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The Ongoing Professional Journey

Teaching should be a continuing expedition of self-discovery, from growing toward the profession as a student to growing in the profession as a practitioner.

Building solid practices and positive attitudes from their first days of preservice education classes prepares teachers for the inevitable twists, turns, and necessary course corrections that they will experience as their careers progress. Reflecting on growth *toward* the profession and planning for growth *within* the profession are essential for maintaining the freshness of self-renewal and the stamina for effectiveness throughout a career.


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I'd like to share the 12 important principles of teacher education that I use with my graduate students as they prepare to assume the role of teacher.

Growing Toward the Profession

Principle 1. Analyze your memories of successful teachers and successful learning experiences to discover how you can teach effectively (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). Use this analysis as a base for decision making. Ask yourself three questions: What one teacher do I remember as most successful? Why do I think that that teacher was successful? Does research on teaching support these elements of success? You will find that the elements of success you have noted informally are usually supported by research—and that the criteria for success you apply reveal your own temperament type and learning-style preference.

Principle 2. Mentally rehearse and practice with peers how you will introduce yourself to students on the first day of class by sharing learning experiences that gave you a zeal for studying the discipline you have chosen to teach. This information personalizes the subject matter and shows your enthusiasm for the discipline's value in your life. But be sure to present this information from a position of strength. That is, present it because you believe that your experiences have instructional value, not because you are reluctantly allowing students to probe for personal information that they might later use against you.

Sharing your enthusiasm directly and personally will help you develop appropriate rapport with students and may motivate them to view the discipline as worthy of study. Mentally rehearsing this procedure, even when you are beginning your growth toward the profession, underscores the usefulness of all you are doing to prepare for teaching. Ultimately, you should develop an introductory activity for your students that will illustrate the value of your discipline for their lives (Duck, 1994).

Principle 3. Ensure wholeness in your life by blending your plans for professional and personal growth (Jersild, 1955). This practice allows students to perceive your genuineness and underscores your credibility as a model for rational and moral behavior.

For instance, while attending a summer camp in New Mexico as a 14-year-old, one of my current interns decided to become a science teacher devoted to helping

students benefit from outdoor education. That summer, he watched another youth in fragile health mature physically and emotionally to the point that the young camper could willingly climb a tree even with a heavy backpack digging into his shoulders. From that moment, this future science teacher was sold on the value of outdoor education and knew how he would blend his personal and professional development. He would keep learning about and experiencing outdoor education. He would make outdoor education central to his role as a teacher.

He continues to pursue that dream as he makes plans to teach in a rural setting where he can make outdoor education a focus of the science curriculum. When he shares his enthusiasm with his students, he will be establishing his genuineness and credibility in the classroom.

Principle 4. Analyze a range of teaching styles to find the most effective styles for beginning your career. There is no one fail-safe way to teach; all you can do is to expose yourself to different styles and learn how to enhance the natural strengths and minimize the weaknesses associated with each style.

The most prevalent teaching style, Essentialism, is based on convergent thinking, which assumes that for each question there is only one right answer. A typical weakness of this style is that during a class discussion, the teacher may listen for—and reward—only the precise answer and phrasing that he or she has in mind.

The next most prevalent teaching style, Experimentalism, is based on divergent thinking, which rewards multiple logical answers to each question. A typical weakness of this style is that for some lessons, students may become confused when they learn that no specific right answer exists. Another is that if students move from one interesting activity to another without appropriate debriefing sessions to analyze what they have learned and how that information relates to the knowledge and skills they need, they may assume that they have learned nothing.

Two additional styles, Behaviorism and Perennialism, are based on convergent thinking; two others, Existentialism and Reconstructionism, are based on divergent thinking. If student participants experience lessons representing the full range of teaching styles, they can assess the strengths and weaknesses of each, analyze how well each can be related to different learning-style needs, and select an effective style or styles for themselves (Duck, 1994).

Principle 5. Realize that students learn differently by reflecting on the ways you and your friends learned best at different grade levels from elementary school through college. If as a preservice teacher you completed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, you can study your temperament type and associated learning-style preference: the Traditionalist/Stabilizer, who has both a sensing (S) and a judging (J) preference in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, is well organized, masters details easily, and wants to complete tasks well in advance; the Catalyst, who has both intuition (N) and feeling (F), values human interaction, cares deeply about morale, and is convinced of the value of personalizing all topics; the Visionary, who has both intuition (N) and thinking (T), understands and seeks change, delights in growth-stimulating conflict, and wants to become increasingly competent at more and more tasks; and the Troubleshooter/Negotiator, who has both sensing (S) and perceiving (P), is the most skilled problem solver in emergencies, values the close camaraderie of egalitarian relationships, and has less tolerance for writing tasks than the other types do (Duck, 1996).

