Frame of Reference
Iain Murray

As I think about my beliefs as a teacher; and specifically, as I think about copying these beliefs into a document such as this, I feel overwhelmed; not because I have no starting point, but rather, because I have many potential starting points; countless moments that have helped to shape the person whom I have become.

However, in narrowing my focus, I must admit that my passion for teaching is (at least partially) fuelled by my experience in school; and specifically, by that which I did not receive as a student. My classroom experience was positive; and it very much seemed as though my teachers cared for me and for my classmates. In spite of this, I found myself, at many different junctures, feeling frustrated. School felt rigid, timed, repetitious, and predictable. Additionally, I recall thinking, even as a child, "there is very little room for discussion". So, the following is [some of] what I believe about teaching and learning, based upon the longings of my heart, in those moments when I felt the most stuck.

Before I begin, however, I should mention that all of this is built upon a management style that can best be described as one part B.F. Skinner and one part officer of the law. It is one part Skinner in that, I see the value of positive reinforcement[1]. That it "fills the bucket" of the student who is receiving the praise, and it offers those who are prone to unacceptable behaviour a tangible example of that which is expected (this based upon classroom expectations that we, as a class, would create together). However, my management style is also one part officer of the law in that I still believe in keeping order, and I still believe in the value of consequences for inappropriate or damaging actions, either to the self, the classroom or to others.

Firstly, that teaching and learning should be built upon inquiry.

I believe that one of the keys to growth (as a student and as a teacher) is the freedom to ask questions. Too often, throughout my school years, teaching was presented to us in a top-down structure. By this, I mean that the teacher would download information to us, which we were meant to receive as fact and then

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[1] Theorist: B.F. Skinner (*Behaviourism*), "Positive reinforcement (praise, rewards, etc) strengthens behaviour or increases the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated."

regurgitate; no questions asked. Very rarely were we given the opportunity to inquire; and this stunted my love of many subject areas.

As a teacher, being confronted with the truth that we do not know the answer can be an exercise in fear and anxiety. I think this is because we like to see ourselves as set apart- those with the knowledge, bestowing our wisdom upon those who desperately need to be educated. In fact, I believe our major task (as evidenced by the recently revamped BC curriculum) is to foster an environment where children are encouraged to think critically, ask big questions, and then to follow up; building upon prior knowledge[2]. As we realize this, we can shed the "traditional teacher" skin, and get to work.

Secondly, that teaching and learning must be focused on exploration.

First comes the question; then comes the process of unearthing the truth! Often we've heard it said, "it's not about the destination, it's about the journey"; and certainly this is true of any good classroom! We need to embrace the ups, downs, and (at points) the confusing middles of exploration. Practically, sleuthing leads to the answer, but more than that, it is these moments that can (and do) uncover passions and gifts within our students, and within ourselves. These unexpected, "aha" moments, on the road to the finish-line, are often the points that teach us the most about ourselves. And so the question must become, "How can we create an environment where this type of exploration is not only possible, but common place?"

Thirdly, that teaching and learning should lead to all forms of discovery.

First comes the question; then comes the exploration, followed closely by times of wonderful, unique, (and often times, unexpected) discovery! It is at these points that our students arrive at conclusions, comparing them to past theories and returning to previous discussions with new information to share! Our world has much to offer, and as we model an attitude of teachability[3] to our students, I believe they see and discover this within themselves.

Related to this, because there is always more to see, and more to uncover, it would stand to reason that our assessment practices mirror this belief. That we would be diligent in checking in- observing and recording what our students know and what

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[2] Theorist: *Jean Piaget (Constructivism)*, "Students learn by doing, rather than by being told".
[3] (Our British Columbia Teacher Regulation Branch *[TRB] Standards*, a document to which we all must adhere as professional educators, outlines the need for teachers to be constantly learning, thus becoming an example of such, to our students)

they have yet to discover (formative assessment); but that we would not allow the summative assessment piece (a test at the end of a unit, for example) to dictate where the learning ends.

Fourthly, that there is joy to be had, in and through the process.

I believe that inquiry, exploration and discovery (built upon the belief that kids learn differently and the implementation of strategies which are inclusive of multiple [and varied] learning styles[4]) leads to the joy of learning, this based upon the freedom that the students experience in pondering, wondering, hypothesizing, excavating (in their own way), and discovering.

These are (some of the) things that I believe are valuable within the classroom, both within the life and practice of the teacher, and to be offered, wholeheartedly, to the students at every juncture.

Inquiry, leading to exploration, leading to discovery, leading to joy. Repeat.

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[4] Theorist: Howard Gardner (*Multiple Intelligences*), "Humans have several ways of processing information (musical, visual, verbal, logical)"