A Celebration of Excellence in Teaching
Honoring Teachers of the Year - Past and Present

Thirty-first Anniversary Observance
April 13, 2010
Century Center

South Bend Community School Corporation
James M. Kapsa, Superintendent
## Teacher of the Year Honorees 2010

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Teachers in the South Bend Community School Corporation are dedicated professionals committed to providing quality educational experiences to all of our children in the community. One teacher is selected each year from each school to represent that excellence. The Corporation Teacher of the Year is then selected from that outstanding group of professionals.

James M. Kapsa
Superintendent
The 2010 Celebration marks the thirty-first anniversary of the Corporation’s Teacher of the Year Program. Since 1980, the Corporation has proudly hailed approximately 946 Building Teachers of the Year for their exemplary teaching. Additional honors have been bestowed on forty-nine of these individuals by their being designated Corporation Teachers of the Year.

In selecting individuals who are designated as the Building Level or Corporation Teachers of the Year, the South Bend Community School Corporation utilizes the criteria developed by the Chief State School Officers and adopted by the United States Department of Education and the Indiana Department of Education. Candidates were selected on the basis of:

- Concern for individuals and the ability to inspire love of learning in students of diverse backgrounds and abilities.
- Ability and willingness to work cooperatively with fellow professionals.
- Willingness to devote time and energy to activities which result in improved instruction for children.
- Ability to work effectively with a variety of publics in the community.
- Desire to keep abreast of current educational theories and practices.
- Ability and willingness to make contributions to the field of education.
- Examples of innovative practices implemented in the candidate’s classroom.

The following awards will be presented:

- **Building Teachers of the Year**
  - Engraved folder with certificate
  - Red Marble Apple
- **Special Honors Group (10)**
  - $100 Grant
- **Runner-Up**
  - $500 Grant
  - Engraved plaque
  - Silver Apple
- **Corporation Teacher of the Year**
  - $1,000 Grant
  - Engraved plaque
  - Golden Apple
PROGRAM

Convening of the 2010 Celebration ................................................................. Tom Fujimura
Executive Director, Division of Instruction

Proclamation from Indiana Department of Education .............................. Rosalind M. Ellis
Executive Director, Student Services

Welcome ............................................................................................................. James M. Kapsa
Superintendent of Schools

Recognition of Special Guests ........................................................................ Tania Harman
2009 Indiana Teacher of the Year

Clay High School Golden Quartet ................................................................. Krista Bladel, Violin
Chloe Andrew, Violin
Briana Gross, Viola
Katie Kuehner, Cello

Quartet No. 13 in A minor (the Rosamunde Quartet) D.804, Opus 29 Andante by Franz Schubert

2010 Building Teachers of the Year ............................................................... Myrtle C. Wilson
Deputy Superintendent

Personal Reflection and Presentation of Awards
  to Members of the Special Honors Group .................................................... Carolyn Joy Peterson
  2009 Corporation Teacher of the Year

Announcement of the 2010 First Runner-Up
  and Corporation Teacher of the Year .......................................................... Tania Harman

Vocal Solo .......................................................... Zoe Thrumston, John Adams High School
Adele's Laughing Song (Mein Herr Marquis) from Operetta “Die Fledermausa” by Johann Strauss
  Accompanist: Dr. Don Moely

Closing Remarks ............................................................................................. Tom Fujimura

Everyone is cordially invited to the Reception in the Discovery Ballroom (formerly Convention Hall C North)
in honor of all teachers who have been recognized in today’s Celebration.
PREVIOUSLY HONORED CORPORATION TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

1957 ................. Myrtle Burns, Jefferson School (Deceased), Corporation and Indiana Teacher of the Year
1980 ................................................................. Ruth Brown, (Deceased) Monroe School
1981 ................................................................. James Stebbins, Riley High School
1982 ................................................................. Doris Y. Smith (Deceased), Eggleston School
1983 ................................................................. Wilbur “Jack” Goodman, Adams High School
1984 ................................................................. Paulette Cwidak, Adams High School, Corporation and Indiana Teacher of the Year
1985 ................................................................. Patricia (Douglas) Dain, Navarre Middle School
1986 ................................................................. Aloysius Niemier, Jr., Adams High School
1987 ................................................................. Nevin Longenecker, Adams High School, High School Teacher of the Year
        Mary Pat Hatcher-Disler, Clay Middle School, Middle School Teacher of the Year
        Darlene Jackman, Coquillard School, Elementary and Corporation Teacher of the Year
1988 ................................................................. Karen McKibbin, LaSalle High School, High School, Corporation
        and Indiana Teacher of the Year
        Mary Faye Shaia, Navarre Middle School, Middle School Teacher of the Year
        Barbara Humnicky, Harrison School, Elementary Teacher of the Year
1989 ................................................................. John Vogel (Deceased), LaSalle High School, High School Teacher of the Year
        Darnell Bailey, Navarre Middle School, Middle School Teacher of the Year
        Ruth Craft, Perley School, Elementary and Corporation Teacher of the Year
1990 ................................................................. Linda Archambault, LaSalle High School, High School Teacher of the Year
        Darcia King-O’Blenis, Navarre Middle School, Middle School, Corporation
        and Indiana Teacher of the Year
        Thomas Spencer, McKinley School, Elementary Teacher of the Year
1991 ................................................................. John Clayton, Riley High School, High School and Corporation Teacher of the Year
        Jean Smith, Edison Middle School, Middle School Teacher of the Year
        Connie Emmons, Eggleston School, Elementary Teacher of the Year
1992 ................................................................. Allen Rogers, LaSalle High School, High School and Corporation Teacher of the Year
        Carol McDaniel, Navarre Middle School, Middle School Teacher of the Year
        Deborah Herring, Perley School, Elementary Teacher of the Year
1993 ................................................................. John Wibbens, Riley High School, High School Teacher of the Year
        Joan Tetzlaff, Navarre Middle School, Middle School Teacher of the Year
        Kay Ferry, Perley School, Elementary and Corporation Teacher of the Year
1994 ................................................................. Ann Germano Adams High School, High School Teacher of the Year
        Britt Mikulyuk, Navarre Middle School, Middle School and Corporation Teacher of the Year
        Diana Carry, Lincoln School, Elementary Teacher of the Year
        Candace Butler, Studebaker School, Elementary Teacher of the Year
1995 ................................................................. James Fenters, Riley High School, High School Teacher of the Year
        William Caparo, Navarre Middle School, Middle School Teacher of the Year
        Patricia Brindley, Eggleston School, Elementary and Corporation Teacher of the Year
1996 ................................................................. Diane Eaton, Jackson Middle School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
        Margaret Moor, Eggleston School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
1997 ................................................................. Karen Kaser, Greene School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
        Margaret Lewis, Eggleston School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
1998 ................................................................. Barbara Schafer, Kennedy School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
        Mary Anne “Nan” Tulchinsky, Brown Kindergarten, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
1999 ................................................................. JoAnn Engles, Riley High School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
        Candace Butler, McKinley School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
PREVIOUSLY HONORED CORPORATION TEACHERS OF THE YEAR (CONT’D)

2000 ...Kurran Strunk, Muessel, Corporation Teacher of the Year and Indiana Teacher of the Year
   Rhonda Polite, Eggleston School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2001..............................................................Candace Butler, Madison School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   Jay Clark, Adams High School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2002.............................................................Terrence Zubler, Swanson School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   Patricia Herr, Hamilton Alternative School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2003.............................................................Barbara Lorch, Clay High School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   William Strunk, Muessel Elementary School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2004..........................Thomas Heminger, Swanson School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   Kathleen Moriarty, Washington High School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2005.................................................Susan Walker, LaSalle Intermediate Academy, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   Judith Gilman, Tarkington Traditional School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2006....................................................Cheryl Nix, LaSalle Intermediate Academy, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   Mary Wehr-Anderson, Tarkington Traditional School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2007.................................................Kathleen C. Miller, Warren Primary Center, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   Mary Jo Ogren, Adams High School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2008......................................................Tania L. Harman, Warren Primary Center, Corporation and Indiana Teacher of the Year
   Joanne Connaughton, Wilson Primary Center, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
2009.................................................Carolyn Joy Peterson, Washington High School, Corporation Teacher of the Year
   Anne Lewandowski, Lafayette Traditional School, Runner-Up Teacher of the Year
Portfolio Evaluators

Teachers of the Year nominees are encouraged to submit a portfolio of materials which portray their achievements and express their thoughts regarding the areas represented by the criteria. The designation of members of the Special Honors Group, Runner-Up, and the Corporation Teacher of the Year is based entirely on a rigorous evaluation of portfolios. Many thanks to our evaluators!

