

My Answer Is Yes

My Teaching Philosophy

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In all honesty, I entered my teaching career with little understanding of the mental, physical, and emotional demands this work requires. Professors, former teachers, friends, and family members all had two reactions when they heard about my choice: “Wow. That’s great—you’re a saint!” and “Are you sure that’s what you want to do?” I was confronted with a myriad of reasons to steer clear of becoming a teacher. “It’s thankless!” “You won’t make much money!” “It’s really hard!” But as I reflect on my decision to become an educator, I remember what my 3rd grade teacher said when I sought her advice. She warned me that teaching would be difficult. She told me that I would have good days and bad days, high moments and low moments, and that my friends and family might not understand why I chose such a challenging job. But she also said that I would join a community of educators who would have my back and understand my commitment. She told me that I would make a lifetime of memories each year and that the bonds I create with my students would never leave me, even when the bad days outweigh the good. She was the teacher who inspired me to become a teacher, so her words have stuck with me and have already proven to be more true than I could have imagined. The connections I make with my students and colleagues will continue to motivate me and to shut out any doubt and negativity from friends, family, and society.

As a teacher, my joy comes from my students’ success—those “Aha” moments and the smiles that shine on their faces when they see their own growth. As cheesy as it may sound, I get tears in my eyes when I watch my students emotionally regulate themselves and reflect on their feelings. The pride I feel deep in my chest constantly reminds me of my goals as an educator: to lift my students up, help each and every one of them experience success, and bring a joy to learning that will last them a lifetime.

In the classroom, I prioritize building relationships and community among my students. During morning meetings, I teach skills that I believe are critical to encouraging positive interactions between my students and with the greater school community. Skills such as greeting others, tone of voice, body language, and understanding boundaries are the building blocks for the restorative and respectful environment I strive to create in my classroom. My students know that they are all active members of the community and are accountable for their part in creating an environment that everyone wants to be a part of. My students all feel welcomed—not just by me but by one another—into the learning community.

To support that learning process and feelings of acceptance and belonging, I implement daily social and emotional learning lessons and restorative practices with my students. I will always see the value in teaching children about their feelings, how to process them effectively, and how their actions and responses to stimuli impact others. My students are taught to be compassionate

and supportive of others while balancing their own personal needs and wants. I make sure my students are aware of what is expected of them in my room in order to be successful. One of those pillars is being in the correct head space. I teach my students that we have tools at our disposal to help us get there. Practices like cool-down corners and safe spaces for de-escalation and reflection become the norm. Differentiated strategies such as daily checklists, fidgets, and flexible seating are available to my students early on in the year as we discuss proactive regulation strategies. Circle-back conversations, restorative circles, and reflection discussions are reactive methods we use in my classroom to ensure all voices are heard and all actions are accounted for when we resolve any issues that may have arisen. My students will always know that their voice and emotions have a place in my room and that we have tools and strategies to make sure our community remains safe.

It has been my experience that when my students know that their social and emotional well being matters, their desire and willingness to learn thrives. I work hard daily to ensure my students are challenged. To do this, I rely on differentiation, consistent summative assessment, and workshop models of learning. It is important to me that my students receive the attention they need to master a skill to the best of their ability, and a workshop model with time to work in small groups while others independently practice is my favorite way to accomplish this. I also teach a growth mindset. I emphasize with my students that in order to master a skill and be able to apply it, they need to appreciate the value of mistakes. I tell my students that mistakes are a sign of learning and growth, and they are extremely powerful tools in their learning journey. I tell them that mistakes tell me what they still need to learn and if they already knew how to do everything perfectly on the first try, I would have no purpose as their teacher! (They love it when I say that.) This part of my philosophy in the classroom stems from my own struggles in school and with perfectionism. I value honesty with my students, and I am always sure to share my own stories of making mistakes and struggling with certain concepts. When my students see that their teacher was once in the exact same boat as they are, they open up to advice and support, and start to develop that internal motivation we love to see in young learners.

Finally, I know as an educator I do not work in a vacuum where students leave their personal lives outside the school doors. My students are whole children, not just learners, and it is crucial that I allow my students to be their authentic selves. On top of the SEL tools I provide to my students to help them cope with whatever outside forces may be impacting their emotional states, my students will also walk into the classrooms and see themselves. They will see people who look like them on my walls, in their lessons, and in the books they have access to. They will have opportunities to share about who they are outside of school, what they value, where they come from and where they wish to go. They will see their work displayed with joy and pride. They will be surrounded with reminders they are loved, valued, cared for, and safe. It is my job as their teacher to work in tandem with all that my students bring to the table to make sure they know their entire being is not only welcome in our community, but *wanted*.

When I first entered education with a smile on my face and so many questions about what to do, I truthfully felt massively overwhelmed. As excited as I was for what lay ahead, I was nervous. Knowing the impact I was going to have on students' lives was daunting, but as I sit down and write out my philosophy here, two years later, this impact no longer feels daunting. This impact inspires me daily and keeps me grounded in my work. The wellbeing of my students as whole children drives my passion for education. Now I do understand the mental, physical, and emotional dedication this work requires, and when people ask me, "Are you sure you want to keep doing this?" my answer is a resounding, confident, prideful "Yes!"