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Teaching Philosophy
January 19th, 2022

Over my years as an educator, I have worked in many different environments, watching students grow and learn as I developed my teaching philosophy. I have seen students in Thailand work to have a conversation in English with a growing vocabulary; I have helped dyslexic students gain years in reading level; I have listened as parents of students on the Autism spectrum have told me their child said “I love you,” for the first time, and I have seen students learn to ask for help when they need it. All of this has taught me that, truly, any student can learn with the proper supports that meet their needs. The perfect instruction can look vastly different from student to student, so the use of Universal Design in the classroom is central to my teaching philosophy—all students should feel supported, and no student should feel out of place or othered if they need different or extra support.

In my classroom, I closely follow the ideas of both Lev Vygotsky and Grant Wiggins. Wiggins offered four main ideas for improving student learning: teach with depth rather than breadth, set goals before instruction begins, teacher collaboration is important, and that “materials should be adjusted according to student success” (Hall, Quinn, & Gollnick, 2020, p. 194). Whenever possible, if students show interest in a specific topic, I believe in encouraging their curiosity by exploring the breadth of the idea. Additionally, by ensuring that materials match student success, I hope to tailor instruction to meet the child, rather than trying to tailor the child to meet the curriculum. Like Vygotsky, I believe that knowledge is the product of social interaction, and that students can often learn best from one another. Collaboration amongst students, effective and respectful discourse, and the allowance of group work is central to my teaching.

To that end, it is important to build an inclusive environment that encourages open and honest discourse, where children learn through both direct instruction and constructivist teaching. I believe

both that knowledge is best remembered when it is self-discovered, but also that all students learn in different ways. Having a classroom where all students' ideas and contributions are valued and celebrated is paramount, so that everyone feels free to contribute. Because students both learn and show their learning in different ways, students should be provided with alternate forms of contribution whenever possible, whether it be through an option of a paper, presentation, art project, or otherwise. Students should not be limited by an assignment.

In order to build an inclusive classroom, likely the most important aspect of my teaching philosophy is that of building strong relationships with students and their families. Building these relationships will help students feel safe and know they are valued and loved while they are in school, allowing them a safe space to learn and grow. Building relationships with families is imperative as well, as parents should be equal partners in their child's education. Successes should be shared along the way, so that communication lines remain open and parents don't equate a phone call from a teacher with trouble. That said, while building relationships is important, it is also important for student to respect my authority. I fall in the middle between student and teacher control, as allowing students some choice can increase their drive and excitement for learning. However, safety is key and when necessary, I know how important it is for students to know that my authority is not to be questioned.

That said, the last aspect of my educational philosophy is the idea of restorative justice. No classroom, school, or student is perfect, and there are going to be days where students make poor decisions. When these days occur, it is important to allow for space for student reflection, apology, forgiveness, and action items. Students should feel they are a part of the reparation process when they have done something wrong, so that they realize that they still are a part of the community and that they are still valued, despite the negative behavior. All in all, I believe in a classroom that helps students find their voice so that they can become the changemakers we need in the world.

Reference

Hall, G. E., Quinn, L. F., & Gollnick, D. M. (2020). *Introduction to teaching: Making a difference in student learning*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.