Iris Bergt       Jameson Eller       Homer Nissley       Deb Smith
Beverly Brazauskas       Sandy Gates       Ann Pierrat       Roxie Smith
Sara Charles       Judy Gilman       Allen S. Rogers       Joan Steinmetz
Jim Choinacky       Jack Goodman       Jeanne Ross       Barbara M. Thomas
Pat Chrenka       Julia Johnson       Tom Schultz       Judith C. Umbaugh
Ann Marie Coglianese       Cinda Korkhouse       Sam Schweizer       Patrick Wolf
Jan Crawford       Barbara Lorch       Pat Shagdai

Special Acknowledgements

Special Assistant and Program.................................................................Linda Ort
Publicity........................................................................................................Sue Coney
Music........................................................................................................Mary Jo Kaser
Photography and Technical Assistance........................................................Debbie Ray, Jeff Kroger
Plaques, Awards, and Certificates .............................................................Debbie Hardy and Linda Ort
Printing.......................................................................................................Jim Day, Frank Moriconi, John Ridenour
Facilities......................................................................................................Sue Coney, Kurt Brown, and Century Center Staff
Corporate Sponsors ..................................................................................Sue Coney
Special Assistance ................................................................................Linda Brookshire, Kathy Carson, Debbie Hardy,
                                            Kathy Johnson, Al Large, Rae Schmiedeknecht, Jesse Warren

Tom Fujimura, Executive Director, Division of Instruction,
Chairperson

Tania L. Harman, 2009 Indiana Teacher of the Year
Teacher of the Year Coordinator

In Association with the Indiana Department of Education,
Office of Student Services,
Sarah Fronczek, Indiana State
Teacher of the Year Coordinator
“I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand.”  Chinese Proverb

Schools are a place where students develop cognitively, personally, and interpersonally in order to continue their academic career through higher education or a specific career field. They do this best by experiencing concepts and information through hands-on and active learning. I believe that children have the ability to learn anything in the right environment, through the right techniques, with the right motivation. The best way for this to happen is through a teacher that allows his/her students to learn through experience.

First, I believe that the amount of learning shows the quality of teaching. It matters little what a teacher does if students do not learn. Concepts and information should be taught for retention, not just memorization. If information a student learns cannot be applied to situations outside of the classroom, then skill retention, comprehension, and long term learning will not take place. As students learn certain information, they need to experience it for themselves or they will not retain it. It is also important to present material to students in a way that interests them. If students are not interested in the topic, they will not connect with it, and true learning is unlikely to occur.

Second, I believe learning is an active process. A learner who passively receives information is not as likely to apply it as is a learner who actively receives information. An important aspect of active learning is the amount of creativity brought into the classroom by the teacher.

There are two ways to facilitate active learning: teacher-centered instruction and student-centered instruction. Teacher-centered instruction allows the teacher to take control of the learning activity. The teacher encourages learning through active listening, which then brings about discussion and higher order thinking. I feel that this type of learning is beneficial for few types of learning. Student-centered instruction allows the students to take control of the learning activity. The students are put in groups and given the freedom to discover information through group activities and discussion. I believe that if students are taught through lecture and worksheets only, then their interests will not be sparked, and they will not reach their full learning potential. Active learning involves the students in the learning process.

Lastly, I believe that cooperative learning plays a key role in a student’s cognitive development. Cooperative learning allows students to learn from their peers. This supports the common idea that one learns best by teaching others. It is often seen in cooperative learning that the more advanced students are able to help other students understand the material. Collaborative and cooperative learning between peers and teachers is a necessary element to help students retain necessary facts and concepts.

How a teacher chooses to assess students is a very important part of education. Tests allow for only one form of assessment, but authentic assessment allows for a more active and useful means of assessing critical thinking and problem solving skills. All the information acquired in the classroom cannot be accessed through paper and pencil tests. Therefore, in my classroom, I assess students through observation, portfolios, performance tasks, group work, student involvement, and rarely standardized tests. Assessments must be reliable and divergent, as well as convergent.

Teaching and learning are very active aspects of the classroom. My beliefs about teaching and learning allow for a balanced classroom that makes way for a positive, active, collaborative, and powerful learning environment for students. Creating an environment to nurture learning will allow all students to reach their optimum potential and to achieve success.
Karen Broad
Jefferson Intermediate Traditional School

I have always had the belief that all children want to learn. They may not be interested in the topics that I’m required to teach, but they want to learn. As an educator, I’ve found that this one statement has been not only my motto and mantra, but what makes me keep going. Based on this philosophy, my teaching style has emphasized three key points; having a relationship with each student, appealing to the student’s desire or need for structure and routine, and differentiating instruction based on student need and interest.

Throughout my teaching career, developing a relationship with my students has always been how I begin the academic year. It is the foundation for future candor, discussions, and a springboard for developing the trust needed for students to take intellectual risks in the classroom. The first weeks of school include activities designed for students to get to know each other and me. We complete surveys on outside interests, academic experiences, and cultural diversity. My ethnic appearance is noticeable, but vague enough that many students are unable to pinpoint my ancestry. I play up this point, finding that students from varying ethnic backgrounds feel a connection to me from the start because I appear to be not so very different from them.

In today’s chaotic world of dysfunctional families, evolving technology, and uncertain economics, my classroom has become for some students a haven of structure and routine. During the first few weeks of school, I outline the procedures and expectations of my class. As the year progresses, I revisit the rules and procedures and strive to enforce them in a consistent manner. Students copy an outline of our activities and homework, which is posted daily. A routine is developed and students can often be found initiating activities or assignments during their break without prompting. Students are provided with absent work in a folder with their name written on their packet of work. Students also enforce routines such as, passing papers, folders, or how to take notes.

My classroom strives to be student-centered. Knowing the importance of having a variety of strategies to assist students with curriculum, I have tried to develop my pedagogy around the idea of differentiated instruction. In the past four years, I have tried to evolve my teaching to be more flexible to the interests and needs of my students while still meeting the state standards. I have used a variety of activities to assist in reading comprehension, writing, and building students’ stamina for multi-step math and algebra problems. Students are led through a guided reading and note taking to assist in reading comprehension. Students are also taught how to analyze paragraphs of expository text to gain information. Hands-on activities are provided during science labs and math enrichment. Choice is offered as an option for math homework. Students are instructed to pick a specific number of problems for each type of problem covered in the lesson. Lessons are also shuffled around according to the pace of the students. Alternative forms of assessment are also considered when students struggle with traditional models provided by the text. One alternative form of assessment used was a poster project, which replaced a traditional chapter test for math. Students were required to complete a pair of posters, which illustrated the structure of the chapter and its complexity, while lowering their anxiety and prevented them from being overwhelmed.

All students want to learn. It is our obligation as educators to find ways to stimulate this desire to learn and provide our students with the skills necessary to succeed. Students will strive for knowledge when they feel a connection with the teacher, have an established routine with clear expectations and feel that they are a part of a student-centered environment.
When I reflect on what makes me worthy of recognition, I have to look at the success of my students and the impact I have made at my school. In my class, I have set clear and high expectations for all of my students. Through their work, they rise to meet and sometimes exceed my expectations. I motivate my students to work harder than they normally work in school. I have worked to build relationships with my students, and they are determined to not disappoint me. This motivation in my students has transferred to their other classes, as well. Other teachers have shared how I have challenged them to become better teachers. Through my leadership at Riley, I have encouraged others to change the way they teach their students. I have helped to initiate student-centered programs designed to improve student success. I have often stayed late to help students with projects or to serve on committees. I have inspired change in my students and my school community.

