

My Sayings

I have learned much from the sayings of others. I do try to remember the good ones, write them down at least, but, alas, like good jokes they don't hang around in my memory for long. That does not mean they disappear, however, for I have found that their essence remains and while I can't remember the exact words I do remember how I felt and how they have guided me in my own search for understanding and in my actions in life. So, below, rather than quotes from books, which we all have and each take our own from, are a series of my own that I have discovered in my journal writings over the years about teaching.

“If you want to find out what you don't know, teach what you do know to someone else.”

This was prompted by a question from a very conscientious and very concerned student on how she could possibly learn fifty or so terms for an upcoming quiz. I told her to 'teach' her parents the whole story through the terms, and when she got stuck that would be the part she'd have to learn/study. She may have to go through it a few times, but once she could tell the whole story she was ready for the quiz. She's here, at the UofC now.

“Study and learn what you don't know, not what you do know.”

A bright student who was doing poorly said to me after failing yet another test, “Studying is so boring! I know most of everything so how can I concentrate and do it without falling asleep or watching TV?” I told him, “Why are you are studying what you already know?” He never heard that before! What he needed to do was go through his notes and textbook looking for the things he didn't know and gloss by those that he did. He then studied well, slept well and passed easily.

“If 'you' can't trust 'you', what does it matter whether I do?”

This was years ago to a class of grade 12 students who were amazed after I had handed out a Unit Examination, got them started and then left the room for some time. “Nobody ever does that!” they cried. I replied to them that that says more about the teachers than it does the students. I rarely have cheating issues as the students police themselves by honouring my trust as well as their own.

“Relevance, relevance, relevance. That is where meaning and interest exist.”

A few years ago this was my response to a terrified student teacher's question concerning how to teach the content of 19th century history to a class of Grade 11 seemingly disinterested students for whom 9/11 is a dim memory, the fall of the Berlin Wall is ancient, boring and dead history, let alone the Napoleonic Wars! I have always thought that if the content wasn't relevant to the student in some way then it *was* meaningless content. Just telling them it is important isn't enough. So, what is the relevance of these events and dead people to your students? If you want their attention and interest find out what these are.

“I am more concerned about how students deal with what they don't know as opposed to what they do know.”

My cranky response to an 'assessment' representative from Alberta Learning when being 'inserviced' regarding the assessment of the 'new' Grade 10 Social Studies curriculum and my concerns of continued teaching to the exam and more directed learning with the ongoing policy of maintaining the grade 12 Diploma examination. The poor dear didn't quite know how to respond to my concerns.