THOUGHTS ON TEACHING & EDUCATION

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Nearly every person can name a teacher who changed his or her life. I don't believe there is any other profession that can boast such a claim. It is this tremendous influence I wield as a teacher that makes my task so awesome yet also so rewarding.

My philosophy of teaching has developed principally from my experiences in the classroom, both as a student and as a teacher. Very early in my teaching career I realized that a teacher must win the hearts and minds of her students if she is to be successful. Only then can she hope to effect a positive change in their lives.

My primary goal as a teacher is to help each student recognize his potential and develop his abilities to their fullest extent. To do this, I feel it is essential to set high standards of excellence for my students because I have discovered that students will live up to the expectations that are set for them. Therefore, I strive to challenge and stimulate my students while maintaining an unshakable faith in their ability to meet that challenge. It is with a tremendous sense of self-satisfaction that my faith in them is rewarded by their increased faith in themselves and their abilities. Although I am a demanding teacher, I temper those demands with love, understanding, and a sense of humor.

In today's world, more than ever, students are inundated with information. History, in particular, continues to expand each year. Therefore, we teachers must view our role primarily as that of a catalyst. I am painfully aware that my students will remember few of the "facts" I have taught them. Thus, my primary goal in the classroom is to spark an interest in my subject matter and to foster a love of learning in general. I know I have been successful, not when my students make A's on a test, but when they stay after class to discuss the lesson further, when they seek more information on the subject, or when they eagerly bring in something they have found that pertains to what we have been studying. I strive to instill in my students a curiosity and a desire to learn that will make them lifelong learners. I believe history lends itself best to sparking a student's interest because it is the record of man's total experience. Thus, I use an interdisciplinary approach incorporating the art, music, and literature of the period to captivate students who in the past thought history was "boring". I also utilize my experiences from my foreign travels to motivate students and to relate history to the present. My most treasured compliment came from a parent who told me I "inspire students not only to learn but to love learning."
Stimulating a student's mind and inspiring students to learn are a teacher's most difficult tasks. A teacher cannot inspire her students unless she, herself, manifests a genuine excitement about and dedication to that which she teaches. But to inspire students requires more than enthusiasm. We must actively involve students in their own learning. We teachers cannot be merely imparters of knowledge. Thus, I have tried to involve students and to make history come alive through the development of such activities as our annual Medieval Fair and our Imperialism competition. This past year I initiated an Oral History Project which involved the entire community by having students interview relatives, neighbors, and friends about various significant events they have lived through in the Twentieth Century. I also encourage my students to take a more active role in their learning by teaching them to challenge and question ideas rather than simply accepting what they read or what they are told.

Winning the hearts of students is equally as important as stimulating their minds if a teacher is to be successful. This is accomplished by showing that you care about the students as individuals. By cultivating and maintaining a good rapport with my students, I have nurtured an atmosphere of trust. I encourage students to express their opinions and to respect each other's differences. I utilize praise coupled with high academic expectations to develop confidence and a sense of self-worth. While maintaining a well-structured classroom is essential, I believe that a sense of humor and a willingness to deviate from the prepared lesson for the welfare of the students is also basic to successful teaching. Above all else, I believe in treating my students with kindness, fairness, and honesty.

Capturing the hearts of students also means showing concern for them outside the classroom. I try to take an active interest in my students' personal lives and school activities. My students know that my door is always open whether they need academic help or a sympathetic ear.

Taking an interest in my students means getting actively involved myself in their activities whether it be dressing up for Punk Rock Day, cheerleading in the Student-Faculty Basketball Came, or coordinating the Homecoming half-time activities. It also means keeping in close contact with the parents of my students not only when they have problems, but also when they need to be praised. Students respond best to a teacher whose role does not end with the class period.

Teaching 'has to be one of the most difficult and, at times, frustrating professions a person can enter. However, the challenges and rewards cannot be equalled. The joy I feel at seeing a student's face light up with excitement about what he is learning is unparalleled. I consider myself extremely fortunate to be part of the most important profession in the world.