Although, I believe that all students will learn if provided an opportunity, I realize this might be an idealistic philosophy. I recognize that not all students will learn the same, given the same opportunities. Teachers should be prepared to teach each student in a manner that best meets the needs of that individual student. It is often necessary for me to try another approach or to meet with a student individually. I think it is important to acknowledge when a student needs extra help and to then work with that student to help them become successful.

The engineering curriculum I teach is largely project-based. Through projects, I can introduce new concepts and reinforce current skills. Project-based learning also teaches skills and lessons not often covered in traditional courses. Projects are often completed in teams and last more than one class period. Students not only have to learn to work well with others, but they also have to prioritize tasks. Teamwork and time management are two of the most desirable skills in business and industry. It is rewarding to think I have covered the curriculum and prepared my students for their futures at the same time.

An important part of my teaching style is showing students how to use what they already know to solve the problems before them. I do more than simply tell my students what they should know; I facilitate learning by helping my students recognize what they already know and then guiding them in applying their knowledge and skills. I have noticed student learning does not happen because I will it; the students are learning by practicing what I have shown them how to do. New concepts become easier for me to teach because my students are anxious to apply what they are learning to the next lesson. My students are regularly engaged in their work and take pride and ownership in their successes.
“The job of an educator is to teach students to see vitality in themselves.” -Joseph Campbell

When I hear “I love this school” or “This is the best day of my life!” a huge smile always creeps across my face. I cannot help but be filled with pride. I smile for a couple of reasons: 1.) This is the first school experience for the majority of my students (not much to compare) and 2.) My passion for teaching and providing experiences has caught on.

I enjoy providing every student who comes through my door with an atmosphere that inspires self-worth and risk taking. It is my duty to provide limitless hands-on opportunities to explore, create, and learn.

A good teacher is not one with the cutest bulletin boards or the cleanest desk. An outstanding teacher is one who understands her students’ needs, accepts imperfections, and celebrates the whole child. An outstanding teacher identifies obstacles standing in her students’ way and develops strategies to turn those obstacles into minor speed bumps instead of impassible obstructions. It seems today that more and more obstacles are stacking up against our children.

I have taught at Muessel Primary Center for seven out of my eleven years with the South Bend Community School Corporation. Muessel is in an impoverished section of the city. With poverty come several obstacles. Single parent families, grandparents raising grandchildren, teenage parents, unemployed families, and uneducated families are just a handful of obstacles that threaten to impede my students’ learning. I do not focus on those obstacles. I acknowledge them and move on to identify the most effective learning strategies for each student.

In our room we work in several small groups to address those individual learning needs. I provide hands-on materials and ample time to explore through stations. We learn through music and movement. We take field trips and invite guest speakers to school. Of course, we read, read, read! I lead students to answers and discoveries by questioning and guiding rather than by just giving them the answers.

People often say how cute those little kids are or comment on how much fun I must have all day, playing with them. My response? It is great fun, and I do enjoy every moment with them. Little do those people know that to give the students fun experiences, to make them love learning, there are many hours of work and sleepless nights. Those hours are devoted to planning and preparing to overcome obstacles. When children leave my room, they leave loving school and with pride, with positive self-esteem, and friendships. They leave as successful readers, writers, and mathematicians! My goal is to continue to share my passion and enthusiasm with my students. My reward? Not money, not fame, not even summers off (as this is a time for continued professional development and preparation for a new school year).

**My rewards, though, are many:**

- When a student looks at me and exclaims with wonder, “I can read!”
- When parents share that they can’t believe how grown up their child is at the end of kindergarten and the fact that the children have become successful.
- When former students want to share a hug and reminisce about the times when they were in kindergarten and how much fun they had and how much they learned.

Those are my rewards! In the words of poet Robert Frost, “I am not a teacher, but an awakener.”
Mary Fisher
Tarkington Traditional School

Due to my group of students changing from year to year and students growing and changing from day to day, I am committed to always listening to students carefully, watching for growth, and watching for difficulties youngsters encounter even in small increments. The exemplary teacher must start by asking, “What do these particular students need to learn?” Just teaching the list of Indiana Curriculum Standards may not result in learning. It’s important to me that I assess each student, note where they start, then consistently record growth. Another important step is to determine the strategy which attributed to the growth so as to provide the optimum learning environment. I want students to learn to track their growth, as well. I teach them to use checklists and rubrics for this purpose.

One of my goals is to teach skills in an explicit manner so that students know what I want them to learn, why it is important, and the steps they need to take (with my support) to master the concept. I also give myself permission to learn new skills and strategies in stages. Vygotsky’s scaffolded learning model makes sense for adult learners, as well as children. I synthesize what I learn at professional development sessions through discussion with my colleagues, and then tailor the implementation to my own youngsters. As the team leader, I am also effective in tailoring the information when sharing back at school so that my peer teachers will be enthused to learn and not be overwhelmed.

The C.L.A.S.S. Model training I received taught me the importance of taking time at the onset of each school year to set the environment for optimal learning. Children aren’t born knowing how to be responsible. They must be taught the Life Goals: “Treat people right, do the right thing.” First graders get it! They easily make the connection between school procedures and the goals. I also teach them these are goals for grown ups too. Students must also be taught that everyone makes mistakes sometimes. I-READ coach, Sally Carlin, taught me to thank children for making a mistake and then point out that they provided an opportunity for the rest of the class to learn from that mistake. When my students doubt their ability to do a task I say, “Pretend, act as if you can.” Then when they jump in and try we have a starting point from which I can determine the kind of help they need.

Part of setting the environment requires me to ensure that students find me trustworthy and fair, while providing motivating lessons with some choice to accommodate the multiple intelligences children possess. It is of utmost importance to treat children with respect. Haim Ginott said, “I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.” When I redirect children, I always keep in mind that we will never make children do well by making them feel bad!

All students have the potential to learn. I try to find the positives in each situation and build on them. I’ve trained myself to state the positive behavior I want to see rather than verbalizing the negative one I want to extinguish. Instead of don’t talk, I say, “Please read, or listen, or write.” I thank students for their effort in tasks and this goes a long way towards building self-esteem and sparking their interest in pursuing further learning.

“We should not only use the brains we have, but all that we can borrow,” was said by Woodrow Wilson. The key to success for students and teachers is building knowledge through collaborative discussion. I’ve taught my students The Daily Five (Gail Bousley and Joan Moser) literacy workshop model strategies this year for authentic, intensive reading and writing practice. It teaches students a variety of ways to read together to support each other’s comprehension. Their eyes light up at workshop time. It has been very successful.
A teacher’s personal philosophy is crucial in the guidance of young minds. My approach to inspire learning holds firm that all students can learn, have strengths, and are worthy of respect. Powerful opportunities for growth may occur when the learning environment is nurturing, predictable, and takes into consideration internal and external factors. Particular attention should be given to family and community members as decision makers and collaborators.

All students learn but in many different ways. I research my students’ strengths and learning styles at the beginning of each school year as a foundation for their academic success. I keep in mind that there is no absolute approach to educating children socially, emotionally, and academically that is going to be effective all the time. I respond to these ups and downs by evaluating, reassessing, and trying different approaches as needed. My one constant is to communicate to my students that I care and I am not going away. I am prepared to do whatever is needed to help students succeed.

Most of my students have severe emotional or behavior problems. They bring more with them to school each day than disruptive behaviors. They also bring basic needs that are not being adequately met in their lives. Some students need extra attention, firm limits or increased motivation. Many of them come from home environments where parents have minimal influence over their behavior. I believe identifying a student’s basic need, planning concrete steps to improve behavior, and providing positive support builds trust between teacher and student. Every success is an opportunity to build more success. Every setback is an opportunity to utilize built trust and communicate expectations that a student can succeed.

