

Bryan Sanders

My Educational Philosophy:

I believe in a true dialogue and inquiry into texts with students. I subscribe to the Constructivist philosophy. While I have many ideas about where one class might end up at the close of a week or month, I do not expect to have every minute and day completely planned out by me alone. I want to engage with students and source them as we together walk forward through our work. I find that not only is their interest in the subject matter enhanced this way but that I gain more from the experience. Furthermore, and really to the point, students make connections with the big ideas of the coursework in an organic manner through this method, and as a result, I find that they retain the lessons for years to come. I adore the messages, offline and online, from my students who encounter nexus points with our work later on in their lives.

I am a fan of a true Progressive education. I spend time reading the founding documents of the movement as well as the more recent incarnations. One particular current dilemma facing students that I try to address in my practice is the mistaken usage of testing in the place of assessment. Measuring student achievement was once really to inform the educators themselves; it gave them data about what worked and what didn't work in their efforts to bring students closer to a greater and deeper understanding of the material. That makes sense to me. Testing and assessment are two very different animals, for the test becomes part of a student's permanent grade record which then affects college admissions. I see all too often the terminology of 'assessment' used to describe what is actually 'testing' simply to avoid using an "evil word." However, the students do not see a difference and are quick to sniff out the Orwellian doublethink. I much prefer to assess where students are on a daily basis in our natural environment and with our natural behaviors. I work hard with them to re-train their minds towards practice and play, instead of cram and memorize, or 'get the right answer.' In our classroom we develop our intellectual capacity and power. The notion that a certain number of points arbitrarily assigned to a single test question which then impacts some unknown future is a ludicrous one that I do not participate in with my pedagogy.

I enjoy working and writing and reading together with students. I sit among them and I join in that which I ask of them. We share our original compositions on a daily basis and work hard to draft and re-draft because one can always find more to tighten, brighten, and sharpen. All ideas in our shared space are ideas worth sharing, not because they are the right ones but more because they could lead the entire group to a more refined or articulate version of what we are talking about -- and, naturally, this then leads to new ideas that we never dreamt of or intended to concoct.

I am not only a fan of computer technology, I am an avid and advanced user. I am constantly experimenting with new methods, software, hardware, and gadgets. I ask my

students to also grow and stretch in this ever-changing field and I find that even though they are known as 'digital natives' that my 'old school' knowledge and experiences are reliable backbones to help them pick up some problem-solving techniques. I also use and teach programming languages, which have been more recently lauded as 'must have' skills for all students -- that's a notion that I have always believed.

I believe in teaching great texts and great authors. I will always choose the one that has the best writing over the hottest topic because students could easily download the news, but nothing can replace a masterful composition. Nothing helps them grow more than a chance to read a challenging and beautiful text in an environment designed to nurture their confidence and their comprehension. Additionally, with regard to text selection, I enjoy sourcing the students for ideas and developing curriculum choices with them. So much of what I do is either tied to or borne from the natural inquiry in which we are all engaged.

Thank you for reading,
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