

Teaching Philosophy

By Jessica Cutler

As a child, I always enjoyed school. It was not always the learning aspect that made school enjoyable, however. I enjoyed being around my peers and gradually began competing to be at the top of my classes, but this did not mean that I was gaining any knowledge. I became good at regurgitating information and taking mental pictures of my notes long enough to take a test. I worried about letter grades, not the material, throughout middle school and high school. Throughout my experiences in the classroom I began changing how I studied and how I worked to retain information and details, not just memorize it for a test. I knew I would need to be able to use skills I learned from other teachers and my professors in the classroom and I would need it repeatedly. Once I began working with students, I felt I could change and mold the minds of students to care about the material and apply it to their interests. I constantly challenge myself to use my past as a tool to evaluate and expand my beliefs concerning what it takes to be a great teacher.

I strongly believe students possess all the characteristics needed to become successful in the classroom. I know it takes personal interest in order to be engaged in material being taught. From experience, I know it is hard to perform well academically if the material is not relevant to the student's life. As a student teacher I learned to make personal connections to people and my community. Students partake in their communities on a daily basis and contribute to it. I believe in continuing to encourage students to explore and learn from their environment and peers. Learning from a book is not meaningful if it cannot be applied to one's life. Learning from the surrounding environment is more valuable than from reading about it. I have learned in my own classroom that in order to keep students engaged it is important to give them problems and materials that relate personally to them. For example, in math I always use students in my classroom in problems and use toys and books they are interested to keep them engaged.

Students need a safe environment to take risks and learn. Students need to feel as though they can share their answer to a question even if it will be incorrect. Students should be able to step out of their comfort zones to share their ideas in a discussion. This safe environment is an elementary school where students make positive relationships with teachers and peers. I believe, as an educator, positive relationships with peers and teachers to evaluate needs and interests of students is beneficial. My goal as an educator is to raise optimistic and motivated children who use their potential to contribute to their environment in a positive manner. Using positive reinforcement as an educator leads to engaged students and a safe learning community.

My lesson plans enable students to make deeper connections while using obtained knowledge and applying this knowledge to reach higher levels. Academically relevant material, hands-on activities and real world examples help students build their previous understandings. I believe I am constantly expanding my own knowledge and thinking, while growing as an educator. Watching students grow throughout the school year confirms how important positive relationships are in a safe school environment I

help create. During my third year of teaching I had a student who was having a difficult time with two-digit subtraction where regrouping was needed in order to complete the problem. I knew I needed to build up her confidence and work with her during small group time to give her the extra practice she needed. Within a few lessons, she had mastered two digit subtraction and was confident to share her answers in class. This was a moment where I knew she felt safe in her environment and was confident to step out of her comfort zone and share her answers during a class discussion. Everyone in the class knew how challenging this was for her and gave her words of encouragement. This was a moment where I knew I had succeeded as a teacher.

My teaching philosophy will continue to grow and change as I continue to grow as a teacher and gain more experiences. However, I will always work for a classroom environment where my students feel safe and comfortable to learn, grow, and express themselves and challenge themselves and each other to reach their academic goals.