My teaching philosophy combines elements of my work as a community development practitioner and health promotion officer. Both of these fields encourage independence and self-reliance with my role being to provide the skills and resources necessary for people to enact positive change within themselves and their community. However, health promotion and community development practices cannot be effective unless the receiver is open to change. Teaching, like community development and health promotion, should provide the learner with the skills and resources to develop a knowledge base, to think critically and objectively, to grow and develop, and to use those skills and resources for continued improvement.

Included in my teaching philosophy are the principles of best practice but with amendments which incorporate more inclusively my core ethos and values. A framework which comprises goals, tools, practice and outcomes built around best practice and my own philosophy is most effective for my teaching and learning style.

The purpose of teaching is to enact positive change and to see a rewarding outcome. Any sense of awareness gained by learning should lead to change in some form. Roger’s theory of Experiential Learning states that experiential learning is equivalent to personal change and growth. (Instructional Design, 2012) Freire, too was an exponent of Experiential Learning. His method was to enact social change by dismantling the banking model of education. Breunig states that Freire’s problem-posing model of education valued the importance of student experience and a dialogical method of teaching and learning whereby the student and the teacher were mutually engaged in the production of knowledge and the process of teaching and learning. In this sense, Freire was advocating for a social justice-oriented, experiential education. (2010, p.58)
Education should not have boundaries and should encourage learners to be open to change and experience and to push limits. Once again, Freire’s philosophy supports this ideal. Dimitriadis and Kamberelis explain that Freire often referred to ‘limit situations,’ situations beyond which people cannot imagine themselves. Limit situations naturalise people’s sense of oppression giving it a kind of obviousness and immutability. (2006, p.120)

My philosophy also encompasses the premise that learning is something that should be encouraged in any form and at any age and to pursue passions and interests. A quote attributed to Aristotle states that education is the best provision for old age. (Inspirational Quotes, 2012) In order to teach to mature age students, an understanding of their knowledge base, life skills and life stage is necessary. A philosophy that creates adaptive education which can allow for circumstances and life skills and stages is a philosophy I wholeheartedly support. Rangel and Proenza state that in Cuban pedagogy, one says that teaching guides development – and educational activity is necessarily conductive to development. This saying also applies to adult education, or andragogy, which is why it is still worth:

• Distinguishing between pedagogical and andragogical models. Older adults are people who are passing through a stage of life and who begin their studies at this time; the requirements of their studies must consider their characteristics.

• Starting with what it is necessary to learn at that age and what one wants to learn, both of which are influenced by the personal histories of the older adult students, their experiences and pains, and how they want to learn after unlearning.

• Considering horizontal interpersonal relations, from adult to adult rather than from teacher to students, since they both have knowledge. (2006, p.166)
My philosophy also entails ethics, core values, a non-partisan education system and education which is available to all, regardless of disadvantage. This could refer back to Marx and a socialist view of education, however I prefer to think of this as all encompassing social justice.

To teach for social justice is to teach for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise. It is to find models in literature and in history of the indignant ones who have taken the side of the victims of pestilences, whatever their names or places of origin. It is to teach so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places so they can become healers and change the world. (Greene, 1998, xlv)

I would hope to see teachers and learners take on social justice and be a voice for equality and ethical practice. A recent article in a newspaper highlighted the inspirational Pacharo Mzembe who is running from Perth to Sydney to raise awareness of inequality in education. According to the article written by Leanne Edmistone, Mzembe says that an estimated 50,000 young Australians miss out on educational and training opportunities annually because of personal disadvantage such as poverty, abuse and unstable home environments. (2012, p.5)

I would suggest that all teachers and learners read Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and to understand how social justice and education should co-exist side by side and are fundamental for enacting any form of positive change. An understanding of what Freire calls the banking system of education is something both teacher and learner should have in order to have awareness, objectivity and to expand creativity.

Creativity is something that I am passionate about and I would encourage this in teachers and learners. The banking system of education often suppressed creativity according to Freire who states that whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem posing education involves
a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality. (2005, p.76)

Freire’s problem posing education has many similarities to Bruner’s Constructivist Theory. Constructivist Theory has many elements related to Freire as well as to community development practices of enabling the learner to be independent and self-reliant. Bruner’s Constructivist Theory can be summed up by saying that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure to do so. Cognitive structure (i.e., schema, mental models) provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows the individual to "go beyond the information given". As far as instruction is concerned, the instructor should try and encourage students to discover principles by themselves. The instructor and student should engage in an active dialog (i.e., socratic learning). The task of the instructor is to translate information to be learned into a format appropriate to the learner’s current state of understanding. Curriculum should be organized in a spiral manner so that the student continually builds upon what they have already learned. (Instructional Design, 2012)

Values education is an integral part of teaching and learning at any life span. My philosophy incorporates core values and the ability to question, develop and interpret these values. Values education can help the learner identify where they would like their course of study to take them in the future through open discussion and critical thinking. According to Freakley and Burgh et al, values education is more than simply listing our aspirational values, identifying our lived values and noting points of discord between them. It involves putting both kinds to the test. We can test our values in discussion with others, employing the actions of thinking, reasoning and evaluating to arrive at expressions of rational commitment that can then be further tested in everyday activity. (2008, p.2)
My teaching philosophy also reflects my personal values and beliefs which include animal rights and veganism, socialism and humanism. While personal values can contribute to an overall philosophy I am mindful not to enforce any personal beliefs on others. Hence the application of critical thinking to values education – teachers and learners can question values and not accept them as rigid and concrete.

I don’t believe that a teacher transfers knowledge to a student but rather that learning is an ongoing process for both teacher and learner. Again, the banking system of which Freire talks about is one which encourages transference and hierarchy. A system which encourages active and ongoing learning and open dialogue will incite a passion for learning and teaching and will promote creativity and social awareness.

I would also encourage reflective practice in both teachers and learners. Reflective practice can assist in problem solving and to clear thoughts and develop a framework for study. Loughran explains that he considers reflection as the purposeful, deliberate act of inquiry into one’s thoughts and actions through which a perceived problem is examined in order that a thoughtful, reasoned response might be tested out. (1996, p.21)

To sum up my teaching philosophy; I use elements of community development and health promotion practice to encourage learners to be independent and resourceful, to think critically and objectively and to use their knowledge and skills to enact change for the better. My philosophy certainly reflects my admiration for Paulo Freire as well as the Cuban education system and contains an amalgamation of learning theories such as Constructivism and Experiential Learning. My core values are also contained within my teaching philosophy as are values education and reflective practice. I believe that both teacher and learner continue to learn and that a teacher does not transfer knowledge to a student. The banking system of education stifles critical thinking and creativity and it would be beneficial for teachers
and learners to read the works of Paulo Freire. Education for social justice and adapting education to
suit different life stages and circumstances are also contained within my overarching philosophy.

Finally, to quote Nelson Mandela - Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change
the world. (GoodReads, 2012)
References:


Inspirational Quotes, 2012, *Education Quotes and Proverbs*, viewed 29th April, 2012,


Instructional Design, 2012, *Constructivist Theory (Jerome Bruner)*, viewed 29th April 2012,

[http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/constructivist.html](http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/constructivist.html)


