

Teaching Credo:  
Encouraging the Learning Process

Linsey Jenae Shannon  
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Professor Eastman  
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Abstract:

After spending somewhere around a third of my life in a classroom, I feel I have made decisions based upon the observations I have made in my classes. Because I have been around children, I feel prepared to make decisions regarding how they should be taught. I know and understand that every child learns differently and some need more attention than others in certain areas. I see the importance of essentialism, progressivism, and perennialism in teaching and will employ all three when I become a teacher. The most important role of a teacher is to encourage the learning process.

### Encouraging the Learning Process

Just as every child learns differently, every teacher has a unique philosophy of teaching. Many different ideas of how children learn influence a teacher's personal beliefs on the topic. Both individual experience and observation affect these ideas as well. By the time one has decided to pursue a teaching career, she has typically spent thirteen years in a classroom setting, taking in different styles and deciding which were effective or ineffective. Most who are ready to dedicate their life to teaching have had at least one teacher inspire them or truly push them to learn. Learning is a process; teachers exist to provide encouragement and instruction on how to initiate and fulfill that process, and many factors--personality, experience, and observation, to name a few--contribute to which methods are implemented to accomplish this purpose.

The classroom is not a new environment for most. From the time one is about five years old, she sits in a classroom and absorbs what is around her. Colors, words, pictures, and sounds are a natural part of the setting. The authority of the teacher is quickly and decisively noted, even at this young age. Yet, I remember as a child constantly thinking to myself, "If I was in charge..." Whether it was more time spent reading or fewer group projects, I had several ideas about how I thought things should have been run. Reading was my favorite pastime, which encouraged me to think even more so about the hypothetical. Name-calling would not have been permitted, boys would have had to let girls play football and soccer at recess, and working with others would have been an option, not a mandate. However, as a child I never wanted to be a teacher, despite how often I contemplated the day I would be in charge. I wanted to be

something “great”--a writer, lawyer, doctor. Something with lots of money and a big house and that made people go ‘oh’. The fact that teaching was great despite its low pay and heavy hours entirely passed over me.

Many teachers have inspired me over the years. I lucked out in elementary school and always got the teacher I wanted. In middle school, while I had favorites, I still enjoyed most of my teachers. Mrs. Hopkins was the first teacher to truly make me dread those days when school was cancelled. Eighth grade English class was everyone’s favorite class. Mrs. Hopkins was smart and sarcastic, keeping the class alive and enthused even if it did happen to be eight in the morning. She put couches and chairs in the back of the room so that when we felt like reading, we could be comfortable. Snacks were not unusual in the classroom. Encouragement was never lacking. And anything you did, you did because you wanted to--which of course you wanted to because the satisfaction of her pride in you kept you walking on air the rest of the day.

After that year, I began to consider more seriously the idea of becoming a teacher. Pursuing opportunity to make a better informed decision, I agreed to tutor one of my best friend’s our sophomore year of high school. She had a learning disability and did not test well. After one semester working together, my friend went from mostly Cs and Ds to mostly Bs and a few As. Using guess-and-check strategies, we determined which ways of teaching worked for her and she was finally able to retain information she had learned. The sense of helping someone elicited that feeling again, like skipping through clouds. At this point, I decided teaching was the best career path for me.

Strengthening this decision was the experience of sitting through Mrs. Pickett’s class my senior year of high school. Mrs. Pickett was known for being one of the

toughest teachers in the school. From the first day, her aggressive personality could easily be distinguished. Yet, this perceived aggression eventually revealed itself to be high expectations. And because she expected so much out of the class, we gave what she demanded. I cannot remember a single class that I learned more from. This made it obvious to me that a teacher's expectations of her class truly influences what happens in the classroom.

Personal experience has a strong affect upon what I believe about learning. This past year, I spent an hour every day with three girls who desperately needed help with their schoolwork, ages twelve, eleven, and nine. The family I tutored was classified as 'English as a Second Language', despite the fact that the girls all spoke, read, and wrote in English far better and more often than they ever did so in Spanish. Because neither parent spoke English, or at least very little, the girls could not receive help when they needed it. I learned very quickly that the oldest needed encouragement, as most of her problems stemmed from a lack of confidence. The middle girl needed a stable, non-distracting environment and explicit instructions because she was incredibly hyper and had very little by way of attention span. Finally, the youngest was very bright and could memorize easily if only the material was read to her in a rhythm that she could repeat. As I got to know the girls and they got to know me, we became more comfortable around each other, which made it even easier to assess what it was they needed and how to help them overcome their difficulties.

After having been inspired by these teachers and going through the long process of deciding whether or not this was truly a career I wanted to pursue, I feel prepared to decide what I believe about the teaching-learning process. The closest branch of

educational philosophy to my own beliefs is progressivism--a student based idea of teaching. I truly believe that every child learns differently--that learning disabilities do not really exist but that there may be obstacles to the process. I also believe that every child has the ability to learn. If a child has trouble paying attention, perhaps he should be moved to a less distracting part of the room (more wall, less color) in the front of the class, so that he can hear and cannot see all of the children around him. One child may memorize spelling words by writing them ten times apiece, while another child may have a better chance if the word is spelled to a rhythm that can be repeated. Each child has specific needs and interests, and while it may be difficult to meet these when there are twenty other students in the class, it is important that this is assessed and fulfilled as best they can. Students also need to learn how to teach themselves when they are not sure, and this can happen when they are prepared with strong problem-solving skills. The ability to troubleshoot their own problems helps the student and the teacher meet on a common ground when overcoming difficulties to the process.

As well as progressivism, my personal beliefs also align with the ideas of essentialism. This maintains that there are basic skills that need to be stressed in education. These are important for establishing the foundations of education. Everyone must know how to read, or add and subtract, spell, multiply, divide. These simple ideas all combine and build upon each other to form more complex ideas, which makes them pivotal to being a productive member of society. Without these skills, few would be prepared for any amount of reality.

Finally, my beliefs also align themselves with perennialism. Many of the ideas outlined in essentialism can be perceived as a constant truth, which is the idea of

perennialism. This philosophy maintains that truth is constant and changes little. While many things learned do change--for example, the fact that Pluto is no longer considered a planet--the constant truths do not. This easily fits with essentialism, as many basic skills of essentialism are unchanging--language and reading, arithmetic, simple scientific observations. Perennialism remains a staple in the ever-changing world of education.

Every person, every student, every teacher is different. Individuals have different needs, different agendas, and different expectations. It is the responsibility of teachers to decide how to address these differences. By acknowledging different learning styles and needs, teachers can more appropriately assess what actions need to be taken. Our personal experiences, observations, wants, needs, and desires all affect what we believe about the teaching-learning process. It is important to determine which philosophies we agree with and acknowledge the strategies that they promote in order to encourage the learning process most effectively.