

Educational Philosophy by Kirk Widra M.Ed.

“Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further...” (Bruner, J. 1996). In my opinion no truer words have been spoken regarding education. My philosophy of education parallels Bruner in that I believe it should include desired outcomes or objectives, but it should also be readily applicable to other spheres. By imparting skills and information to students we provide only cursory knowledge but when we challenge the students to take that knowledge and apply that to tangible real world problems we foster understanding. While my teaching objectives vary, depending upon the course level and content, this philosophy serves to frame my practice.

In designing course content and assessment tools, I strive to elicit student engagement to challenge their knowledge and biases in the pursuit of understanding. Classroom instruction generally includes a PowerPoint presentation / lecture of my own design that provides periodic prompts for in depth discussion. I strive to use examples and ideas from their world and use that to connect to the course material. These lectures are later complimented by creative exercises for stimulating further class discussion, which in some cases are augmented by guest speakers, films, music, and museum tours that relate to the particular topic in question.

Education is a lifetime endeavor, something to be looked upon as an ongoing process that aids us in negotiating and participating fully, and perhaps more importantly equally, in a complex world. I embrace teaching as an opportunity to inspire students and to foster an innate sense of empowerment and self-confidence. Ideally, I want students in my classes to feel challenged and motivated by the material I present but my greater wish is that they understand the relevance of the material and how it connects to them personally and professionally. To that end I always introduce the ideas behind the subject matter, the bigger picture if you will, and illustrate how the material we will be covering connects to the larger whole of their lives in hopes of giving students the opportunity to personalize the experience. I use the above quote as a starting point for discussing my own philosophy of teaching and generating discussion about learning and empowerment. Reflecting on Bruner’s words, I ask my students to consider the difference between knowledge and understanding and the role of education in their lives. I ask them to consider the idea that although knowledge and skills are important tools without understanding and the ability to apply that to other spheres, they will not be able to truly further themselves in life and get the most from it, and that is what I am here to help them do.