

## Educational Life History

My decision to pursue teaching as a career can find its roots in Mrs. Larson's tenth grade history class. Our class had just finished a unit on World War II and Mrs. Larson was given permission by the school to show us a student-friendly version of the movie *Schindler's List*. After watching this powerful movie at school, I insisted that my dad rent the movie and watch it with me at home. Needless to say, that movie made a tremendous impression on me and I felt that I had to make an impact on the world. Yes, this cliché "make the world a better place" reason, born in Mrs. Larson's tenth grade history class, was the beginning of my decision to become a teacher.

I did not declare a major during my first year of college. I knew that I wanted to choose a major that would allow me the opportunity to have an impact on the world, but I did not have a clear understanding on how I should proceed. After all, I was 18 years old and living on my own, paying rent, and working full time. Although I was young and struggling to make decisions and financially provide for myself, I was cognizant that my opportunities in life are somewhat based on my gender and the color of my skin. This is a fact that I struggle with today, knowing that I have a better chance to succeed in life because I was born a heterosexual, white male. In today's society, there is a perception that social equality has been attained. In reality, Strike and Soltis (2009) point out that today, there is a bigger gap between the rich and the poor, women and non-whites make less money than their white counterparts, poverty impedes children's ability to learn, discrimination against one's sexual orientation is still rampant, and people with disabilities are the targets of hate crimes, violence and are not always provided with proper accommodations. In my mind, I had to choose a career that would counteract these social

injustices. With these thoughts on my mind, throw in a decision about majoring in college, especially with this romantic idea of saving the world, and I was not going to take this decision lightly. Eventually, I decided that the best way to make a difference and root out social injustices was to choose a profession that dealt with young people, and since teachers always had such a profound impact on my life, I decided that I should become a teacher.

While making this decision I thought about my high school journalism teacher, Mrs. Martin, who taught me the importance of taking ownership in my life. She served as a mother-figure to me and was extremely supportive of me during my junior and senior years of high school. She was very aware of my home experiences and worked at building a positive relationship with me. She was clearly a teacher as a facilitator, as she encouraged and nurtured my growth as a student, and as a human (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 2009). I had a wonderful high school experience, thanks in part to Mrs. Martin. Going to school became a nice refuge, an environment that contrasted my home life. I think this is another reason I was drawn to teaching. I felt like I wanted to provide that guidance for others and as a teacher, I take this on as one of my responsibilities.

Once I decided to go into teaching, I declared history as my major and decided I would become a high school history teacher. From that moment, I really loved the vibe of being on a university campus. Walking around, I could sense the common goal of learning, growing, and experiencing life. This euphoric feeling only reinforced my decision to go into teaching. I thought to myself, “This is the feeling I need to pump into my future students!” Filled with such positive emotion for teaching, the thoughts about the great inequalities in our society still lurked in the back of my mind.

After graduating college, I decided to take some time off before getting my teaching credential. I started working at various jobs that were not related to teaching. Eventually, I was fed up with these jobs and decided to travel. I talked to my girlfriend, who is now my wife, about the possibility of moving to South Korea to teach English as a Second Language. She had just graduated from college with a Liberal Arts degree to become a teacher, and was thrilled with the idea of moving abroad and teaching. It was during this time that I had a shift in the age group of students I wanted to teach. In Korea, I taught grades four to seven. I really enjoyed this age group. For this reason, after returning to the United States, I pursued elementary education instead of teaching at the high school level. During my student teaching, the thoughts I had about social injustices made their way into the forefront of my mind and began playing out in my classroom.

There are plenty of reasons why students behave the way they do in a classroom. Their behavior can be based on culture, language barriers, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disabilities. However, these differences should be explored and capitalized on to ensure inappropriate teaching does not occur (Sleeter & Grant, 2009). To learn more about approaching education from the difference orientation, I was lucky enough to have an amazing Mentor Teacher named Mr. Dobbs. He is an incredible teacher who genuinely cares about his students. He was a great mentor in that he did not subscribe to the deficiency orientation (Sleeter & Grant, 2009). I learned that you must overcome your own biases towards a group of people and not let yourself perceive them as being deficient and incapable of learning. This will harm their academic success and make you weak and inadequate as a teacher. From this conclusion, I did not want to be an ineffective teacher, rather an inspirational and well-trained teacher.

As my journey to becoming a teacher progressed, I formed an idea on the aim of education and the proper role of a teacher. I believe the aim of education is to prepare students for a productive life that contributes to society. This life preparation includes providing students with knowledge, experiences, and guidance. Education should provide the tools necessary to be a productive and successful human being. My aim of education requires a teacher to constantly increase their knowledge on the best practices for a multicultural and multilingual classroom. A teacher must be trained with sheltered instruction practices. There needs to be a child-centered approach that accounts for all students. Based on this aim of education, I believe the role of the teacher is to be the guiding force for those aims through a methodical and knowledgeable process. Fenstermacher and Soltis (2009) refer to this approach of teaching as the Executive approach, because knowledge of a subject needs to be passed from the teacher to the student in an organized and effective method.

However, a teacher's role is not confined to simply supplying academic knowledge. A teacher's role is also to be aware of who the students are, and form good relationships with them so they can facilitate the process of students becoming productive human beings. Also, a teacher should develop students' character while fostering a thirst for new ideas to liberate their way of thinking (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 2009). I have realized that to become a socially responsive teacher, I must root out my own prejudices so they do not interfere with my perceptions of students' abilities; and that I must strive to continue with my own education on best teaching practices for the multicultural and multilingual classroom. Additionally, although my dominating teaching approach is aligned with the Executive style, I need to also be a Facilitator and Liberationist when appropriate (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 2009).

I can look back on my struggle to rationalize my ‘luck’ on being born a heterosexual, white male, and say, “I am using my lot in life to better those who were not given the same opportunity.” I believe teaching is one of the most honorable and important jobs in the world. I am very proud to be a teacher. I hope that I can have the same impact on the lives of my students that my teachers and school experiences had on me.

**Teaching metaphor:** Teacher as a father-figure.

There is often a debate on the role of teachers in the classroom. I have heard that teachers should simply teach, and leave the child rearing to parents. Teachers should not be responsible for guiding or counseling students; rather, teachers should simply provide students with proper education in academic subjects. On the other hand, some would argue that a teacher’s responsibility goes beyond academics, and teachers should serve as a more parental role in addition to their academic teaching responsibilities. Teachers often spend more time with students than their actual parents. Consequentially, students crave, seek out, and need more guidance than what they are provided at home.

As my teaching metaphor of teachers as a father-figure indicates, I see myself as a man who can guide children in the right direction. I feel that in addition to core academics, it is appropriate to teach manners, discipline, responsibility, compassion, and kindness as a way to live one’s life. I do not believe in interjecting political or religious beliefs, but I do believe in providing students with a good moral character model to live by. This metaphor is very child-centered and is pragmatic in that I will teach my students in the most appropriate way that suits them. Being child-centered allows one to figure out how to use the available resources to effectively promote academic success (Commins & Miramontes, 2005). As a father-figure, I will always do what is best for the child, whether it be in academics or life education.

I know that I cannot save the world, or control administration decisions, or government decisions on education. However, I can control my classroom and ensure I implement the most appropriate strategies for a multicultural and multilingual classroom. I can reflect on my personal biases and control how I perceive other cultures and situations. I can control the example I set for my students, and I can control the standards I set for acceptable human beings. At this point in my career, teacher as a father-figure is my teaching metaphor.

#### References

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