

Interlocking Connections: Enabling Students for Lifelong Success

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Abstract

Regardless of their ability or disability, every child is entitled to a meaningful and productive educational experience that enables lifelong success. Educators are responsible for providing students of varying abilities the tools needed to not only succeed in school but also their careers and life experiences. This includes not only academic knowledge, but also proficiency in practical life skills, and moral accountability.

When I think of interlocking connections, my mind is immediately drawn to visions of Lego blocks being put together. When you open a Lego kit there are hundreds of pieces and one instruction manual. You can put pieces together, but without the instructions, it would be very difficult to produce the intended result. Each piece is connected to build the masterpiece. Educators have the responsibility to put the interlocking pieces together to shape the attitudes and minds of students to help them pursue excellence in their careers and lives. Regardless of their ability or disability, every child is entitled to a meaningful and productive educational experience that enables lifelong success.

Philosophy of Education

It is my utmost goal as a teacher to make a lasting impact on students. I strive to teach them to not only succeed in the classroom but in life as they blossom into young men and women and make a lasting impact on their communities. As an educator, I not only teach to instill knowledge about reading, writing, arithmetic, and history, but also to teach the morals required to become good citizens that contribute and make the communities in which they live a better place. Students learn the standards of ethical behavior by rewarding and reinforcing positive behavior and the behaviors that exemplify what they feel to be right and wrong. (Ornstein, et al.

2017) This axiology is dependent on the values the teacher instills. As a Christian teacher, I attribute my axiology to the morals and values that are found in the Bible. When I try to develop a philosophy that is outside of the authority of the Bible, it is like trying to develop the idea of light without the concept of the sun. (Bartlett, 2007) Philippians 2:13 says “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (New International Version Bible, 2011)

I believe along with William Bagley a leading essentialist professor that the lifelong success of students is achieved when schools provide all students with the skills and knowledge needed to function in a democratic society, and that when schools fail to provide this, it puts the students and society as a whole in jeopardy. (Ornstein, et al. 2017) In addition to the essential skills taught in the curriculum, I believe we need to hold to our culture’s great and lasting ideals. The morals found in the Bible for which we are to live, are paramount to the lifelong success of students. As evidenced in idealism I believe that teachers should help each student regardless of ability to achieve their fullest individual potential, not just a statistical average. Standardization in schools does not go along with Plato’s vision of students achieving individual, moral, and intellectual excellence.

Professional Practice

Teachers should use the highest quality of educational practices while reflecting the values and expectations that inspire others to do great things. Our society is drastically changing to reflect what is perceived as sociological views based on the narrative that is surrounding us. That narrative says that you can choose your destiny, your truths, and even your gender. As a Christian, I know that our destiny is one of two places Heaven or Hell. I know that God is truth and that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. When we create our truths, we take God

completely out of the picture. I would have to argue then that our professional practice should emphasize truth and values that are certain. My rationale would then be found in Colossians 2:8 which states “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” (New International Version Bible 2011) To build the interconnecting pieces of students' lives, we cannot exclude the instruction book that is the Bible. The moral truths and functional framework of how to be successful in life according to God's plan are found only in the Bible. Even *Abington School District v. Schempp*, the court case that most people interpret as taking the Bible out of schools, ultimately read, “It certainly may be said that the Bible should be studied for its literary and historic qualities. (*School Dist. of Abington Tp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963) As a Christian I know that these historic qualities are the truths that are the building blocks for how we should live, and throughout history, those truths have helped to transform millions of lives.

Educator-Learned Relationships

Building relationships is another step in the building process. Just as Lego blocks must fit together in a pre-designed order to achieve the desired outcome, our learned relationships as educators must be constructed to fit the needs of students. The role of the teacher and student has been long debated regarding progressive and essentialism, however education pioneers such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Montessori all believed in students learning progressively and learning early. This belief I most align myself with, knowing that children need early intervention, and they need to learn in such a way that the child is being developed and not just the academic mind. When we learn to problem solve, have an appreciation for the artistic side, and have a hands-on

approach to learning, I believe the blocks so to say come together to form the masterpiece that God created us to be.

Diversity

Diversity is especially prevalent in the context of special educational needs. I think too often we only refer to diversity in the context of race or socioeconomic status. In special education, the very title IEP (individualized educational plan) reflects the diverse needs of special education students. An IEP must be treated as it is intended to be a plan of action to help that one student not only succeed in the academic classroom, but also in social skills, interpersonal relationships, career planning, and post-secondary educational opportunities. Some argue that even though education is considered to be a moral enterprise, the area of special education sees its share of ethical dilemmas and moral problems. (Symes 2015) Such problems include the lack of success, appropriate support, and educational opportunities due to the cost of adequately supporting students with special needs. When resources are provided, the gap is bridged resulting inequitable participation for all students. Students have very diverse needs and teachers need to immerse themselves in professional development to be able to address and meet the diverse needs of their students. Diverse practices concerning disability are often addressed in inclusive educational models and planning, but the discussions surrounding the educational needs of these students do not reach further than the classroom in many instances. (Reindal, 2021) Educators need to not only develop strategies to help the diverse needs learner to pass a class by supplying appropriate accommodations and modifications but also intentionally developing the person to be a functional contributing member of the community who is taught self-advocacy with mutual dignity and respect exhibited from teachers and students. This is the masterpiece we desire to help learn and grow, who God has wonderfully made in His image.

Classroom Management Philosophy

Classroom management is the structure that must be in place for learning to take place. Research has shown that those teachers who are the most effective use many techniques to develop productive classroom climates resulting in the motivation of students. (Ornstein et al., 2017) A student in a properly managed classroom knows what is expected of them, they know how to receive help. Positive behavior should be rewarded to avoid constant negative discipline techniques. An effective classroom must also utilize varying ways of presenting material to keep students interested and to engage students of varying learning styles. Mutual respect needs to be shown between the students and the teacher, and this is accomplished through the use of social contracts. A social contract is created by the students as the expectations and rules that a class should follow. This works most effectively when the students can create this contract and specify the norms for the class themselves. This activity is done by the students with the teacher only facilitating the activity. After the contract is created the class signs it and it is placed in an area where it can be seen by the class. Positive behavior rewards are also very productive, especially in the self-contained special education classroom. As part of an individual educational plan, these rewards are most effective when they are unique to a student.

Conclusion

As educators, we have a mandate to teach children to become all that God wants them to be. We must put the pieces together one at a time, following the blueprint, but at the same time, engaging them in the process, through progressive measures to instill a love for learning and practical application of life skills that allow students to become more productive members of society. Students from every race, socioeconomic background, and intellectual ability should have equal access to learn and grow in an environment that stimulates their minds. Regardless of

their ability or disability, every child is entitled to a meaningful and productive educational experience that enables lifelong success.

Resources

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