Sharing your enthusiasm about the subject you are teaching will help you develop rapport with your students.

Use your understanding of the different temperaments and learning styles to modify your teaching. You might use only one teaching style and modify assignments to match the learning styles, temperaments, and diverse learning needs of all your students (Gardner, 1993; Myers & Myers, 1983; Tieger & Barron-Tieger, 1998; Duck, 1996). Or, as you grow within the profession, you could become a "healthy eclectic" who effectively uses different teaching styles in succession and thereby meets the learning-style needs of all your students. Becoming a healthy eclectic is generally a long-term goal achieved only after much reflective practice and planned growth within the profession.

An eclectic teacher uses convergent thinking and divergent thinking about equally, showing no clear preference for either one. A favorite lesson that uses both types of thinking involves advertising. The teacher asks students to recall and write down advertising slogans, along with their associated products. By reading aloud a few of the slogans, asking students to list the corresponding products, and having them determine how many items they got correct, the teacher illustrates convergent thinking.

When the teacher, contrary to students' expectations, announces that anyone whose answers were 100 percent correct gets an *F* and anyone whose answers were 100 percent incorrect gets an *A*, he or she is preparing students for the remainder of the lesson. The teacher then leads students in an analysis of why they think that advertising is effective and of whether they have spent money on items they later regretted buying. The second part of the lesson emphasizes divergent thinking.

Principle 6. Assess your preferences for classroom-management approaches before beginning classroom responsibilities. Complement your analysis of teaching and learning styles by examining the Teacher Behavior Continuum (Wolfgang, 1999) and by completing a self-assessment instrument designed to reveal your preference for a certain band on the

continuum. This technique shows how ich major theory can become the undation for a classroom-management approach and how each approach mainly uses one band of the Teacher Behavior Continuum.

Behaviors on this continuum are grouped into the Relationship/Listening band (silent observation, nonverbal cuing, nondirective statements), the Confronting/Contracting band (questions, directive statements), and the Rules/Consequences band (directive statements, preparatory command, physical intervention).

Relationship/Listening approaches assume that effective classroom management occurs when teachers help students discover and understand the motives behind their lack of compliance. Confronting/Contracting approaches assume that teachers need to call their students attention to their lack of compliance and that students help plan their own improvement. The Rules/Consequences approaches ssume that teachers need to be aware noncompliance and to apply appro- riate, predetermined consequences fairly and without anger.

Because instruction and classroom management are parallel and simultaneous processes, it is helpful for new teachers to realize that their management strategy and their teaching style preference can be based on different philosophies. For example, a teacher who wants effective classroom management only to ensure enough cooperation for meaningful learning to occur may use Rules/Consequences management strategies (based on convergent principles and behaviorism) and simultaneously employ a divergent-oriented teaching style, such as Experimentalism.

Teachers should also understand that although they may have a preference for one approach on the continuum, they will probably begin there but will move along the continuum until they find an effective approach for a specific tuation. Therefore, eclecticism is osen more often for classroom anagement than for teaching.

With your colleagues, view videotaped incidents and brainstorm avoidance strategies and ways to reestablish rapport after a problem has occurred. You will learn that each classroom-management approach has natural strengths and weakness, just as teaching styles do, and that even more than with teaching styles, a teacher is likely to be an eclectic for classroom management. You will also learn that you must be comfortable with whatever classroom management you choose. Techniques and behaviors alone never ensure success. Success is likely only when a teacher *believes* that the behavior will succeed.

Concentrate on what you enjoy about each lesson and each group of students.

Principle 7. Use classroom visits and observations to assess the teaching-style and classroom-management preferences of practicing teachers. Brainstorm how to adapt your own teaching style and preferences to mesh with a given master teacher's preferences.

Growing Within the Profession

The foregoing seven principles underscore growth *toward* the profession in the typical sense: preparing well before assuming instructional responsibilities. Five additional principles relate directly to growth *within* the profession. Though there is obvious overlap, and though a teacher can grow *within* the profession and experience self-renewal by revisiting the first seven principles, those principles are usually associated with teacher preparation before an internship experience.

