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Philosophy of Teaching

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**Teaching as a Metaphor:**

In Janet Alsup’s *Teaching Identity Discrouses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces,* she examines a stimulating fact about metaphors that persuaded me to futher evolve my teaching philosophy. Alsup stated, “metaphorical discourse can create and reinforce personal and professional identities.” (147)

A metaphor is most commonly used to compare two objects, for example, life is an adventure. Metaphors are not only used to assist in describing an experience, but they can also change how someone perceives or understands certain events and/or situations. A metaphor can help shape an individual’s view on a certain theory. As I personally consider what my view on effective teaching entails, it is true that writing in the form of a metaphor can creatively and effectively help describe the experiences that have shaped and affected the course of my teacher identity. Not only can a metaphor shape an individual’s view on a certain theory, that metaphor can also be modified or changed as pedagogies develop further through more concrete experiences. Therefore, in order to help organize and better understand my own personal philosophies, I have used metaphors to help describe the various beliefs I personally have on teaching.

First, I have decided to include a metaphor I do not believe teaching should reflect; the template. I chose the template, simply because it’s everything I don’t want to be as a teacher. A template is a pre-developed layout that is intended for the use of creating a similar design, pattern, or style. The template serves as a tool or model that is given for others to copy. I think this embodies a lot of the relationships students have with their teachers. I think teachers are often seen as the template given to students and the students simply use the teacher as their reference in figuring out what kind of work to produce. They see the teacher as the mold they are to center their work around instead of crafting their own authentic pieces of work.

A template can also embody the role that schools are slowly progressing toward—a standardized institution. Those who created the Common Core Standards feels every state in the nation should adopt the Common Core Standards in order to help students succeed in college, career, and life, but the problem I have so strongly with this, is the fact that these standards forget that students are not homogenous. Students learn at different rates and in different ways. The Common Core Standards see students as equal level learners. The Common Core Standards could be seen as the epitome of a template, for the word “standards” is used in the title of the goal, and the definition of standard is “something considered by an authority or by general consent as a basis of comparison; an approved model.”

Everything I have studied to be (the individuality of a teacher) and every experience that has shaped my identity as a preservice teacher has pushed me away from the identity of a “teacher as template” metaphor. Each member of my cohort brings to the table a unique individual identity that reflects the diversity of a teacher. Not one member of the cohort learns and teaches in the same way, if this were the case, we would not grow in our learning experiences as preservice teachers. One of the greatest tools in learning is collaborative thinking: the involvement of deepening understanding by building off new ideas in order to increase knowledge and performance. I cannot lead myself to believe that a template as a teacher will work, due to the fact that not all teachers teach the same way and not all students learn the same way.

Now, I will provide different types of metaphors that relate to my beliefs on what teaching should reflect. First, I believe teaching is like a garden. The classroom is much like a simple pile of soil with seeds in the ground the first time you approach it. Just like the seeds, the students are anxiously awaiting to see how you care for them. Just like the students, if you treat the seeds with respect, love, compassion, and care, they will bloom into something beautiful; if in turn, you have all the necessary supplies but fail to execute, the seeds will sit there, will feel neglected, and won’t grow into what you hoped. Teaching first takes compassion. If students see you care about them first, they will be much more likely to grow. Therefore, I’ve learned to greet my students with a smile, listen intently to what they have to say, respect their opinions, and ultimately give them the love each and every one of them deserves.

Secondly, I believe teaching is like building a team. Michael Jordan arguably may have been one of the best basketball players in the history of the NBA. However, the 72 game win for a single season in the NBA couldn’t have been achieved without the assistance of the other Chicago Bulls players on his team. Just like Micheal Jordan couldn’t have achieved all his records on his own, a classroom of students can’t grow as learners without the creation of a strong community. Discussion among students creates a community. Students being able to hear the opinions of their classmates often helps them see a situation in a light they may have not been able to see it before. Each and every student in the classroom has a unique mind of their own, and all those different perspectives helps foster growth in the learning process furthermore and hopefully creating trust among the students. Not only does the team talking amongst one another help them to improve their skills, it also helps the coach figure out what works for them as a team and what doesn’t. Just as a coach, the teacher must listen to her students and see what motivates them in order to help them progress as learners. A team could never be as strong if they never talked to each other, just as a classroom full of brilliant minds could never grow if there was no sense of community.

