has shaped my teaching philosophy as well. Of the educational philosophies we’ve studied, I favor a mix of the Progressive and Liberal depending on the teaching situation and conditions.

When I began my career in residential construction management, I knew nothing about the business, received no formal training, and learned by making mistakes, which was sometimes costly to my company and highly stressful for me. Hence, when my focus in the business shifted to training, I was motivated to create for my students what I had lacked as a novice in the business – formal, real world preparation to succeed in their jobs through training with practical applications that my students could learn and use to their advantage and to the benefit of the organization as a whole.

Hence as a teacher, I am strongly guided by the Progressive Philosophy for those learning situations where students have the benefit of personal experience, past and/or present in relation to the subject matter being applied (Zinn 2004 p.73). In these scenarios, I gravitate to the role of facilitator, employing a highly interactive learning strategy where student discussion, collaboration, and role playing techniques dominate the learning experience. By speaking and acting, they learn more effectively than from just listening and seeing. Whenever the learning situation has personal relevancy to my students’ experiences - past, present, and future, the Progressive approach is clearly favorable.

I am also strongly influenced by the Liberal Philosophy. As a learner, I’ve pursued knowledge in many different subjects - a “renaissance person” (Zinn, 2004 p.72) who believes there is value in a liberal arts education that carries over into “the real world.” I believe that knowing a little about a lot and possessing the desire and the ability to learn new things promotes important educational, career and life skills such as flexibility, versatility, and adaptability.

The Liberal Philosophy carries over into my teaching as well, especially in situations where my students lack the benefit of personal experiences relevant to the subject matter. In such instances, I assume the role of “expert” (Zinn, 2004, p. 73). I rely primarily on lecture to convey the subject matter, but try to employ creativity in my lectures to keep students engaged through the use of personal stories and open ended questions, as well as visual and auditory learning aids such as PowerPoint, photographs, music, and even poetry. I believe the lecture as a teaching technique does not have to be boring, and when executed with enthusiasm and ingenuity, may not only capture the student’s attention, but also stimulate their imagination and kindle their learning spirit as well.

Humor is a big part of me as a person, and me as a teacher. Hence, although not practical or applicable to every learning situation, I like to use humor in my teaching and strongly believe it keeps my students in tune and interested. I believe that humor, when measured, calculated, and delivered in appropriate doses, sets the tone for a more relaxed, conducive learning environment. If we can laugh while we learn than we should.

**Conclusion**

One’s personal philosophy is inextricably tied to one’s teaching philosophy. Our experiences shape those philosophies. Depending on the learning situation, I gravitate to the Progressive Philosophy when the subject matter bares relevancy to my student’s life experiences and the Liberal Philosophy when it does not. I believe that education should enlighten, but more importantly enable and empower my students in practical ways to better achieve their career, educational, and/or personal goals. I believe in lifelong learning and strive to generate enthusiasm for the learning process and inspire my students to pursue intellectual growth as a pathway to personal fulfillment. Lastly, I believe that when learning is fun, learning is more effective.

**References**

Zinn, L. (2004). Exploring Your Philosophical Orientation. In M. Galbraith, (Ed), *Adult Learning Methods, A Guide for Effective Instruction* (pp72-73). Malabar: Kieger Publishing Company