

As my experience of working with children in various settings grows, my philosophy of education continues to grow and change as well. I once believed in Behaviorism, and thought that children need discipline and firm boundaries in order for learning to occur. Through my experiences and education, I have learned a lot about children and the way they develop. I have come to realize, that it is not the firm boundaries or the discipline that children need; instead what they need is someone who facilitates learning experiences which empower them to achieve their goals, without wanting and relying on external rewards.

I have worked with many teachers who believe in Behaviorism and run their classroom with high structure and token economies. I once believed that Behaviorism was the way to go. I have seen first hand that sometimes these approaches work when nothing else will. However, sometimes these approaches don't work. With some children, for example: children who receive special education services, this approach may be necessary at first, but it should gradually be removed and replaced with approaches which focus more around intrinsic motivation and the construction of meaning. I feel that some teachers view the use of token economies and external rewards as necessities to stopping and preventing unwanted behaviors. Even in situations where token economies work and may be needed at first, I believe that if instruction is presented in an interesting, hands-on and minds-on approach there will be less unwanted behaviors and the token economy wouldn't be necessary. I also feel that the best environment for the development and education of children; is an environment which is warm, nurturing and

safe. The environment should also provide the children with many opportunities for self reflection, allowing them to think about their choices and develop their own consequences' with guidance from adults around them.

The approach I prefer to take in my classroom is that of Progressivism and Constructivism. I expect students to be accountable for their learning as I provide them with the opportunities and the materials to broaden and expand their horizons. To me, learning is more than the memorization of information and subject matter; it is solving problems and creating solutions. I believe that people learn more through doing than they do from watching, therefore, in my classroom, children are given opportunities to explore through engaging activities that allow them to manipulate, question, and internalize material.

I observe my students and their ways of learning, to help me find new ways for expanding and developing old and new ideas. I take my observations of students' interests, likes and experiences, and apply them when I am planning and teaching. Meeting my belief that if the material is inviting and intriguing to them, then they will be more likely to participate and certainly more willing to learn what is being taught. Classrooms that encourage cooperative learning experiences as opposed to competitive learning experiences provide the children with the foreground of building stronger social skills and interactions. I try to provide students with as many opportunities as possible to work in groups or pairs, so that the children develop appropriate social skills.

I believe the idea that learning is a process of building new information and skills upon old information and already mastered skills, otherwise known as scaffolding. It is important to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to build on the skills and information they already have learned or achieved. I believe that when students learn they are searching for meaning, in order for learning to take place students must actively try to construct and develop meaning, and that in order for meaning to be constructed the primary focus needs to be on teaching concepts, not isolated facts. I provide students with the means to develop and construct their own meaning through activities that are open-ended, as well as encourage thought and the formulation of thought. During instruction I try to ask as many open-ended questions as possible, encouraging my students to analyze, interpret, predict information, and promote extensive dialogue among each other.

I believe it is important for teachers to be flexible and change with time. Therefore, I understand that as I learn more and gain more experience, my philosophy will change. With that change, my teaching style and methods of teaching will most likely change as well. I welcome these changes and invite the development of new philosophies and ideas as my knowledge and experience of working with children continues to grow.