As an educator, I believe building positive relationships with students is crucial, but building trust and receiving support from parents is powerful to a student’s success. It is imperative to gain the needed support and encouragement of parents for students to reach their full potential. I remind parents that they are the most important person in their child’s life. With constant positive communication, parents are more accepting to hear about and are more cooperative when problem situations arise. I achieve this goal with a year long parent involvement plan including a record keeping system to track positive communication with parents. I encourage parents to share their many personal talents with students. Parents may continue their efforts with their children’s future teachers when they experience one positive year. With parents on my side, I can look forward to academic and discipline support from them which results in a less stressful year for me.

Consequently, my teaching philosophy lies upon the belief that all children can learn in a nurturing, safe environment. My role is to satisfy their basic needs while walking hand in hand with parents. The rewards that I reap are realizing that my students are inspired and motivated to seek more knowledge and have fun in their search. My hope is that my persistence instills in my students’ lives social and emotional values to become productive members of society. I want them to take with them that I cared. For a “thanks for being there” look in a student’s eyes at the end of the year is the reason I’m still teaching today.
Every child in my classroom has the right to learn what I am teaching and I have the obligation to teach to the best of my ability, using the latest research to improve my teaching skills and maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning. My goal is to share these skills with future teachers.

There are many students who enter my classroom for the first time that have no idea of the wealth of information they are about to ingest. Most are unfamiliar with world geography, in particular of the Spanish speaking countries we study. In addition to teaching my students to read, write, hear and speak Spanish, they become familiar with the culture of the countries we study. Because of my extensive group of Latino friends, I am able to bring a more personal approach to the culture. I invite native speakers to visit my classroom and share their perspective of the culture of their country. Especially memorable was a guest speaker from Columbia who was a journalist in Medellín and as soon as he arrived in the United States he requested political asylum. My students were amazed by his story; they had never met someone who lives in our country after being granted political asylum. Friends from several of the Central and South American countries visit my classes. It is impressive what a difference this makes to them.

My goal is to create a safe, interesting learning environment. There is only one rule in my classroom and it seems quite effective. On the first day of class each student writes on an index card his/her interpretation of respect and how it relates to the Spanish classroom. If a student behaves in a way that is disrespectful, we conference in the hallway to discuss the behavior. Usually the student understands and corrects the behavior; sometimes the student opts to drop the course because s/he doesn’t want to be accountable for behavior in class. I hold myself to the same standard as I do my students and when I feel like I have behaved in a way that could be interpreted as disrespectful, I call myself on it.

My students enjoy unusual activities, those they don’t normally experience in a typical school day. Several times a year I will read a children’s story to my advanced level classes. We move the desks and they sit on the floor and listen to the story - just like they did in elementary school - and they love it! I have done cooking lessons in Spanish and shared unusual foods from other countries. Food is a great way to build interest in learning a new language.

I love my profession and encourage prospective teachers to follow their calling. I have had ten student teachers in my career. Each has successfully completed the student teaching assignment and all but one is currently teaching. Several are teaching Spanish in the South Bend area.

After 34 years in the profession, I am still committed to the education of the young people I serve. I share my optimism, energy, passion for teaching, for Spanish and for the cultures of those who speak Spanish with my students and prospective teachers. I have an awesome responsibility to instill character values in my students, by my words and my actions. I am determined to continue to make a difference in the lives of my students.
I believe that the purpose of a formal education involves providing learning opportunities that enable and encourage students to become life-long learners. Problem solving strategies, analytical thinking skills, and creativity evolve through an integrated curriculum, aligned with assessment tools and practices. I like developing a learning environment that provides students with opportunities to participate as decision-makers. The school’s staff, parents, and students should be united in working towards common goals for continuous student and school improvement.

The curriculum in school should provide for flexibility and differentiation in instruction to meet individual needs. Students should develop a strong knowledge base of essential and basic skills because ideas and learning strategies would be integrated across the curriculum. The use of technology should be integrated with students working on projects and they should learn to use developmentally appropriate software. The students’ learning plan should also include opportunities that allow them to formalize their ideas and communicate these ideas effectively both in written and oral presentations. My assessment plan for students is aligned to the curriculum and provides ongoing feedback to students regarding their performance and strengths, as measured against local and state standards. My lesson plans are developed with an emotional hook which gives students the opportunity to be active participants in their learning, resulting in the ability to retain information, as supported by brain base research.

My classroom environment is designed to provide an emotionally healthy experience for students. Students are active participants in the daily routines and workings of the classroom. Procedures are carefully taught and posted, eliminating the need for a long list of rules and consequences. Parents are provided with opportunities to become active participants in their child’s education both in and out of the classroom. Tolerance and acceptance of one another is the norm. Personal best is always the expectation. Respect for others and their belongings provide the basic philosophy that transcends all situations. I try to model the treatment of others with the same patience, kindness, and respect that I expect the students to demonstrate.

As the teacher, my primary purpose to students is exemplified as a positive role model that promotes excitement, motivation, and opportunities for learning. I also help provide students with guidance, resources, and learning that can be applied to real-life experiences. I also try to be accessible to students as they engage in activities throughout the school day to provide stability and support. The continuity in students’ routine, expectations, and consistency are very important to attain. I like students to maintain their own portfolio of exemplars and assessment results as a tool for self-reflection and data collection. Allowing students to maintain a history of their own academic achievements provides opportunities for students to be accountable for their own education. My role as a teacher is also to be an active member of the school’s staff. It is important to participate on committees that provide for continuous student and school improvement. It is also important that as a teacher I continue my development in the field of teaching through professional development opportunities and continued education.

In closing, providing students with a learning environment that encourages and promotes diversity in thinking and critical thinking skills that can be applied to real-life applications is essential. Also, a strong knowledge base in essential and basic skills that are applicable to all areas of the curriculum makes for a confident student. Keeping the students’ needs as the primary focus, results in strong support from parents and fellow staff members. I believe a successful teacher can help students become an active participant in their own educational progress and goals.
There was a time when I figured that my students may not remember who taught them long division but I hoped they would remember they were loved. I always want my students to feel that our classroom is a safe haven.

This philosophy has changed somewhat. It's no longer enough for my students to know I love them. They must learn to love each other. The suicide rate among young people keeps rising. Hate crimes and gang-related shootings are killing our young people. Students with physical, emotional, and academic disorders are especially vulnerable. As their second grade teacher, I will not be going to third grade with these students. They will go to the next grade together. I desperately want them to be advocates for each other. They need to work together and cheer each other on. We call our class our “school family” and pledge to look out for each other.

This belief affects my teaching style. A traditional classroom where the students sit silently and take notes while I spew information will not transform my students into advocates for each other. A responsive classroom builds camaraderie among the students. My students work in groups to practice problem solving. As the students work together verbalizing their ideas, we learn from each other. I observe students teaching each other and I know they are solidifying the information in their own minds.

The benefits of instruction and interaction are multiple. Research shows that kids learn best in small groups. However, my sincere hope is that as we learn together we learn about each other. I want my students to cheer each other’s successes and differences rather than criticize. We learn to love and advocate for each other.

It makes my heart sing to hear from past students that some of their best friends are friends they met in my classroom. I know they are still looking out for each other. I know they are still encouraging each other.

If we could all spend more energy building each other up and helping each other learn, then maybe the problems facing our young people would go down.
“You get what you get.” William Glasser

Every fall, I receive a class list of students who I am privileged enough to work with for the year. I never have complained about who may be in my class, as I believe that each child deserves a fair start void of last year’s problems and concerns. I never go back to last year’s teacher to find out about a particular child, as that student deserves for me to make my own opinion of them. I also don’t dig through cums until I feel I know my students well. Every child deserves a fair start at the beginning of the year where success is my natural expectation.