Principle 8. Develop a portfolio as a way of charting your growth within the profession and your plans for self-renewal. Start your portfolio with a statement of philosophy that includes your choice of teaching style, classroom-management strategies, and teaching techniques that you plan to emphasize. This statement sets the stage for other portfolio items: sample activities, lessons, projects, photographs of classroom interaction, and videotapes of instruction (Martin, 1999). These items reveal how you have implemented your philosophy by reflecting thoughtfully on your practice.

Begin your reflective practice by writing brief journal entries describing your greatest success of the week, your most pressing concern, and the way you are addressing this concern. These journal entries document your growth within the profession and help you compose the rationale for selecting the portfolio items. This process puts you in control of your own professional development and helps ensure ongoing self-renewal.

Principle 9. Participate in a support group dedicated to sharing information about successes and concerns, to reflective practice, and to action research (Hubbard & Power, 1999; Schmuck, 1997). Many states and school divisions have mandated mentorship programs in which master teachers are assigned to new teachers; some schools provide formal preparation for the mentoring role. If such support mechanisms are not already in place, however, you should select a mentor yourself.

Try sharing a success and a concern with a few experienced teachers you might want as mentors. If, in the process of sharing, these teachers genuinely listen and ask probing, nonjudgmental questions, then any one of them might be a good mentor. If, however, a first response approaches "Well, I certainly wouldn't have done that!" consider finding another mentor candidate—and avoid sharing other concerns with that individual.

Principle 10. Build on your successes. Concentrate on what you enjoy about each lesson and each group of students. When you reflect on a lesson, emphasize its positive aspects more than its negative aspects. To focus on successes and to choose only one or two points of weakness to address at a time, ask yourself three questions. What three things did I like most about the lesson? What two things did I learn about myself from this lesson? What one thing will I do differently when I offer this lesson again?

Principle 11. Keep your focus on the

future and on the excitement of lifelong learning. To help develop this perspective, project your professional role 5 to 10 years into the future and ask these questions (Duck, 1996): What changes do I foresee? How will my role be performed then? How do I feel about these changes and their impact on my role? What new skills and knowledge will I need? How might I attain them?

Principle 12. Investigate new technologies and how you can best use them in your classroom. Use a technology not just because it is there, but because of its curriculum design potential (Norton & Wiburg, 1998). Although gaining expertise with technology is essential for growth *toward* the profession, it is a key element for growth *within* the profession and for assessing the future's impact on classrooms.

The Principles in Practice

Recently two of my former students completed internships in a high school setting with outstanding master teachers. Both were career switchers—a former official with the U.S. Department of State and a former attorney—who had rich insights appropriate to teaching social studies. When these students began their internships, they found their master teachers—indeed, the whole school—immersed in concerns about student performance on new state-mandated, high-stakes tests. These Standards of Learning (SOL) tests will soon serve as criteria for graduation and for school accreditation.

The high school had in place successful reform efforts that emphasized interdisciplinary instructional teams and the school as a learning community. School staff saw a conflict between the predominantly multiple-choice format of the SOL tests and these reforms. Both the master teachers and the interns felt pressured to teach to the test by using mostly information-giving and recall strategies.

The interns expressed frustration at their inability to attend adequately—in their view—to student motivation and learning-style issues, to problem-solving strategies, to effective uses of technology—in short, to all the things they had learned to do that make classroom learning experiences authentic.

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After discussing the issue, we examined the potential benefits of presenting this problem directly to their students and getting their input. I reminded these interns that they could benefit from asking students to become intellectually self-conscious enough to perform metacognitive analyses, although I advised them to use different words to avoid the probable teenage gag reflex. Their students needed to brainstorm about how they best learned in the past and about how this awareness might help them succeed on SOL tests.

Presenting this instructional problem directly to the high school students underscores the enthusiasm of the teachers for the discipline and its worth. The teachers also demonstrate respect for the students by valuing their input. The students become aware of this respect when they realize that they are engaged, along with their teachers, in an action research project to study the effectiveness of specific instructional approaches.

The dialogue that occurs between students and teachers as they decide how best to learn not only keeps teaching fresh, but also keeps students and teachers fresh. It can transform classrooms into settings where lifelong learning becomes a nurtured habit of mind. All teachers should seek and savor this adventure journey in teaching. ■

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