

## January 2005 - Sara Talis O'Brien, Education

### Teaching Tip

Over the past five years, I have taught Aims of American Education, Educational Psychology, Child Psychology, Principles and Techniques of Instruction, and Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education courses at Saint Peter's College. The undergraduate and graduate students in these courses have challenged me to bring my philosophy of education to life in new and creative ways every day in my classroom.

As a beginning high school English teacher, I operated on a rudimentary philosophy of education by striving to be FAIR, FIRM, KIND, and CONSISTENT. I soon realized that I had to add FUN to my emerging philosophy, or my students would never learn a thing. Later, through my research into the social and philosophical foundations of education, I discovered that my philosophy of education was actually grounded in the thoughts of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Plato, and John Dewey. For the actual implementation of my lesson plans, however, it is always Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy and Madeline Hunter's model that guides my instruction.

In his excellent text, *Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education* (Merrill Prentice-Hall 2001), Gerald L. Gutek of Loyola University in Chicago describes Pestalozzi as a proponent of educating the heart and the senses. Primarily, Pestalozzi emphasizes a loving, emotionally secure learning environment. He advocates instruction that appeals to the five senses and includes object lessons of "hands-on" activities. Like Pestalozzi, Froebel, the father of Kindergarten, focuses on the learning environment as a fertile garden where students can use their imaginations, create, play, and have fun. Plato, on the other hand, focuses his students on critical thinking, strategy, and teamwork. Likewise, John Dewey expects his students to solve real-life problems through experimentation. Although all of these great thinkers contribute to my own philosophy of education, Pestalozzi is at the heart of my work at Saint Peter's College. His thought is also consistent with the Ignatian spirituality of *cura personalis*.

In order to put my philosophy into action, however, I write general goals and use the rubric developed by Benjamin Bloom to delineate specific, measurable instructional objectives for my students day by day. Benjamin Bloom's widely accepted taxonomy provides guidelines for writing instructional objectives for the cognitive domain. It includes the categories of Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Using this taxonomy, I identify exactly what I want my students to be able to do in each lesson I teach.

Then, I develop my lessons in the spirit of Madeline Hunter. I put out the "bait" or in Hunter's terms, I implement a motivational set. This is the first part of the

lesson or unit where I do *anything* to grab my students' attention. For example, in setting up my unit on education and the law, I ask my students to rise; I enter the class wearing a judge's robe, and I carry a Bible and gavel. This sets the scene for a mock courtroom where students will try historical and created cases relevant to education and the law. Madeline Hunter has a specific, seven point lesson plan model which includes: 1) Anticipatory Set; 2) Objectives; 3) Teaching, including input and modeling; 4) Checking for Understanding; 5) Independent Practice; and 6) Closure. Although I don't follow the model exactly in every lesson, I do basically go with this flow over the course of a unit of instruction.

So, I guess it is Pestalozzi, Bloom, and Hunter that make up my teaching tip – all, of course, within the Ignatian spirit of *cura personalis*.