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Pedagogy Improvement Plan

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EDL 774.84

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Mission Statement

As an educator, my mission is to facilitate student learning using knowledge of their individual learning styles and furthering my content knowledge and pedagogic techniques through proper professional development.

Vision

In the fell clutches of circumstance

I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance

My head remains bloody, but unbowed.

- W. E. Hensley

If one wanted to summarize a quintessential quality of a teacher, they need look no further than the second stanza of William Earnest Hensley's *Invictus*, a poem about individualism, and the pursuit of free will. The second stanza encapsulates the author's desire to be resolute and staying of the course. The stanza is resonant with educators as well, as they see parallels within their job be they unruly pupils, demanding schedules, distracting requirements of administration, or constant change at the state level. As the internet provides new information and thoughts into our profession, so too does it ratchet up attacks from our critics. Although public opinion of teachers seems consistently high, how teachers do their jobs seems consistently critiqued. So what does a teacher do under these circumstances? A teacher keeps doing what is important, those things that help students learn, by continually changing and revising their lessons, connecting with and encouraging their students, and being an advocate for their profession.

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Helping students learn seems like an obvious concept for a teacher, but it is the nuance that has meaning. In order to help students learn, a teacher has to have a basic understanding of how they learn and mastery for the content they are learning. Achieving both requires the teacher going to seminars, taking classes, discussing with colleagues, and considering their efficacy.

Changing and revising lessons will naturally follow anyone that strives to help students. New techniques from seminars, classes, the internet, and insights from colleagues will enable the teacher to reflect on their lessons. In turn, the teacher enhances and extends the lessons. While training his new soldiers Mel Gibson in *We Were Soldiers* has a line that sums up this paragraph better than I could, “Three strikes and you’re not out; there is always one more thing that you can do.” Good teachers do one more thing every day.

Because technique only goes so far, connecting with and encouraging students is vitally important in encouraging kids to achieve. As one of the students in our Troy cohort discovered, teachers do not just only come in and teach. *In loco parentis* is technically a legal concept and applied to teachers gives them certain areas of responsibility while at school but, for the purposes of this vision statement, allow a more broad scope of the definition. Like parents, teachers should know their students, what they do in school, after school, for work, on the weekends, etc. New perspectives about students will open up based on this information.

Finally, with the barrage of criticism against education and public teachers, a quality teacher works hard to educate themselves about professional issues and advocates for the profession. Simply reading an education web log or being a member of a professional organization will give the teacher a greater world-view of how his or her own profession

perceived. Teachers spend so much time thinking 'in the classroom things' they ignore the importance of public relations.

Assessment

My vision incorporated the broad aspect of doing those things that help children learn. Many facets are involved, making the overall analysis of this item difficult. I will define this aspect as procedures and techniques that allow children to learn content. I will discuss five facets that I think have the greatest bearing on helping children learn: extending thinking; differentiation by learning style; emotional intelligences; recognition of extenuating circumstances; and discipline.

Extending thinking usually refers to higher order questioning from Bloom's Taxonomy, although it should not just be limited to that particular model. I use the levels differently depending on the subject. Life Science consists of sophomores that received below average grades in freshman science; I tend to use the first three of Bloom's levels well, while using analytical items in topics that are more appropriate for them. I rarely use the last two levels, although I have used students assess each other's work (Evaluation) more this year than in the past. Chemistry and physics get into the higher levels of the Taxonomy just by the nature of their content. I use Synthesis, the 2nd highest level, for nearly every topic in both classes. Overall, I have a grasp of the levels, but I am too content with teaching of the middle levels of Bloom's too much of the time.

I think every teacher understands that not every student learns the material in the same way. Nor do I think every student learns the same all the time; thus when little Betsy is labeled a visual learner, that, to me, means she has the propensity to learn things visually but some things she can still learn in another way. I present material visually, kinesthetically, and verbally for

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every chapter and would consider this a facet I do well. Supportive evidence is that every topic has general lecture, illustrations, some moving images, and a laboratory.

I have heard emotional intelligence bandied about since I started teaching six years ago. Not discussed in undergraduate courses to any depth, it is one topic I know very little about and therefore a facet I need to work on.

During the long course of an academic year, nearly every student will have a circumstance that does not fit nicely into the black and white school rules. Helping students learn means acknowledging the circumstances that arise making learning difficult. Just this week I had a girl that obviously sick and yet had to be at school because she had run out of days she could miss without a doctor's excuse. This fall the family suffered a medical issue that put them into some financial problems and probably could not afford a doctor visit. We are discouraged from allowing students sleep or not participate in class, but I thought it obvious she could not learn at that time and decided to allow her to catch up at her own speed later. This facet is one I try to work on every year in and attempt to understand why students do not succeed when they should.

The final facet is discipline, which I am inconsistent at administering. My classroom environment does not meet requirements for learning every single day mostly because of my personality and ability to be overly flexible in giving allowances to students.

The final three parts of my vision were revising lessons, connecting with students and being an advocate for the profession. Because I coach quiz team and Envirothon, go to sporting events and know a lot about things kids do outside of class I connect pretty easily to them.

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I make an effort to read about teaching in the news from either normal news sources or web logs. I read about current trends and positions from different think tanks and political sites in order to understand our deriders, although I have never actively been an advocate for teaching.

Finally, every summer I attempt to edit my course notes and redo my presentations; every year I find some new activity to try in each class in order to refine the lesson. Further, I find new links to previous content and attempt to get students to recognize them also.

Gap Analysis

Using the *Pathwise* criteria and the above analysis I have identified five gaps in my teaching skill: extending thinking, make a safe and educationally conducive environment in regard to classroom behavior, knowledge of emotional intelligence, incorporation of learning styles, and being a active advocate for our profession.

Action Steps

Although I have gaps that need more improvement, I believe the most crucial is incorporation and extension of the use of learning style models. In an effort to increase my proficiency with using learning styles, I will do the following:

- 1) Read information on the internet about learning styles and multiple intelligences. Specifically, LdPride.net, The Wallace Foundation, Wikipedia, VARK-learn.com, and funderstanding.com;
- 2) Read scholarly research provided by Wikipedia (4 links provided);
- 3) Perform search for similar research using Ebsco host (at Infohio.org), the Fordham Foundation, the CATO institute, and the Buckeye Institute;
- 4) Discuss with other teachers how they incorporate learning styles either in person, through instant messaging and web log comment sections on Edwonks or similar;

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- 5) Edit my class notes and update visuals as needed in weak areas (evolution in Life Science, gas laws in Chemistry, fluids and electricity in physics);
- 6) Make one new animation of a vague concept using power point for each class (Lenses, cell division and gas laws are probable topics);
- 7) Add two discovery style labs to Life Science, and one each to chemistry and physics;
- 8) Purchase the PBS evolution series for Life Science;
- 9) Find one computer simulation lab to use in Life Science (Evolution, dissection) from PBS.org or Arizona State's Biology Online Lab; and
- 10) Add a presentation assignment to each class.

Reflective Summary

Trained in science, I like doing things rather than talking about them. It is the 'doing' portion of the assignment that is most important to me. The mission statement and vision are words with little meaning but the analysis and gap analysis are important; they are simply goals to achieve. Some of the action steps were things I already wanted to do such as 9) introducing a computer simulation lab in life science. Now, instead of a goal by itself it has a defined purpose as part of a larger goal.