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Director of Graduate Student Teacher Education and Denver Summerbridge?? [1]

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Here's a brief description of my ongoing projects related to teaching.

I am seeing through the press, namely Teachers College Press of Columbia University, a book whose subtitle is Recovering the Tradition of the Active Mind for American Education. I see this tradition as beginning with the Transcendentalists, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and Elizabeth Peabody, continuing through philosophical pragmatism, most notably with John Dewey, the experimental schools of the 1920s, the open classroom movement of the 1960s and 70s, and some present teaching structures, such as the Honors course Mary Ann Shea and I initiated, "The Experience of Education." In short, this tradition views knowledge as provisionally constructed by the mind in perpetual interaction with the world.

The end results of this process are generally cultural artifacts such as ideas, classifications, and formulae, works of literature—basically a body of knowledge that has been organized and divided as the curriculum. The worst mistake of conventional education is to overvalue and fetishize only these end products, and merely hand them over ready made instead of involving students in the entire process of reconstructing the world for themselves, of engaging in dialectical movements between experiencing and conceptualizing, acting and thinking, practice and theory. It is a practice and a philosophy that we would now term more constructivist, more student-centered, more meta-cognitive, engaging students more as culture-creating agents than as simply conduits for the transmission of culture.

It is wholistic, focusing not on developing the intellect solely but integrating knowledge with the body and the feelings. While this tradition has generally been ignored or even repressed by American public edition, it is still available as a coherent and living tradition, and this book hopes to make it more widely known and available to teachers and other educators.

Trying to put these ideas into practice in my own department, I am director of Graduate Student Teacher Education. I teach a graduate course “Literary Theory and the Teaching of Literature,” that involves us all in teaching a laboratory section of an introductory course. Our own class meets in the period after this laboratory class, and we discuss what we have observed and what we plan to do in the light of theories of reading and writing, cognitive psychology, and philosophy. Our graduate students who want to teach have to take either this course or an informal non-credit pedagogy seminar run by our lead Graduate Teacher and supervised by me. I also do informal observations and consultations for our graduate students once they get into their own classrooms.

For the past two summers I have also done teacher training and supervisory work for Denver Summerbridge, a program where inner city middle school students are taught math and literacy in small classes by high school and college students.

Groups audience:
President's Teaching Scholars Program

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