CI 412W Who Are My Students? Activity

In *Spitwad Sutras*, Mr. Inchausti spends a great deal of time learning not only about his particular 9th grade boys, but about 15-16 yr. old students/boys in general. We see evidence of this in the following excerpt from Ch.3, p. 24:

> It was not my students’ ignorance that was so exasperating, nor was it their rowdy behavior; it was the audacity of their small minds and the power their pettiness possessed to undermine everything in life that I valued. Why were these kids so certain that there was nothing important they could learn from me, when one look at them, one walk down the damn school hallway, provoked so many revelations in my mind that I could barely process them all?

So let’s see... Mr. Inchausti is realizing, above, that he doesn’t know much about adolescent learners of this age, while admitting that he holds certain attitudes and dispositions about these boys (perhaps about all students of this age) – namely, that they are intellectually ignorant (in this example, regarding literary interpretation), rowdy, and unwilling to learn what he sought to teach them.

As this book makes clear (eventually), successful teachers work hard at combining their general knowledge and dispositions of young people with knowledge of their own, particular students in an effort to establish an overall professional relationship and rapport that, combined with successful pedagogical actions, results in meaningful teaching and learning for all concerned. Of course, the combinations of knowledge and dispositions about one’s students are never clear cut with respect to a teacher’s actions – as we see when we return to Mr. Inchausti’s reflections in the same chapter (p. 29):

> Was I finally asking the right questions? Was my two-step strategy for interpreting parables the key?
> Or was it the risk I took in allowing the discussion to go beyond what I knew?

As you prepare to meet your 495 students this semester we invite you to spend some time reflecting upon the knowledge and dispositions about secondary students in general that you currently possess, and how all of this might connect to the instructional skills (asking higher order questions, offering appropriate and educative assessments, etc.) you’ll employ.

Assignment:
1. List at least five aspects of secondary students about which you feel more or less knowledgeable (in contrast to Mr. Inchausti’s apparent ignorance of same). Your list might include, for example, “that some students have special needs” OR “that adolescents are involved in identity exploration and construction” OR “that adolescents are ‘cliquish’.” Keep in mind that your list includes aspects of students about which you feel somewhat knowledgeable.

2. List at least five attitudes or dispositions toward secondary students that you feel will prove more or less important in your effort to develop relationships and rapport with your 495 students. One example might be that you (like Mr. Inchausti) believe 9th graders to be small-minded and petty.

3. Now, using the lists you’ve provided, write a brief (250 word maximum) essay using the following as your opening sentence:

> Given what I currently know and feel about secondary students, I anticipate emphasizing certain instructional practices within my 495 class/es this semester.

Note: We are asking, here, for a single Word document that contains your numbered lists of (1) knowledge and (2) dispositions, followed by your brief persuasive essay.

Due: 29 January, 2009 (To be submitted in class)