

Helena C. Castañón-Vargas, Ed.D.

Student-Centered Teaching and Learning

After 25 years of serving diverse student populations as a teacher, mentor, and administrator, my philosophy of education revolves around student centered teaching and learning based on intentionally designed instruction, meaningful feedback and inspiring life-long learning. It is important to provide intentional scaffold learning experiences designed to meet the students' needs as well as inspire students to grow academically and personally.

On Teaching and Learning

Apart from cultivating impetus, which is invaluable, I also believe education needs to *not* be an enabling act. In other words, students need to be shown how to be independent learners who take responsibility for their own learning. Instruction needs to be designed and delivered in a mode that aims at *facilitating* learning. Scaffolding the level of support, one that pushes in and then pushes out gradually only to regenerate as needed, is crucial in the development of independent problem thinkers and solvers. It is through *intentional* positive and nurturing yet liable learning experiences, that learners will blossom and grow in shaping their thoughts. Additionally, the teaching and learning process is dynamic and reciprocal. Therefore, the teacher needs to adapt and learn the needs of the students as well to better serve them. The traditional *banking* concept of education, a term popularized by Freire (1921-1997) in the 1970s, largely opposes a passive stance from the students. His dialogical approach abandons lecturing and the banking approach breeding dialogue and fostering open communication amongst the students with and to the teachers. Predecessors of constructivism, Dewey (1859-1952) and Vygotsky (1896-1934) both denounced the practice of rote learning and non-engagement. In contrast, constructivism is rooted in open dialogue; practical and real world practicality; collaborative learning; and problem solving through critical thinking.

On Inspiration

Personally, inspiring students to achieve and even surpass academic and personal goals proves rewarding for I once was encouraged to achieve despite language and cultural barriers. I joined the education field to give back and I definitely wish to continue to do so for many years to come. I concur with the belief that education is about having faith in the betterment of society. I hold faith in education efforts to cultivate highly skilled students to endure and restore a future that might involve financial hardship and political uncertainty. Apart from the positions held as an educator, I am a parent and I hope to leave behind a legacy of the value of education to all our young. Our youth need to be inspired to flourish.

My philosophy of education is validated by the incredible efforts by magnificent teachers inspiring and teaching students on a daily basis.

References

Dewey, John (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books.

Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006). Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos). New York: Continuum International Publishing.

Vygotsky, Leo (1997). *Educational Psychology*, St Lucie Press, Florida 1997.