The next metaphor I decided to use for my philosophy of teaching is the four seasons. I chose the seasons, because they’re always changing and you’re never quite sure what kind of hand you’ll be dealt considering the weather, especially living in Nebraska. Just like teaching, the weather is always varying in different forms, one day it will be calm, sunny, and 80 degrees, the next day it will be 32 degrees with a combination of high wind, sleet, rain, and snow. Also, just as the teacher’s classroom, no one has control of what kind of weather will occur on a certain day, it changes almost spontaneously. A lot of what my preservice education has consisted of has been based on this type of understanding. Our cohort has been trained to be prepared to deal with different types of classrooms that consist of a diverse number of students.

Considering the weather can spontaneously change overnight, just as the classroom can change spontaneously from one day to the next, the teacher should come prepared with the right type of outfit for that day: if it’s a rainy day, make sure to have an umbrella handy, if the next day it’s freezing cold make sure to pack an extra coat. The four seasons happen in one huge cycle and it is a process that takes place all over the world.

I believe, just like the four seasons, it is important to be different forms of teachers to different forms of students. Just like the four seasons are consistently different, teachers should have the same view when considering their own individuality and the individuality of students. The four seasons, however, also have a unique part in the process of nurturing the earth, just as the teacher has an important individual part in the nurturing, development, and learning process of her diverse students.

Just like the four seasons have much diversity amongst each other, it is important to realize that students, as well bring diversity to the classroom. I believe it is important to understand as a teacher that each student carries a unique form of intelligence or gift to the classroom. Therefore, it is important to create lessons based upon the vast majority of diversity each student brings to the classroom. Not one student learns the same and a teacher needs to be mindful of that. In a sense, every student could be considered a “struggling” learner at one point in their education. I also realize in teaching diverse learners, that a strong classroom community can only be formed on trust and respect among students. In past experiences in lessons, I have found discussions are one of the most essential factors in establishing a community amongst a class of diverse learners. Students want to talk about situations that have happened to them in the past. They want to feel connected to and cared for by their classmates. I have to cultivate a diverse learning environment by giving my students opportunities to bring their life and community experiences into the classroom. Therefore, it is my duty to use English to help broaden students’ horizons and ultimately help them gain new perspectives based on their classmates’ perspectives.

Unlike a template, the four seasons cannot be controlled and cannot be standardized. This is why I hold so strongly to the four seasons being a metaphor for teaching. Also, just as the four seasons change, the experiences I encounter further as I develop in my professional identity will also develop and transform.

Lastly, I believe teaching is like a wave. Just like the waves in the ocean create a ripple effect, teaching with passion will also have a ripple effect. If students see you are passionate and enthusiastic about teaching them your subject, they will most likely mirror that attitude. Therefore, it is essential to come to class everyday and be enthusiastic about your students being there. If they sense you are not passionate about your lesson, how can the teacher expect the students to be even more motivated about learning that lesson? Therefore, the teacher should be that wave that creates many more ripples of students who are motivated and ready to learn and enjoy coming to your class everyday.

These various metaphors can be my core metaphors, which reflect the ideological positions and stances that affect and take part in the transformation and development of my teaching philosophy. These metaphors serve as an explanation of what I might be and what I might do as a future teacher. These metaphors not only serve as a reflection of my beliefs, but a bridge between the divide of societal expectations for teachers and my own individual teaching philosophy.

**Works Cited:**

Alsup, J. 2006. *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces.* Mahwah, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.