

## Our Philosophy

Inspired Teaching is rooted in the belief that every student possesses the ability to think critically, learn and understand information, and solve complex problems and that students should spend their time in school engaged primarily in these kinds of activities. It is the teacher's responsibility to find or create a way to reach every student.

The teacher avoids spoon-feeding information to students, giving excessive instructions, and supplying answers. Instead the teacher structures lessons so that students work independently and collaboratively using the process of inquiry to search for answers, pose and solve problems, and meet academic standards. In these classrooms teachers and students are intellectually, emotionally, and physically engaged.

Students are expected not only to develop a familiarity with content, but to develop a deep understanding of it. Assessment involves application of knowledge, often to new situations, and the ability to explain or demonstrate mastery of subject matter. This is done through multiple means such as interdisciplinary projects, writing, and oral presentations.

Reflection, on the part of students, teachers, and principal, is a key component of Inspired Teaching. The teacher challenges students to reflect on their work and the principal challenges teachers to reflect on their practice—their successes, and what they have yet to accomplish. This process of self-assessment involves constant examination and re-examination of the learning process, material learned, approaches tried (on the part of the teacher and student), etc.

The teacher-student relationship—and the relationship of the principal with teachers and students—is essential to the success of Inspired Teaching. Discipline and motivation for high levels of success are accomplished through building a learning community, with each student, teacher, and principal making a contribution and investing in the success of the whole. Teachers and students share control over learning. As teachers respect the right of students to make decisions about how they approach learning, students accept the responsibility to do their best work.

## Our Inspirations

Below is a brief listing of the educational theorists and reformers who have influenced Center for Inspired Teaching's educational philosophy.

### *Equity and High Expectations*

**Paolo Freire:** 'Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.'

**Eric Jensen:** The human brain learns when the experience is challenging, complex, and engaging.

**Jonathan Kozol:** The voices of low income children must be heard and their needs met in any education reform efforts.

#### *Emphasis on Social-Emotional Learning and Strong Student-Teacher Relationships*

**Linda Darling-Hammond:** 'If you want to teach well to very high standards, you have to know the students well, you have to have that relationship that allows you to both challenge them, and adapt what you're doing for them so that it works.'

**Adele Faber:** Non-punitive discipline techniques foster cooperation rather than obedience.

**Loris Malaguzzi,** founder of the Reggio Emilia approach: Young children have much to contribute to their own education and should build critical thinking skills as they help determine school experiences.

**Deborah Meier,** founder of Central Park East schools in Harlem: School ought to create thoughtful citizens.

**Pedro Noguera:** There is more than one way to teach poor kids. Successful schools cannot focus on achievement alone, and ignore children's social and emotional needs as if achievement can be separated from the whole of any person.

#### *Authentic Learning Experiences*

**Bev Bos,** national expert on early childhood learning: The basics of young children is wonder and discovery - 'Experience is not the best teacher. It's the only teacher.'

**Lucy Calkins,** founding director of the Teachers College Writing Project: 'learning should be purposeful . . . language is used, skills are developed, and information is learned for real purposes.'

**John Dewey:** Children, and all people, learn by doing, by engaging in authentic experiences in which they make decisions. Education ought to foster young people's ability to participate in a democracy.

**Mem Fox:** Author of *Reading Magic*, *Radical Reflections*, and many other children's books. 'If you want our children to learn how to read anything – let alone to read more diverse or more difficult material – it helps immeasurably if we can give them as much experience of the world as possible.'

**Lilian Katz:** Project work is critical in the education of young children.

**TheodoreSizer:** "The best we educational planners can do is to create the conditions for teachers and students to flourish and get out of their way."

**Grant Wiggins:** Authentic assessment is the most effective means of measuring student understanding of material.

#### *Differentiated Instruction*

**Howard Gardner:** Multiple Intelligences - As educators we should not ask: Is this child intelligent? We should ask instead, *how* is this child intelligent?

**Maria Montessori:** Focus on the individuality of each child in respect of his or her needs or talents.

**Carol Ann Tomlinson:** Teachers can and must differentiate instruction to meet all students' needs. Approaches such as Differentiated Instruction and Responsive Classroom facilitate student learning.

**Lev Vygotsky:** Children, and all people, learn best in their zone of proximal development—the area just outside of their comfort zone.

#### *Emphasis on Creativity*

**Jean Piaget:** Children's curiosity drives their learning, and play is a critical component of learning, especially for young children. Teaching must be appropriate for the developmental stage of the child.

**Daniel Pink,** Author of *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future:* the importance of right brain thinking in educating students to thrive in new economies.