Sonja Wiedenhaupt

Why is it that in some classrooms, students seem interested and deeply focused in the problem of the lesson; while in others students’ minds couldn’t be further away from the lesson? Why is it that in some classrooms students will keep trying on the most difficult problem, while in others they disengage almost before even attempting the problem? What is it that teachers do to tap students’ imaginations, sense of purpose and possibility? These questions about environments that foster motivation and learning have always intrigued me. I use my foundation in developmental, social and personality psychology gained at Teachers College, Columbia University, and U.C. Berkeley to inform my study. Evergreen’s MiT program provides a wonderful reflective space to continue to deepen my understanding in a very interdisciplinary and practical way. It has pushed me explore the physiology of the brain, history and cultural studies. It’s shown me ways to make space for music and art.

I'm drawn to teach in the MiT program because of its high expectations for future teachers and its collaborative structure. Faculty work closely together to both develop the curriculum and to learn from each other’s expertise. Students work hard to develop their knowledge and skills as teachers within a learning community. It’s powerful to observe the relationships they develop, the high expectations they have of each other and the ways they develop to support each others’ learning.

My goal is to support teacher candidates in developing good skills for making sense of what happens in their classrooms; in intelligently interrogating and creatively negotiating practices that will support all their students, not only as learners, but also as capable, empathetic and responsive citizens. I enjoy coaching student teachers, and am struck by how much they grow not only as teachers, but as thinkers and informed decision makers. I believe that teaching is a practice –a practice that involves curiosity, reflection and a willingness to experiment. No matter how skilled or knowledgeable we are, there will always be something to learn. Even as an experienced faculty member, I continue to learn and to be pushed to refine my knowledge and skills – it’s in these spaces for learning that I find beauty.

In other areas of my life: I play music with a brass band, a Greek band and a small Brazilian ensemble; I ride my bicycle; and am learning how to care for a garden.

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