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Teaching Philosophy

Developing a teaching philosophy can be challenging as it requires a wealth of experience and self-reflection. In my opinion, the best way to develop any teaching philosophy is to investigate the purpose of education. Is it to challenge and enlighten young minds, or is it a means to convey information to students? Does the learning environment need to be safe, or should it mimic real-world situations where individuals may encounter unique and challenging scenarios? I believe that any type of education should provide students the opportunity to learn and succeed in any future endeavor they choose to pursue, while also accepting each individual student for who they are. These core attributes are what form the foundation of my teaching philosophy. I adamantly believe that building strong teacher-student relations in inclusive classrooms which focus on cultivating meaningful scientific discussions are paramount for success.

At the beginning of the BEd program at The University of British Columbia, I thought that creating an inclusive classroom was the most important attribute of my teaching philosophy. After (briefly!) teaching in a secondary school in North Vancouver, I believe that this philosophy does indeed play a crucial role, but what stood out to me was building strong teacher-student relationships. I was shocked at the differentiation between high school students, mainly because when I was a secondary student I existed in a very tight bubble (close friends, accelerated subject groups, team sports, etc.) and did not go out of my way to meet new students. Now, as a teacher candidate, you are responsible for every single student and each one has a unique life story to tell. My favorite part of teaching (so far!) has been getting to know students at a more personal level, simply because I like hearing about what makes them tick, and am genuinely interested in what they do (both in and out of a school context). At first, I was a little apprehensive of getting to know individual students, namely because teachers are supposed to conduct themselves in a very professional manner, but I feel as though I am too empathetic to put myself on a pedestal and ignore all the factors that make up an individual. I strongly feel that as I get to know my students better, I can tailor my lessons and the curriculum to suit their needs, and be more respectful of their lives (for example, if I know half the class is away for a choir trip, I'll try my best to not schedule too much homework for that trip). Furthermore, building strong relationships helps me foster inclusive and encouraging classroom environments in different ways. First, I feel as though stress and anxiety levels decrease, because students are more comfortable expressing themselves to me and their classmates. Second, I believe learning is enhanced because students are less willing to dabble if they feel their instructor truly cares about them. This point relates to another important attribute of my teaching philosophy, namely that respect is paramount in the classroom. This is not simply between teacher and student, but also between the students in the class. When I interact with students at a personal level, and incorporate these ideas into my classroom, they are more likely to respect both me and each other. I feel it is necessary to incorporate strong teacher-student relationships, foster inclusive classroom environments, and build respect in the classroom, all of which form the core of my teaching philosophy.

To this day, I remember the exact class where I gained an interest in biology. This lecture opened my eyes to biology and potentially jumpstarted my career in environmental sciences. My professor showed a video which displayed the inner functions of a cell and it opened my eyes to how simple biological processes progressed. I was blown away at the intricacies of the cell transport proteins, and how much structure which was present in such a small entity. I remember this spark of interest, and how profound an impact it had on the rest of my life and I want to bring this excitement regarding the scientific fields into the classroom. Too many young students believe that the sciences are dull, monotonous, and boring. Often, they are correct because too much of science pedagogy revolves around the memorization of (potentially!) mundane details, without focusing on the big picture or making the subject matter relatable. I strongly feel that this strategy, while successful in certain situations, can be improved on by instead focusing on contextual examples which directly relate to the topic at hand. Furthermore, these larger themes can be expanded on by bringing in global situations which emphasize them. Students may be uninterested in learning about marine ecology, but a discussion (or debate) which centers around aquaculture in BC and whether it is a necessity or a burden may cause more students to take an interest. I thoroughly believe that when science is taught in this fashion, it fosters much more participation, discussions, and general interest because the topic at hand is being directly related to various issues which may be impacting the students' lives.

Teaching philosophies can change over time, and I fully expect my own ideals to shift as I gain perspective and experience. I feel as though all teachers need to be flexible and adaptable to best serve their students' needs, particularly in such a dynamic and rapidly-changing global environment. We simply cannot remain static and hold onto philosophies which may be antiquated, but we also need to be true to ourselves and our values. I believe that fostering strong teacher-student relationships, along with delivering scientific material in insightful and meaningful ways form my core teaching philosophies. I cannot wait to gain more experience, and look forward to teaching in the coming practicum in North Vancouver!