I believe that all students can learn regardless of outside influences. Certainly, students learn at different rates and it is my job to take them on an educational journey that will advance them as far as they possibly may go. Identifying my students’ learning styles and incorporating many activities that reflect different learning styles into my every-day curriculum helps my students to reach their full potential.

Students, I believe, must feel safe, valued, and a sense of belonging to truly blossom at school. My classroom is designed to meet these needs. I spend a great deal of time building community in my classroom and I model respect, appreciation, acceptance and encouragement in all of my dealings with students.

I also believe that students must know why they are learning something and the relevance it may have on their lives. Students, even at a young age, must “buy in” to the fact that something is important enough for them to work hard at and master. I make connections to real life situations with all of my curriculum. My students also know that I am excited and passionate about learning. They know that I love to read and write and I talk daily about my love of books, numbers and all the knowledge that I expose them to throughout the day. I am passionate about learning and model to my students that learning is a life long process that never stops.

Lastly, I believe that joy must be a strong component of everything that I do in my classroom. I want my students to approach their lives, learning, relationships, and goals with a sense of wonder and happiness. This life skill of being positive will hopefully make their lives more meaningful and fulfilling.
I love being a teacher! If I had to start my professional life over again, I would not change one aspect of it. My career as a teacher has been fantastic. I have enjoyed almost every day of work from my beginning as a naive twenty-something teacher who believed that anything was possible to being a fifty-something teacher who knows that not everything is possible, but learning is fun and yes, an enormous amount of hard work. According to Goethe, “Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being.”

Goethe’s quotation is especially relevant when teaching seventh and eighth graders. My students are changing physically and emotionally on a daily basis. Therefore, it is imperative that I interact with each and every one of my students every single class period. I begin each class by immediately taking attendance. I always announce my “Question of the Day” and each student must answer this question when I call his or her name. Questions may range from: What is your favorite activity to do in the snow to naming a favorite cookie, or character in a novel. If students have been to an assembly, my question will relate to that particular event. By taking the time to speak with each student each class period, I learn a great deal about my students. The questions also help my students learn about each other. Sometimes, students will question each other about their responses and an interesting discussion will ensue.

Being a teacher is like being a parent. I choose which battles are worth fighting and which are not. Middle school students like to chew gum, and they do not always dispose of it in an appropriate way. They also do not know how to chew it discretely, and therefore, they “get caught” chomping away or blowing bubbles or playing with it during class. This is one battle that I handle my way. I have a “gum jar” which is a plastic, one quart, see-through container. Students who chew gum and get caught must place their gum in the gum jar. As the school year goes on, the gum jar gets smellier and more disgusting. However, several of my students see it as a challenge to make it through my class without being caught. Of course, those who do not get caught are chewing discretely. Being middle schoolers, they do not realize that they have learned how to correctly chew gum; they simply think that they have beaten the system.

By interacting with each of my students on a daily basis, I hope that I convey to them that each is a valuable and important part of my class and our school. Each person’s comments count and I expect everyone to sit quietly and listen without starting side conversations. I explain to my students that it is important to listen to each other and to learn from each other. I believe in the words of Nelson Mandela when he said: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” My students are the future and indeed, they are the ones who will change the world in many, many ways. Hopefully, my influence will help them to achieve their future greatness.
Teaching is much more than a profession. It is an opportunity to participate in molding a child’s future. Every teacher becomes a part of a child’s life, and is as unique and needed as every piece of a patchwork quilt. I believe that embracing teaching with this attitude leaves no other option than to be wholly committed to what you do. It is overwhelming to think how far your influence will reach after five years of teaching, let alone ten, twenty, or even thirty years. For example, the students I taught during my first year as a teacher are now entering college. They will be our doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers of the future.

**My personal goals as an educator include:**

- Developing a student’s character as well as challenging them academically
- Helping each student find relevance and connections between their learning and the “real world”
- Teaching them to be organized and disciplined

I encourage character education along with academic rigor in my classroom. While student’s tests scores are important, I point out to my students that there are many intelligent individuals sitting in prison cells. We focus on different life skills as part of developing character. Students are rewarded when they demonstrate the specific character trait in an exemplary way.

I also seek to find real life connections for my students. If kids see the connection between what they are learning and real life, they are more likely to “buy into” what you are teaching them. For example, when we had stale donuts from a local grocery store, I had the kids write a letter persuading the grocer to replace them with a quality product. After the manager responded to their letter and gave the class a gift card to purchase new ones they were overjoyed. They also learned a valuable lesson-respectful communication is always more effective than being argumentative. This was a great life experience.

So you might ask what makes an exemplary teacher. I believe it is wrapped up in the following core values: being a life long learner, having the best interest of the kids at the center, staying balanced, and good classroom management. In order to reach your full potential as a teacher you must continue to learn yourself. Trying new concepts and ideas keeps you fresh, relevant and on your toes. Of course you need to have the best interest of the kids at heart. If you don’t care about them as a person they know it, and it is detrimental to their experience in your classroom. A great teacher needs to stay balanced. Being a “super teacher” doesn’t mean that you must get to school every day at 6:30 and leave each night at 8:00 at the expense of your own health and that of your family. I believe that great teachers learn how to maximize their effectiveness while they are at school. We all know, this occasionally means staying late, but not every night. Finally, an effective teacher has good classroom management. This is the glue that holds everything else together. Students need boundaries and expectations for behavior, materials, whole group instruction, individual work time, etc. It is when this system is fine-tuned and running well that you will be able to relax and teach, and they will be able to learn. It is then and only then, that you have those magical teachable moments when you know that your students are drinking in knowledge like a bee to nectar.
In order to be an effective teacher, I feel that it is important to take a holistic approach to teaching. This means that I must not only be concerned with educating my students but also the entire development and welfare of my students. As a teacher, I must be aware of the individual needs and interests of each of my students including: the social, personal, cultural, moral, physical, and intellectual dimensions of their development. As a teacher, I must aim to help students achieve their best, positively encourage them to reach their potential in all aspects of their life. This may involve helping a student develop self-esteem, confidence in themselves, and respect for others. As a teacher, I know I must modify my teaching style in order to enhance the learning of my students, recognizing students’ individual home and cultural backgrounds, personal and family values, and character, as well as appreciate my own role in the development of the student’s learning.

In considering curriculum using a holistic approach, I feel that I must address the question of what children need to learn. Since holistic education seeks to educate the “whole person”, there are a number of key factors that are essential to this type of education. I feel the four essential components to holistic teaching and learning includes: students learning about themselves; learning about connections, relationships, and community; learning resilience with meaningfulness; and aesthetics. First, children need to learn about themselves. This involves learning self-respect and self-esteem. In learning about themselves I must teach students to reflect critically on how we come to know or understand information is essential. As a result, if “we ask students to develop critical and reflective thinking skills and encourage them to care about the world around them they may decide that some degree of personal or social transformation is required.” Clifford Mayes, Understanding the Whole Student: Holistic Multicultural Education (Rowman and Littlefield: 2007).

