

Teaching Philosophy Jessica Schocker

I teach the way I want my students to learn, with curiosity, passion, and a belief that more is possible than we could ever imagine. The overarching principles that guide my teaching philosophy are social justice and integration. As such, I strive to *be* a teacher who inspires my students to teach for social justice, and I intentionally take on projects that simultaneously model and teach an inclusive curriculum.

My teaching career began in my early twenties as a high school teacher in an urban school with a wide diversity of students. I quickly noticed that my tracked classes seemed to be divided more by race and class than academic abilities, resulting in the de facto segregation that I had learned about in my teacher preparation program. Meeting bright, talented teenagers whose curiosity was stifled by years of believing they were not intelligent or unlikely to go to college propelled me to begin considering how education, even on a small scale, may be a catalyst for change.

In particular, I had a poignant experience with a black male high school student that first year. As I followed the curriculum of my Western Civilization textbook, teaching about the renowned, white men of the Scientific Revolution, the Reformation, and the European Renaissance, this student asked the question that changed my career: "With all due respect, Miss, when are we going to learn about black people in here?" That evening, I stayed up all night researching the Harlem Renaissance and rewrote my curriculum. Two weeks later, this same student was at the front of the classroom, rapping an eloquent poem he wrote about social change, that is "renaissance," comparing the artistic experiences of Langston Hughes and Leonardo Da Vinci as an example.

These experiences led me to graduate school, where I sought to understand how teachers, curriculum, and school culture contribute to the learning and development of children and young adults, and how these pillars have the power to either perpetuate structured inequalities or affect profound social change. I began to develop an integrated approach to teaching, research, and service based first on a critical examination of Social Studies education (in early childhood, elementary, and secondary years), and second on a curriculum for my own students that teaches Social Studies inclusively, legitimatizing the experiences of women and people of color.

I am able to accomplish these goals by seeking out and integrating into my curriculum research and service projects in the Reading public schools located just five miles from Penn State Berks' suburban campus. Reading is the second poorest city in the United States, as per the 2012 census. At the elementary schools where our student teachers work, most of the children are Hispanic (many are learning English), and a high percentage live in subsidized housing. Budget cuts have resulted in children having few opportunities for interdisciplinary learning or cultural experiences in school, and as such, many are in danger of never actualizing their educational potential.

In 2011, I facilitated a partnership between Penn State Berks, the Reading school district, and the Reading Public Museum that brought Toothpick World to Reading, Pennsylvania. Toothpick World is an exhibit of to-scale models of the world's diverse religious temples and most dramatic and tall skyscrapers. The exhibit is made only from toothpicks and Elmer's glue, covers over 700 square feet, and stands over nineteen feet tall. Utilizing this exhibit, I taught my undergraduates to develop interdisciplinary Social Studies lessons that would be engaging for children, culturally inclusive, and transferrable to future lessons and life applications. Then, each of my senior level student teachers brought their classes of children to the museum for field trips. The children, many of whom had never been on a field trip, participated in rich, well-developed experiences before, during, and after their visits. The success of this project is a tribute to my undergraduate students' mastery of teaching engaging and relevant lessons geared toward inquiry and understanding.

I am engaged in other ongoing projects such as this that involve my college students in the Reading schools. In the spring of 2012, I piloted an after school program to teach Social Studies to third graders in Reading through a creative and fun curriculum incorporating Yoga and Taekwondo. The Penn State juniors I worked with learned strategies for identifying learning goals in Social Studies, effective teaching strategies, and a deeper philosophy of and conviction for teaching Social Studies. This program met the needs of the school, where all after school funding was recently cut, and my undergraduate students, who rarely (or never) see Social Studies classes in their field experiences. This spring, the successful program will continue for a third year.

Further, this semester I've joined a group of other college faculty to plan a series of undergraduate classes across disciplines to write historical accounts of Reading's local chapters of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Next fall, my education students will develop lessons to teach this history to local children, many of whom are influenced greatly by the clubs. I will teach my students about methods such as teaching history with primary sources, images, and narratives, and they will practice and then implement these strategies with children. Through experiences such as these, my students gain valuable learning experiences in the pedagogy of teaching for social justice and the opportunity to pursue undergraduate research with my mentorship.

The experiences I've had with children, adolescents, teens, and undergraduates have ignited and continue to fuel my passion for teaching and learning. My philosophical vision of good teaching has resulted in creating a career that revolves around teaching for social justice and the integration of teaching, research, and service.