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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Every year, I usher in August by hanging pictures and posters, filling bulletin boards and bookshelves, organizing cabinets and drawers, and attempting to create an inviting space in which my students and I can learn about language and each other. Then it happens. A hundred-something fresh faces filter into my classroom and find their way into my heart. As the August heat gradually gives way to chilly autumn evenings, I devote a great deal of time and energy to building relationships with my students because if I want to teach them, I must reach them, and reaching them hinges on convincing them I care.

Therefore, I make it my mission to learn about them, reflect their goodness back to them, and demonstrate genuine concern for their wellbeing. In so doing, I model mutual respect and boost self-esteem as well as increase student interest in whatever lesson I am trying to teach them. I rely heavily on these relationships I build with students to make my classroom a safe place and an effective learning environment. For example, I call students “sir” and “ma’am,” build them up with compliments, and ask them how their day is going in conversation. I respond to their “free writes” with notes of interest and affirmation, so they feel seen and heard, and information about myself, so they know more about me. I encourage them to share their writing in the “author’s chair,” and I lead them in cheering on one another with applause in response.

Beyond the building of relationships, my goal as an English language arts educator is to create critical consumers and producers of print and electronic media, promoting literacy by encouraging students to become thoughtful and confident readers, writers, speakers, listeners, and viewers. My hope is that students enjoy writing, develop a lifelong love of reading, and utilize both reading and writing to overcome challenges and achieve goals.

Since students construct knowledge in multiple ways, I incorporate a variety of teaching methods. I vary oral reading strategies, provide an abundance of modeling and scaffolding, offer hands-on experiences with manipulatives, include opportunities to move around the classroom, facilitate different types of discussions, and encourage collaboration in pairs and small groups. In keeping with the latest brain research, which suggests activities for teenagers be limited to smaller chunks of time, I frequently integrate various combinations of these teaching methods along with a mini-lesson or guided practice.

Regardless of which methods I embrace, I promote literacy by requiring students to read and write daily. My students read to enjoy, to explore, and to expand their knowledge. My students write to describe, to narrate, to inform, to argue, to create, to reflect, and to express. They build diverse portfolios over the course of the school year, showcasing the pieces of which they are most proud. Compiling and sharing compositions in this way increases student buy-in exponentially.

Aiming to engage students and instill in them the idea that they have a voice and can make a difference, I strive to create meaningful assignments over topics of interest with authentic audience and purpose. Whenever possible, I offer choices and encourage students to explore subjects near and dear to their hearts about which they will be more likely to write with passion. Then I seek to provide platforms for their voices, posting pieces on school walls, publishing them on the class blog, submitting them to various publications, and entering them in contests.

Moreover, I believe it is important to practice what I preach, so I assure my students I will never ask them to do anything I have not done and am not willing to do myself. Then, I prove it. I write alongside them and post my writing on school walls, publish it on the class blog, enter it in contests, and submit it for publication. By the time my students set out to soak up the summer sun in May, they know me and what I am passionate about in addition to knowing that I care about them.