Next, children need to learn about connections, relationships, and community. In learning about their relationships with others, there is a focus on social “literacy” (learning to see social influence) and emotional “literacy” (one’s own self in relation to others). The idea of connections in holistic education sees the various aspects of life and living as integrated and connected parts; therefore, I believe education should not isolate learning into several different components. Martin (2002) illustrates this point further by stating that, “Many alternative educators argue instead that who the learners are, what they know, how they know it, and how they act in the world are not separate elements, but reflect the interdependencies between our world and ourselves.” (Robin Ann Martin: 2002)

Children also need to learn about resilience. This entails overcoming difficulties, facing challenges, and learning how to ensure long-term success. Finally, children need to learn about aesthetics and have meaningfulness. This is an important factor in the learning process. People learn better when what is being learned is important to them. This also encourages the student to see the beauty of what is around them and learn to have awe in life. (The Putnam Pit: Scott Forbes on Holistic Education)

In holistic education, the teacher is seen less as a person of authority who leads and controls but rather is seen as “a friend, a mentor, a facilitator, or an experienced traveling companion” (Forbes, 1996). Schools should be seen as places where students and adults work toward a mutual goal. Open and honest communication is expected and differences between people are respected and appreciated. Cooperation is the norm, rather than competition.
I have been committed to the teaching profession since the first day I walked into Riley high school in 1970. I have dedicated my life to this profession always trying to better my teaching techniques along the way. Dedication to teaching is a daily task. Every day is different and of course some days are better than others. I try to remember that the young people that we are working with are still growing; they are like a work in progress. I believe the students I come in contact with every day are worthy of my attention, devotion, time, and energy. It is important as a teacher to be prepared for each day, even if it doesn’t always go the way you wanted it to. I believe it is my responsibility to engage the students in each day’s lesson in hopes that they are learning what was intended for them to learn. I have high expectations in my classroom because I try so hard to be well prepared; the least they can do is give me an opportunity to teach what I have planned. I strongly feel that if I am well prepared they will give me this opportunity.

I hope that each student in my class finds the time they spend with me beneficial. To accomplish this goal I realize that my lesson plans have to be interesting and if possible, exciting. To do this I try using a variety of teaching techniques including reading, writing, occasionally drawing, skits, group work, and partner work. I try to keep them active, especially when I see them getting bored or uninterested. I believe that well planned classes can also help reduce discipline problems. I put a lot of work into my lesson plans and I expect my students to give me their attention and participate in the class work. I try my best to look at each student directly, go to their desk to see if they are working, and I always stay actively involved with the class, never sitting behind my desk. Even when I show a movie I watch the movie with the students and have a discussion about the movie afterwards.

As a veteran teacher, I have had the advantage of seeing many outstanding teachers along the way. I have always admired the teachers who never get upset, that always have a smile for their students, and that know how to handle discipline problems calmly. An outstanding teacher has the respect of their students and colleagues because they are dedicated to guiding and caring about their students in a loving and consistent way. An outstanding teacher can find a way to help all students achieve no matter what level the student is at. This comes from understanding and knowing the needs and strengths of each student. My goal is to be a teacher just like the one I described.

The rewards of teaching for me come from my students. To watch a student complete a given task and do an outstanding job is a reward for me. When I watch a student learn a new skill and they are so proud of themselves, this is a reward for me. When students that I no longer have, pass me in the hall and tell me they miss my class, this is a reward for me. When a student gives me an unexpected hug when they see me, this is a reward for me. I especially like to run in to students that I had who have graduated. It is always so much fun talking to them about when I was their teacher. I have some who tell me I was their favorite teacher, what a reward that is!!
Work Hard, Play Hard ... Pray Hard

This is how I approach my life and my teaching. I want to emulate a strong work ethic for my students. I also want to show them that working hard earns time to play hard. Over the years my students have helped me realize the importance of balancing work and play. They are so quick to ask when they can play. I found myself responding, “Work hard, then play hard.”

A strong work ethic comes naturally to some and is difficult for others, but is essential even at an early age. I want my students to understand the importance of organization, initiating and completing tasks, questioning, researching, and taking pride in their work. I try to teach all of this by modeling it. I want my students to see a teacher that is prepared with researched based lessons, appreciates curiosity, and has the time and flexibility for questioning and research. I want them to hear a teacher provide explicit and systematic instruction that reaches all of their differentiated learning styles. I want my students to feel earning by being active and using manipulatives. I want my students to observe me celebrate every achievement big or small, so they too will take time to notice their own accomplishments. Good teachers know all too well the term, work hard.

Eventually, my students convince me that they have earned some time for play. I am reminded how I also need time for play. I would not work effectively if I did not run, spin, listen to music, read, and play with my nephews. Fortunately, this is yet another time good teachers can be creative. Can I turn this lesson into a game? I try to use play time to discover their passions. What can I find out about my students to use as motivation for the next assignment? Some of my students have never seen board games. What an excellent time to teach sharing, taking turns, and even a standard or two. Setting aside time to play hard allows me time to be creative, get to know my students, and helps all of us rejuvenate for the next lesson.

Obviously, I am not allowed to pray with my students, but I pray for them. I am thankful for our moment of silence everyday as it gives me a minute of prayer. I pray my students learn to be compassionate. I want my students to be able to identify a problem and solve it. I want them to see a need and serve it. I teach my students how to forgive and forget in an effort to encourage them to be loving and generous to others. I hope they learn a strong work ethic and find healthy activities to keep them motivated. These attributes will help give them peace in an unruly world, and make them successful at whatever they choose to do. This is a lot to ask for each of my students and that is why I must pray harder each day.

I love my job because it is so rewarding. There is nothing better than watching my students high-five each other because I taught them to celebrate. I smile when I see a student plop down on a bean bag chair with a chapter book because I taught him how to read. I cheer when I see my students write a sentence or their name because I taught them to write. I am thankful when I see students help each other because I know they have learned how to forgive and serve. I thank God for the gift of teaching and for the strength to survive the day. My career has been blessed with wonderful students, parents, and colleagues.
Becky Piekarski  
Warren Primary Center

“It’s about the journey--mine and yours--and the lives we can touch, the legacy we can leave, and the world we can change for the better.” -Tony Dungy

The heart and soul of my teaching are based on my core values of building a community of good citizens and responsible learners. Three tenets that I teach by are; building student’s self-esteem to give them confidence to learn, modeling and practicing good behavior that develops good citizens, and using research-based pedagogy to lay the foundation for good instruction and continuous monitoring of progress toward those goals.

The knowledge shared by educational icons has inspired me to provide the best possible experience for my students. The Morning Meeting Book by Roxann Kriete conveys the importance to take time with our students and get to know them both personally and academically. My responsibility to get to know each student helps me to be focused on developing a safe learning environment in which all can make mistakes and learn from them. Author Debbie Diller believes “classrooms can be like a test kitchen,” I learned from her to empower the students and include them in my thought process when developing the structures and procedures of the classroom. This gives students the ability to predict the agenda for the day, and have consistent outcomes for demonstrating their knowledge.

The mantra I teach my students is “We are smart, polite, and well-behaved, and we will show you”. “We are smart” comes from Harry Wong’s pedagogy of teaching procedures in his book The First Day of School. “We are polite and well-behaved” refers back to the tenet of teaching good citizenship. “We will show you”, is the positive affirming behavior that helps us to monitor our progress toward our overarching goals. Students are acknowledged by the greater Warren community for being smart, polite, and well-behaved. As an example, my students keep track of all the compliments they receive. I use these teachable moments to reconnect them back to our mantra and the core tenet of self-esteem and good citizenship. Compliments are our data! This allows students to transfer these skills into a larger community setting. Carrying the rules in their hearts is one thing children can do to show that they are walking the walk, and talking the talk, without teacher supervision, and will ultimately transfer to their own lives. Discovering a feeling of self-worth and taking risks in a safe school environment led me to believe in my core tenets of teaching.

In order for my students to understand these concepts, we embrace the philosophy of former Indianapolis Colts Head Coach Tony Dungy. In his book Quiet Strength, he often refers to the responsibility of taking ordinary tasks and doing them better despite the environment around us. While we may change our surroundings and our “stuff,” our core tenets will be constantly evaluated by myself and my students in order to improve student growth: academically, socially, and emotionally.
Carolyn Pinter
Nuner Primary Center

My personal philosophy of teaching is a compilation of ideas, practices, and experiences that I have truly gained as an educator, mother, and observer. My intention is to always keep an open mind about the latest viewpoints and theories in education. This approach is closer to a progressive viewpoint. RC. Doll says,” although numerous educational viewpoints exist, two major belief systems or philosophies have emerged in contemporary American Public Schools, the transmissive viewpoint -sometimes referred to as traditional or conservative education and progressive viewpoint - sometimes referred to as experiential or pragmatic learning (Doll, 1996).

