Teaching Philosophy

 As an educator, it is important to have a philosophy that guides your actions and practices. My teaching philosophy includes many components, but some of the important elements that govern my philosophy include establishing a cooperative classroom learning, reinforcing positive behavior, encouraging academic risk taking, and developing lifelong learning skills. These elements are important to me because I believe they will enhance the way my classroom functions, allow my students to flourish to their full potential, and set my students up for success in all areas of their lives.

Creating a classroom that supports one another and works like a family is one important element of teaching philosophy. I will create a caring environment in my classroom by implementing Kagen Cooperative Learning strategies into my curriculum. Kagen strategies involve forming students into cooperative learning groups that allow students to build bonds and meaningful connections with one another. For example “classbuilding” exercises such as class meetings. For instance, if an incident occurs in the classroom that can wait to discussed, I will tell the students that this incident will be part of the discussion at the next class meeting. During the class meeting we may talk about solutions, ways to prevent the issue from reoccurring, and work on identifying the cause of the issue.

In addition, I will never place my students in a situation that will encourage competition against one another. It is common for classrooms to have teams and for the teacher to dole out “team points”. Many teachers then reward the highest scoring team at the end of the week or the end of the afternoon. A teacher in one of my college courses explained how this strategy can actually causes resentment against the highest scoring team and cause students to feel inferior. She offered an alternative to this that I found especially appealing. My professor explained that in her classroom, she also gave points to teams, but at the end of the day all of the points earned were combined to contribute to a class wide points fund. The teacher would encourage all of the students to thank the highest scoring team of the day and plan with their team how they can earn points the next day. This method really highlights how simple changes to a classroom function can create a sense of unity rather than a sense of separation and competition. As a teacher, I will continually seek methods that will encourage a close-knit classroom community based on communication and trust.

Cooperative learning will provide a sense of comfort and camaraderie that will allow students to become more comfortable taking “academic risks”. In order to develop academic risk taking skills I will model how to try something new by delving out of my comfort zone. For example, I may tell the students that I am terribly embarrassed about my horrible singing voice, but that I will join a choir to learn how to sing and practice singing with them. I will explain to my students that I may be a bit nervous, that I know I will grow and learn from taking this risk. As a class, we will practice learning about new things and being open to experimenting and trying our best. I will explain that the whether or not the outcome of these risks is what we expect or desire, we will nonetheless benefit from taking academic risks. Each student will be encouraged to take risks and go out of their comfort zone, even if it simply means raising their hand to answer a question. I will also engage my students in meaningful discussion about what we have learned from the risks we take as a class, and what we may have missed out on if we had not chosen to take these risks.

I will also explain that learning new things, asking questions and seeking answers are what it means to be a lifelong learner. When students express their natural inquiry about the way the world works, I will encourage them to seek answers. I will guide my students in the process of discovering answers to their questions. Partnering with students to ask questions about the way the world works will be a part of daily life. Guiding students to find answers via Internet searches, interviews, phone calls, and emails will show students that as a teacher, I am still learning too. My class will engage in a variety of inquiry based lessons that will further develop their abilities to solve problems, synthesize information, seek answers, and develop perseverance. Fostering these kinds of integral skills will not only encourage students to become lifelong learners, but give them the tools they need to be successful lifelong learners.

One other important element of my teaching philosophy is positive encouragement. My mother has always said that is so important to “catch children being good”. I will acknowledge when I see students act kindly to one another, especially when they think no one is watching. I will call parents to tell them how well a student did in class or tell them about an act of kindness that their child did. Writing small notes to students is another way I will continue to encourage them and reinforce kindness, hard work, and good behavior. A note may simply thank them for raising their hand in class even though it makes them nervous to speak in front of everyone, or acknowledge their kind act of helping a friend tie their shoe. Making certain to encourage kindness and compassion in students helps them remember that their small acts of kindness and hard work are indeed important and appreciated. As a teacher, I will take every opportunity I can to encourage my students and tell them how proud I am of them.

Although my teaching philosophy is quite complex, three main components guide this philosophy. Cooperative learning, academic risk taking, positive encouragement, and lifelong learning skills are integral for students to be successful not only in their academic careers, but in all areas of their lives. Practicing and refining these life skills in the classroom with the guidance of a teacher will prepare these young students to flourish to their full potential and set them up for a life of success.