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Head of School Educational Philosophy

Learning is a complex, highly individualized process. Educating today's 21st century learner in what is now an asymmetrical enterprise in a constant state of metamorphosis is unlike anything experienced by the generations of teachers before us. We are a new generation of pioneers, and as American teachers in an era of unprecedented wealth, the options for teaching and learning are legion. Our primary limitation in the teaching and learning process is now our imagination.

Student learning and their parents' expectations of us as teachers are different today, and effective teachers must embrace a student-centered approach to learning. This requires a fundamental shift in philosophy and pedagogical practices as the authoritative-passive role of teacher to student is revised to reflect a more symbiotic interaction between the two entities. As Christ followers and servant leaders, *we must employ the use of instructional techniques that most effectively facilitate the learning process of our students* and not instructional approaches that we favor for personal reasons.

One thing I have learned in working directly with young people for almost three decades is ultimately, teachers cannot make a student learn; the desire to learn is a student's decision. What we can do is embrace and uphold the undergirding of interpersonal relationships at the core of the learning process. Here are four characteristics that I have found employed by successful teachers in fostering healthy relationships with students:

- **Honesty.** Honesty between people is important; honesty between students and teachers is sacred. Students will listen to honest teachers, even if they do not especially like them; but they heap contempt on the dishonest. Eventually students discover the truth and falseness of some teachers. Everyone remembers their teachers, and students' lives are shaped by both good and bad teachers.
- **Passion.** Passionate teachers motivate students to learn, encourage them through challenging concepts, and keep them engaged in learning during periods of intellectual drought. The greatest teachers express high levels of passion and an eagerness to share it.

- **Purpose.** Today's students want to know how curriculum correlates with a useful life skill. They want to know the purpose for learning the content. Students respond more favorably when they are reassured of the usefulness of their efforts.
- **Discipline.** Social, moral, and intellectual discipline is the whetstone on which young people sharpen themselves. Aside from the normal complaining inherent with adolescents, students perform better when expectations are clearly articulated, understood, and enforced by teachers. Successful teachers understand that discipline creates sparks but also produces a fine edge. They also wisely and judiciously employ grace and compassion within the construct of their relationship with their students.

As educational pioneers, *we must resist the comforts associated with recycling outdated approaches to teaching:* "At every crossway on the road that leads to the future, each progressive spirit is opposed by a thousand men appointed to guard the past" (Maeterlinck, 1911). Instead, *we must promote student learning* by consistently seeking self-improvement, independent study within our respective content areas, and embracing change that improves the learning process for our students.

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