

Speak Less, Listen Often, and Let the Students Lead: Chappell's Educational Philosophy

"When a child walks in the room, your child or anybody else's child, do your eyes light up? That's what they're looking for." – Toni Morrison

Years ago I was exposed to the work of Toni Morrison who, ever since, has remained my favorite author in the American literary tradition. As an English scholar and school administrator, I am particularly drawn to Morrison's simple yet sophisticated understanding of how adults influence children's perceptions of themselves and the world. Morrison poses a profound question, asking: "When a child walks in the room, your child or anybody else's child, do your eyes light up? That's what they're looking for." During my tenure as an independent school teacher-administrator, I have had the fortune of watching Morrison's belief in real time.

There are many things of which I am uncertain, but my purpose to be a teacher-administrator is not one of them. I have dedicated my life to fostering inclusive learning communities that equip all constituents with the tools to engage with peoples from ethnically, culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. To properly prepare 21st century students and teachers for lives of leadership and service in our global society, it is imperative that we reimagine pedagogical, curricular, and programming models to ensure they challenge students and faculty to expand their worldview while also meeting them where they are. The four pillars of my educational philosophy are rooted in inclusive practices in teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning begins with storytelling

- Mary Oliver asks of us, "Oh do you have time / to linger / for just a little while / out of your busy day"? Oliver's inquiry serves as a constant reminder that each person's story is their greatest source of power, and we use these to build connection with members within our community. Intentionally creating space to engage with students and faculty's stories is the highest sign of my respect and appreciation for them. I remain appreciative to students and faculty for their vulnerability in sharing, and I hold each of their journeys, triumphs, and concerns with care.

Curriculum expands beyond the classroom

- Within a learning community, everything is curricula. Each moment yields a lesson that students and faculty internalize. Thus, every facet of the curricular and co-curricular programming must be viewed as instructional material from which students are drawing conclusions about themselves, their communities, and the world. For faculty this means they have access to professional development opportunities and receive ongoing feedback that expands their own professional capacities as it relates to teaching and learning.

Establishing a culture of respect and forgiveness

- No one ever reaches the end of his/her/their DEI journey, and we will not "get it right" all of the time. And that is fine. The goal is to get it right, not to be right. The world is ever changing, and so are we. To this end, an institutional culture of respect for self and others results in all community members feeling supported in asking questions and seeking to better

understand their neighbors' experiences. Moreover, all community members should accept the notion that mistakes foster growth, be willing to assume the best in each other, and extend grace when necessary.

Academic programming should be rooted in learning science and cultural competence

- My thoughts around teaching and learning are rooted in neuroscience and cultural sensitivity, namely the works of Zaretta Hammond. Much of Hammond's work explores the coupling of learning science with culturally competent pedagogy to optimize learning for students and faculty. One hallmark of inclusive curricula programming is how it meets each person where they are. To effectively move the community forward, all constituents must be able to identify an entry point into the curricular and DEI efforts. Inclusive curricular and co-curricular programming offers various entry points, makes learning active, and challenges each community member to engage in the exciting *and* challenging work of building their own capacity around cultural competence. In my classroom and within the broader learning community, this looks like retrieval practices, check for understandings, differentiated instruction, multiple modes of engagement, multimodal lessons, teacher-student partnership, and a culture of critical care.