As an observer, my philosophy has been formed from ideas I have been taught and observed. As a mother, I realize that learning does not take place solely in the classroom, but rather during the course of our daily lives. Many of the lessons that we learn in life are ones that come from life experiences.

Learning is not just about whether or not students are succeeding, but rather how students and teachers are interacting in their environment. The learning climate is the most important part of the learning process. If with thoughtful planning, the classroom is established for learning then I believe it should have these three ideas.

- I believe the classroom needs to be inviting and free of distractions
- I believe the classroom should be a showcase for students work
- I believe that a classroom should provide a consistent level of comfort and safety

My classroom is set up with a purpose. There are five areas where students are rotated by the day. These are the Centers; Math, Language Arts, Computer/ Gross and Fine motor, Writing and Science/ Art. I have a Circle and Work area. Initially it takes some time to prepare my students for this daily rotation. By the second or third week students know where they should be at each time of the day. There is no problem with students knowing their place.

I use every possible wall space and bulletin board in the classroom to showcase our shared writing, interactive writing, and art work. My students get very excited when they see anything they have written or constructed on display for everyone to see.

A big part of comfort in Kindergarten is consistency. Knowing that daily routine as they enter the room starts the day on a positive note. If I change even one little part they give notice, “you forgot something, Mrs. Pinter.” Their taking notice of omissions in the classroom routine helps them feel safe and secure.

It is my experience that a safe and secure environment has a tremendous impact on student success, particularly those who come from a lower socioeconomic background. All children thrive on structure and consistency.

As an educator, I am called on to do more than teach my students the curriculum. I fill the role of parent, counselor, disciplinarian, and a whole host of other jobs that go along with being an advocate for what is best for children.

It isn’t difficult to describe the rewards I find in teaching. The most significant is the transformation I see every year in my students. In August, there are 24 young individuals who are nervous and excited, afraid to try anything new, yet by April they are blossoming, “like buds on a tree.”

I enjoy all the waves and smiles from all my former students. It is a special feeling when I see parents in the stores and they tell me all about their children. That is my reward.
“Spoon feeding in the long run teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon.”

E. M. Forster

I included this quote by British novelist and essayist E. M. Forster as part of my teaching philosophy in my student teaching portfolio over a decade ago. When I read that document now, I quickly realize those are the musings of a young, naive pre-service teacher; however, Forster’s notion has never left me. I view teaching through an entirely different set of lenses today, but this core belief has never left me.

Teaching is not about “spoon feeding” my students information; rather, learning should be an exploratory activity wherein individuals make personal discoveries during personal journeys. In this regard, I have always defined my classroom as a community of learners. In this community students are encouraged to interact with others, express personal views, cultivate new understandings, and demonstrate proficiency. In this paradigm, I am not the enemy; at times I am the opposition, the facilitator, the inquisitor, or the counselor. These are all hats I wear as teacher and incidentally, I often find myself in the role of learner. I want my community to be as egalitarian as possible, as I strongly believe every one of my students is capable of personal growth and learning. I want to stand as a model for a lifelong desire for enrichment.

Utilizing writer’s workshops, using literature circles, and engaging in Socratic discourse are few of the techniques I have employed over the years in my classroom. These offer my students the opportunity to interact with their peers in meaningful ways. These strategies also allow students to help facilitate each other’s learning, only reinforcing the notion of community. As often as possible, students are grouped heterogeneously to illicit collaboration between students with various backgrounds and abilities. Exposure to multiple perspectives and ideas only aids each student’s ability to engage in personal introspection to better understand his or her own beliefs. They are then given the opportunity to demonstrate their growth via various assessments, ranging from compositions, to speeches, to performances.

Although my objective is to make the coursework as personally engaging as possible for each student—a rather utopian idea, I realize—not every student will perform well. Some have struggled and even failed. Once a student told me I was his favorite teacher. I asked him why, since he was habitually absent and rarely turned anything in when present. His response was that I always treated him as a person, not just a student or a subordinate. He revealed to me that, like many of his peers, life had created circumstances that were both beyond his control and hindered his motivation. He was happy to know I cared enough to interact with him on a more personal level. Yet another time, a student praised my class for being more philosophy than English because he admired how I wanted people to think for him or herself. Furthermore, countless others have shown their appreciation with small gestures such as thank yous or passing along small gifts, and several have cited me as their most inspirational and influential teacher. These are the real rewards of teaching.

E. M. Forster’s seminal novel Howard’s End explores class differences in early 20th century England and establishes a central motto: “Only connect!” He goes on to write: “Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.” Connecting curriculum to experience, students to students, and ourselves to the larger world around us can be a valid, reliable methodology. Taking the time to connect with the members of my community has paid great dividends.
“Education is not the answer to the question. Education is the means to the answer to all questions.”
- William Allin

“We must scrupulously guard the civil rights and civil liberties of all citizens, whatever their background. We must remember that any oppression, any injustice, any hatred is a wedge designed to attack our civilization.”
--Quote from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, appearing on a wall at the FDR Memorial

My educational philosophy is based upon four central beliefs. First, I believe that all children deserve a quality education. The access to a quality education should not be based on race, economic status, or physical and/or mental ability. I am not only an educator, but I am a parent of two students with special needs. We currently live in a society that does not always agree with this belief. We have classrooms in some of America’s most impoverished areas that are falling apart. Students do not have access to textbooks or technology. Their schools and neighborhoods are unsafe and not conducive to a quality education. We also have schools where students with disabilities are taught in separate classrooms, if not separate buildings. These also happen to be the schools that are without well-trained, highly-qualified, and committed instructors.

Secondly, I believe that teachers and parents must be partners in a child’s education. As I mentioned above, I am a parent of children with special needs. My daughter is on the autism spectrum (Asperger’s Syndrome) and my son has a learning disability: I have a unique perspective of seeing both sides of the equation. I let the parents of my students know that we are a team. I cannot do it all by myself. The most successful students I have ever taught had strong family support systems. Many of the parents that I work with do not have many ideas on how to work with or support their child’s education. Many of them have told me that school was not an enjoyable place for them. Most of them fear and dread a phone call from school. I make a real effort to make positive calls home and leave positive notes in their agendas. I do not want every contact with parents to be a negative one. We need more collaboration between home and school to have truly successful students.

Thirdly, I believe that all students have the ability to learn. They may not all have the same potential or abilities, but all students are capable of learning. My first year of teaching gave me the opportunity to work with a young man that had cerebral palsy. If you were to have met this young man on the street, most people would have thought he was not capable of learning grade-level material. I even wondered why we were educating him in the general education setting. We worked so hard that year. He was non-verbal and had some physical disabilities as well, but we learned how to communicate. Real learning happened that year. He could grasp some of the material. We modified his lessons so that it was accessible on his level, but he made such progress! He actually taught me more than I taught him that year.

Finally, I believe that quality teachers are the most important factor in a child’s education. While all students deserve teachers that are qualified and well-trained, our most needy students should have access to the best teachers available. For students that have special needs or that live in poverty, a quality education may be their only hope for a more successful life. The statistics show that students with special needs have a much higher drop-out rate and lower graduation rates than their non-disabled peers. We are losing generation after generation of students because they are lacking a quality education. Many of the most qualified and experienced teachers have chosen to teach “gifted” or “advanced” students. I chose to work with students with greater needs because I feel they are capable of learning and deserve the opportunities in life that a quality education will afford them.

In conclusion, I feel like the luckiest man alive to teach my students in the South Bend Community School Corporation. I get up every day with a smile as I go to work. The opportunity to see the students learn and acquire knowledge is the greatest gift in the world. Previously reluctant learners will come up and excitedly ask me, “Mr. Schwager, what are we doing in Science today?” This is such a thrill. To have a student begin to cry because it is almost summer break and they do not want to miss school makes everything I do worthwhile. I love the commitment I have made to educate the students of the South Bend Community School Corporation.
Learning is a lifelong skill that must be developed in a young student. I believe that it is imperative I do everything possible to instill this belief in my students. By accomplishing this, I am not only teaching them content, but facilitating their journey in becoming successful citizens.

