

Theory of Practice Memo: Professionalism

Professionalism is one of, if not the, most important factors in being an effective educator and broadly, a human being. No matter what, people (especially ones in different situations to you, students, for example) will judge you based on how you interact with them. Professionalism as a practice allows you to curtail some of that judgement through careful selection of behavior. Without professional practices, you are less likely to get what you want done done. It allows you to get your foot in the door. And preserving it throughout your interactions allows inundation into the room of decision making.

So, what is professionalism? It is the careful planning and execution of actions in a way that is most likely to beget positive outcomes. It is a holistic way of interacting with other people that allows you to somewhat manage their perception of you. It is multifaceted and always improvable. In many ways it is an art form, with its own great thinkers (Fredrick Douglas) and famous works (Brown v. BoE) And it is crucial to maximizing success in almost everything.

In *Rethinking Disability*, Connor, and Valle term respect as primarily (or at least as an aspect of) inclusivity—emphasizing the importance of equity and community. Both these ideas—inclusivity and respect, are tantamount in professionalism. Broadly respect is a simple axiom: You should never ever be rude anyone, even if they really deserve it, as it probably will not help the situation. Inclusivity is a less simple task to conquer. To be brief: One should tread lightly with affirmative action to not disparage already established groups of students. However, simple steps like differentiation or translation of materials can be critical to ensuring success in poorly performing students. Honesty, to a point, is also tied in with this. Without being honest and clear about intentions and requirements, issues can be buried only to resurrect later with fewer solutions. Patience is another aspect of respect. One must anticipate delays and needless

bureaucracy as they are an unavoidable symptom of large groups of people working together. Expecting prompt resolutions will be disappointing and more than likely cause whoever you are working with to become frustrated and view you as unaware.

As discussed in section 3 of the SIOP model component text, clarity & formality is important as well. Communication is inherently mentally taxing and the briefer and clearer you can keep your communications the more of them you can have. Grammar and spelling issues are unacceptable in communications as they suggest a lack of care being put into the message sent. Formality in this instance refers to the multiple of most common practices associated with certain spaces (email is the easiest to consider, e.g., you should have a signature, introduction etc. One might also consider formatting standards like APA or the superior MLA). Not preserving these practices will oftentimes lead to less confidence being assigned to your abilities. There is a line, where breaking formality to a point can be effective to get something done, but it is important to develop rapport before this.

It is valuable to discuss clarity and formality in the context of interactions with for nonnative English speakers. What is important to remember, is that it's very likely that some students (and their families) may have significantly different cultural behaviors than you, and under most circumstances (especially without clear communication about these circumstances) it is best to align with what you can perceive as is the most correct behavior.

Dry professionalism and fortified pedagogy—shaken—are key for good classrooms. Unstirred, students will not be prepared to encounter expectations of professionalism in the “real world”. To both properly assess, and completely prepare one's students they must employ professionalism in their methodology. This is not limited to behavior and materials inside the classroom—it extends to home visits, meetings, and any other interactions an educator may have.

With professionals, students ultimately have better opportunity to meaningfully engage with materials. However, it is important to understand that as the proprietor of behavior in your classroom there exists a balance between what is most professional and what is most effective. Educators should emphasize primarily their educational value—professionalism ensures just attention.

Works Cited

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