

## An Ever-Evolving Idealism: A Philosophy in the Making

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Before ever stepping foot into a classroom to teach, like anyone else, I had the image of what my idealistic classroom would look like. I envisioned inquiry learning where students were taking the lead and initiating their own learning through student-centered instruction. This student-centered instruction would take the shape of multiple different instructional strategies that would engage students in their own learning and hold students responsible for their own learning. The use of technology would be key in this idealistic classroom, as well, as many different aspects of technology would be used. In this idealistic classroom, student growth in the conceptual understanding and reasoning mathematics would be the ultimate goal that could be achieved by asking thought provoking questions, relating to student interests in ways that incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy, and by asking questions that span the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

As I began teaching, I quickly came to realize how difficult each of the things in my image of my idealistic classroom were to actually implement. During my student teaching experience, I attempted to use many of the things that I would consider being used in my ideal classroom, such as a variety of instructional strategies, a variety of technology resources, a variety of questioning strategies, and did all of these things while focusing on the needs of individual students through culturally relevant pedagogy. Each one of these different things brought challenges to the classroom, not only for me as a teacher, but for the students as well. Due to this experience and the use of these techniques in the classroom I was able to grow as a teacher. I was able to learn the importance of proper scaffolding, modeling of activities and tasks, asking a wide variety of questions, and differentiating lessons to meet the needs of each student

within the classroom. I also acquired skills such as classroom management strategies and understanding the importance of structure within the classroom that also effect the flow of a lesson.

### ***How My Experience Has Changed My Philosophy***

When I think back to my thoughts entering the classroom for the first time compared to my growth as a teacher since that time, I think about how my philosophy of teaching has changed. In this context, however, I do not think that change would be the appropriate wording, as I would consider evolve to be a more fitting title. I still believe that all of the things mentioned earlier about my idealistic classroom would be fitting for my philosophy of teaching such as various instructional strategies, the use of various technological resources, the use of various levels of questioning, and these things leading to student-centered learning where the ultimate goal is student growth in the conceptual understanding and reasoning of mathematics. However, based on my experience in the classroom, I would say my philosophy has evolved to incorporate new things such as the importance of proper scaffolding, modeling of activities and tasks, asking a wide variety of questions, and differentiating lessons to meet the needs of each student within the classroom. In order to facilitate learning in the classroom towards this ultimate goal for students, thought provoking questions are being asked that span the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, and culturally relevant pedagogy is being used to relate to student interests.

### ***Goals for Students***

As mentioned earlier, the ultimate goal for students in my classroom would be to show growth in conceptual understanding and reasoning of mathematics. Other goals that I hope for students to achieve throughout their time in my classroom would be the acquisition of or expansion on student's problem-solving skills, the development of procedural fluency of the

concepts, and to understand real-world connections that can be made to the concepts being discussed in class. In order to determine if students are achieving these goals, and to determine if learning is taking place in the classroom, consistent and timely assessments would be given, both formative and summative. From these assessments, timely and useful feedback would be given to students, and then students would be given a chance to implement this feedback into their learning moving forward to address their needs.

### ***Implementation of Philosophy***

The teaching strategies that have been mentioned earlier would aid in the students' acquisition of goals, as well as, the implementation of my teaching philosophy in my classroom. Asking thought provoking questions that span all the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy allows students to deepen their understanding of mathematics as they reach and understand higher level questioning and activities. Student-centered learning, especially through the use of a variety of instructional strategies, reinforces the idea that students can acquire or expand on their problem-solving skills by putting them in the driver's seat, and giving them some responsibility in their own learning. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), "culturally responsive teaching can be seen as the beginning step to bridge the gap between home and school" (p. 467). Therefore, by incorporating student interests into the classroom, this can be seen as bridging the gap between school and home, and it allows students to make real-world connections to the concepts being discussed in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) also mentions, "culturally relevant pedagogy would necessarily propose to do three things—produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who can demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can do both understand and critique the existing social order" (p. 474). Based on this quote, by incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into a classroom, students would be able to achieve

academically, as well as, demonstrate cultural competence, and be critical of their surroundings. Each of these things would demonstrate student growth in mathematics.

### ***Ongoing Professional Development***

In order to continue growing and evolving as a teacher, I feel that it would be necessary to stay current in the field of education. In an attempt to stay current in the field of education, I feel as if it would be important to attend meaningful professional development sessions in all areas of teaching. Some of these areas might include classroom management strategies, differentiation strategies, the use of technology in the classroom, and the incorporation of interdisciplinary topics into mathematics. Another way to stay current in the field of education would be to welcome student teachers into my classroom if I was given the opportunity to do so. Student teachers are a great way to stay current in the field of education because they are going through training programs that introduce them to the latest research and strategies in teaching.

Another way to ensure professional development as an individual would be to set goals for myself as a teacher. Some of the goals that I have set for myself in order to ensure professional development as an individual are to be flexible in the classroom, but to also have structure, to step outside of the comfort zone when it comes to teaching every once in awhile, and establish parent communication. One of the most important things for teachers to remember is to be flexible when it comes to teaching, however, not to become so flexible that you lose structure within the classroom as that could adversely affect students. Another goal I have is to remember to step outside of my comfort zone when it comes to teaching because students learn in many different ways, and it is important to acknowledge that. As a teacher, I feel it is absolutely necessary to establish parent communication as soon as possible when a new school year starts, but also to maintain that communication throughout the year.

***Resources:***

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Education Research Journal*. Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 465-491.