

My Philosophy of Education
By Jeremy Votaw

To me, the purpose of education is to prepare young people for the lives that await them—to help them grow into contributing members of society and to expose them to knowledge and skills that they will use throughout their professional and personal lives. Obviously, this means that a student must be presented with and master basic knowledge in a variety of basic subject areas, such as mathematics, the social sciences, language arts, and the physical and life sciences to name a few. However, the purpose of education is much deeper than this: while a student must amass knowledge that will help him in his career, he must also learn how to think, how to live, and even how to learn.

An education is just like any other aspect of life: a student will get out of it what he puts into it. In my eyes, all young people—including those with tremendous scholastic talent, those with special educational needs, and everyone in between—should have the right to pursue an education, but what is actually achieved depends on the pursuit. Especially at the secondary level, students are developing into responsible, young adults and should understand that they alone will ultimately determine their intellectual development. Students should motivate themselves to learn rather than be forced to do so by a teacher, parent, or other authority figure.

While students are ultimately responsible for their own education, the teacher plays an invaluable role as well. It is my belief that every person has some special talent or intelligence, and the job of a teacher is to help his students discover those special attributes and how they can use them to positively impact our society.

How does the teacher do it? Firstly, a teacher should make his classroom environment one that excites students and fosters an individual commitment to learning. While students should

motivate themselves and take responsibility for their own learning, the teacher should stimulate interest in the subject and present students with the opportunity to learn in an environment which is interactive and challenging.

Secondly, the job of a teacher is not so much to teach as it is to help others learn. A teacher should draw information out of his students instead of pounding it into them. Although lectures can be valuable, students will learn more if *they* are the key players in the learning process. As such, the teacher should take advantage of methods and assessment activities that put students into that role—classroom simulations, case studies, creative projects, and other educational ventures that place the responsibility (and, hence, the rewards) of learning squarely on the shoulders of the student.

Finally, a teacher should treat his students like the valuable, intelligent beings he wants them to become. Research indicates that student achievement is a direct result of the expectations established by the teacher; if a teacher *expects* his students to succeed and *interacts* with them as though they are scholars, the results are bound to be brilliant.

By doing these things, the teacher does not only familiarize his students with subject matter; on the contrary, he teaches them how to act, think, and learn on their own, providing them with tools they will use in everything they do for the rest of their lives.