

Teaching Philosophy of Sonya Franklin Burney, Ed.D

An educator serves as a facilitator of the learning process, which should enlighten every student that crosses her path with skills that will improve his or her life and prepare them for a global society.

“What does this have to do with me now? How will this affect me later?” As a rookie teacher, these were the first two signs that I posted on my classroom bulletin boards. I wanted my students to clearly see these questions before, during and after learning for reflection. I believe that self-reflection is an effective measurement in which a student can take responsibility for how they learn best, recognize the purpose of the learning and connect this reflection to their future progress. Presently, these posted questions still assist my facilitation of teaching, and serve as reminders to the students that there is an end goal, or mastery of a skill set in mind along with the purpose of preparing them for life in a global society.

My methods of teaching are researched, actively engaging and preparing students for literacy, leadership and life.

The Backwards Design Theory from Wiggins and McTighe (2000) is my starting point, so that the desired learned skills and results from students’ learning performances are at the forefront of planning and delivery (p. 8). The literacy skills being taught *now*, will serve them in many ways *later*. Therefore, I encourage my students to make mistakes with their reading, writing and speaking in the classroom *now* for correction, so that they won’t cost them years *later*. I am persuaded to believe that it is not how you begin, but how you end that matters. Therefore, begin with the end in mind!

Lev Vygotsky (1978) asserted that when a [student] interacted with peers in a nurturing environment, their cognitive processes were awakened (p. 90). A learner’s ability to determine the appropriate learning strategies to solve problems is a major component of the cognitive approach. I am a *facilitator* of their learning guiding them in the critical thinking and problem-solving process. I cannot do the learning for them.

According to *Understanding the Brain: The Birth of a Learning Science*: “Learning ... always occurs in social contexts through interaction between learners and their environments,” (p. 197). I believe that if a student is to learn, it must be safe and set up for the needs of the students whether at the middle or high school levels. My classroom environment builds culture, relationships and learning collaboration from assigned groups as they learn best from each other with my support. As an educator, I have discovered how a [student’s] absorption process of learning and acquiring culture involve movement (Montessori 1967a, p. 172). Therefore, the use of movement has been helpful with instructional activities and the learning process on all learning levels.

Education must be functional, practical and applicable for student growth...

Harvard psychologist and professor Dr. Howard Gardner asserted, “Students need to understand *why* they are learning what they are learning and *how* this knowledge can be put to constructive uses,” (*Five Minds for the Future*, 2008, p.142). I believe that teaching should be purposeful with the delivery of a relevant curriculum for the individual student or whole class learning. Author Daniel Pink (2006) discussed that

stories are easier to remember and will keep information straight in our brains, than just recalling the facts. Stories aid our conceptualization of how we should live, learn and treat others. This is why reading comprehension and literature are still important teaching tools of literacy in classrooms, especially as a global learner. I tell stories to my students from my business days that share the importance and relevance of education, learning and professionalism with jobs and careers.

...so that they can be free to learn yet express themselves in a safe and supportive environment of learning, change, and accountability.

Gardner's theories of Multiple Intelligence and the incorporation of the five minds (2008)-Discipline, Synthesizing, Creating, Respectful, and Ethical-are incorporated into my classroom in order to establish environment and culture. These theories consist of attending to the entire well-being of the learner by incorporating these minds into the classroom through differentiation in my teaching styles and assessments that will support actual learning, yet with firm accountability put into place, while also exposing students to cultures and global learning practices from other countries; the edification process of the learner is not only in learning, but growth, and fighting the fear of change in order to be successful lifelong learners and leaders. As a public school teacher, I have served some of the most culturally diverse and socio-economic classes of learners—both native and non-native speakers--that came from different backgrounds, homes, ideals, and cultures with varied ways of learning. Unfortunately, their learning process has been limited by others in their past. I believe in challenging my students to go beyond their limits and the limitations that are put upon them by others. Students are here to learn from each other, but I learn from them, as well.

An educator is professional, purposeful and intentional and makes a difference one life at a time.

Teaching and modeling mindfulness and respectful behavior is significant in any learning environment. It is also important to share that learning is to be met with passion and enthusiasm. Learning is a process that can sometimes be uncomfortable. I teach my students that it is ok to be uncomfortable. Not everything that a person learns is going to end with a perfect "A." Sometimes true learning happens while we are uncomfortable, but that's when there is growth because of the struggle. As I share my uncomfortable experiences with my students, I also let them know that it doesn't stop me from learning when I attend professional developments or earned my degrees and certifications. If I can do it, they can, too. In my classroom, I teach students to give voice to their thoughts by learning effective writing and other forms of communication through brain-based learning, the use of data, and rigorous, relevant, research teaching. These aspects of my teaching edify learners to be problem solvers and critical, creative thinkers in a global society that will bring about progress and positive change now and in the future.