Many children enter school with the desire to learn, but somewhere along the way tend to lose interest. It’s my intent to open the eyes of my students so that they can visualize what potential learning can offer. In order to do this, it’s vital for me to take the time and get to know them. Understanding their interest and learning style, allows them to function in a comfortable learning environment. As an Explorer teacher, I have gone through extensive training that shows this greatly benefits young learners. By stepping away from some of the traditional methods of teaching, I have seen how children have gone from the “I have to learn” to “I want to learn.” For example, one way I have done this is by allowing them to make more choices in the classroom. Some students may be more comfortable at a desk reading and writing while others can perform the same activity on the floor. Additionally, I try to allow some choice in the topics we discuss. What is it they want to inquire more about? Providing students with the sense of ownership during this process I have found that choices like these provide a desire to learn.

Small groups are another teaching tool I continue using to assist my students. There are parts of the day when learning as a whole can be useful, but to hit the needs of my students, it is imperative that they meet in leveled or interest groups. Not every child enters the classroom with the same background knowledge or skill set. Taking a child from where they currently are in a particular skill set and building from there not only shows growth, but reduces their frustration in the learning process. As in the real world, placing them in interest groups also allows students to find community with their classmates.

Providing a safe place to learn is another important component for successful learning. One thing that I stress in my classroom is that we learn from our mistakes. There should be nothing embarrassing about an incorrect answer or when something didn’t turn out as was planned. I find it important that students see me make mistakes too. Many times I will point it out to them, or thank them when they catch me. No one is perfect in real life and the same is true in the classroom. Therefore, you will not find perfect work hanging in my classroom or in my hallway. I will always stress for my students to do their personal best, but perfection is not a necessity to learn and grow. Creating an environment that is conducive to real life learning is my goal as an educator. Being a part of the Explorer program and teaching at Monroe Primary Center is where I plan to stay for some time. Both the Explorer program and Monroe have a high interest in providing an education to meet the diverse needs of our students.
“Believe to achieve” are words that inspired me, but before I could believe it took someone to believe in me. I must be a believer in my students so they can take flight and start their journey of believing in themselves and achieving their goals. For me to be an effective teacher, I must create a classroom community that makes the student feel comfortable, confident, and empowers them with a sense of belonging. Every child wants to learn! Every child wants to be successful, but they are afraid to make a mistake. Typically children see mistakes equal to failing. I have to reverse that way of thinking; if not reversed, a student then sees not trying and failing easier and better than trying or making a mistake and learning from it. If we don’t make mistakes we will never learn. No one is perfect and does everything right the first time. This then leads into the classroom environment that encourages learning, discovery, and exploration.

As teacher, I must be a great actress and play many roles. One of my favorites is being that tour guide on the side. I get to tag along with my students on their journey of learning. While the students take an active part in their journey, I am there pointing out fascinating facts and points of interest. Another one of my favorite roles is being that mirror. Listening to the student’s questions and then reflecting back with a question or a statement that leads them to see they already have the answer. Tight rope walker is another important role I must play as a teacher. I must be able to balance academic, social, and emotional needs of each student. Most importantly, I am a teacher because I get to be a gardener. Planting the seed of knowledge and watching my flowers grow and bloom.

We are in the 21st Century, and I must prepare my students for this time with the use of new tools and technology available. The curriculum I teach is still inclusive, interdisciplinary, contextual, literature based, relevant, and meaningfully weaves around the core subjects. Assessments of course not only focus on the outcome but the process of thinking which includes higher order thinking skills. Critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, and innovation are all the skills I want my students to take with them on their journey when they leave my classroom. I want my students to become independent thinkers and have a global awareness. I want them to feel confident and believe that any question or problem they are faced with, they are able to use their resources on answering the question or solving the problem, academically or socially. Now with the technology we have, they are able to build skills, answer questions, and be inspired more than ever.

Not only must I prepare my students, I must become a 21st century teacher. The world is changing and times have changed. Change is constant; learning must be constant. That is why I must continue my journey as a lifelong learner. I must know and use best practices in my classroom. Critical reflection is another important aspect in both teaching and learning. As a teacher, I actively ponder, question, and review my teaching. I have to be aware, analyze, and critique the effectiveness of lessons, projects, activities, and experiments. I am always looking for better ways I can teach and inspire. Through reflection, I find quite frequently I was the learner and my students were the teacher.

There are many reasons why I teach, and they change very frequently with the changing of time. One thing I know for sure is that I became a teacher because I love the sheer joy a child gets when they succeed. I now teach for the joy I get when a child succeeds and believes that yes, he/she can achieve. Another thing that hasn’t changed is that I want to inspire the love of reading and learning in my students. W. B. Yeats once said that, “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” Life is all about learning. We cannot expect anyone to know everything in the 12 years, but as a teacher I can light a fire in a student who inspires to want more.
In the 70s, my father was an outspoken community activist who worked with at-risk youth. This may have been the subtext that drove my need to make a difference in the world. Young people are a direct connection to the issues at play in any community. Their lives are a reflection of what is going on good or bad. Being a teacher is a privileged and powerful place in any social change movement. I believe teachers hold the key to making sustainable change in communities across the country.

From a young age I imagined that after high school, I would explore the world, hone my skills, and then come home to put my skills to work. When I returned to South Bend, I was nostalgic for the wholesome, black middle class family life I knew. I bought a house around the corner from where I grew up. Naive, at first, to the changes that had taken place in my neighborhood; I did think it strange that people now set off fireworks almost every night. It didn’t take too long to realize those “fireworks” are firearms. I still hear them every night and I know that my students hear them, too. For me they are a reminder, a call to arms; a call to build for our community an armory of weapons... “mightier than the sword”. I have now been in the business long enough to see students I taught in middle school incarcerated and, worse, murdered by senseless violence. Today, every aspect of my life, in my work as a teacher, and in my personal life as a businesswoman, I go about the work of an educator, planting the seeds for sustainable change.

In this way, teaching is a calling. The task is to create knowledgeable, productive citizens. My goals in working with students are to inspire a life long love of learning and rouse the consciousness of the uncorrupted soul. Students need to have both the knowledge base to fulfill the natural curiosity of the human spirit, and a sense of justice to feel empathy and be provoked to make change in their world.

I strive most of all to prepare students to be successful “in spite of”. It feels good to make a difference in a child’s life; most teachers have had the experience of awakening the learner in a child who was once disconnected and unmotivated. I want to be able to prepare all my students to continue the achievements they come to know in my care. I want each child to realize the abilities and supports available to them even when I am no longer there everyday. This is why I believe it is important to bring parents into the educational process in a meaningful way. The empowered parent can help their child navigate the world of education through changing schools, negative peers, and even poor teaching experiences. As the constant presence in their child’s life, parents must be the managers of their educational career and only teachers can provide parents with that knowledge.

The outstanding teacher is not always nice; in fact, I always thank my student for saying that I am mean. I tell them it lets me know I am pushing them to be their best. School should not be easy, and it won’t always be fun. A great teacher can find that delicate balance. I remember going to the mall with my aunt when I was young. We couldn’t get five feet without a former student or parent stopping to give her a hug or saying thank you. Even then I could appreciate the awesome power she had in touching the lives of so many people. My greatest reward in teaching is watching students grow into young men and women knowing that in some way I was a part of their journey.
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The South Bend Community School Corporation acknowledges with great appreciation all of the persons who contributed to and participated in the 2010 *A Celebration of Excellence in Teaching*. Thanks are extended to all individuals who provided materials for the portfolios and to the initial selection of our honorees. The members of the Evaluation Committee deserve special thanks for the many, many hours they spent reading and reviewing the portfolios.

The *Celebration of Excellence in Teaching* is dedicated to the recognition of exemplary teaching and of outstanding teachers in all of our schools, as represented by persons we honor at this time, those we have honored in the past, and those we will honor in the future.

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