***Philosophy of Teaching***

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Teaching is one of the most important jobs in our society. It is a gift to have the opportunity to help children grow and develop as individuals as they prepare themselves to be life-long learners and active, productive members of our society. Although teaching is a tough and demanding career, I have found that the rewards of being able to play a central role in helping others make all the effort worthwhile. Teaching is the ultimate example of servant leadership in that by looking after the needs of every student, teachers aspire to help their students reach their full potential and perform their best.

My personal philosophy of teaching, which follows, is organized per the ACEI Standards 1, 3, 4, and 5.

**Development, Learning and Motivation (ACEI Standard 1.0)**

As defined by David Labaree (1997), I endorse the democratic equality goal of American education, which states that a democratic society can’t persist unless it prepares all of its youth to be competent citizens. It puts an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge in a collaborative environment versus creating an environment where students compete against one another to accumulate the most or highest credentials. My approach as a teacher, therefore, will be focused on creating a positive learning environment for my students and making education equitable based on outcomes, not opportunity.

Like Jean Piaget and John Dewey, I believe that children play an active role in their development. Given this, the education children experience needs to tap into their natural curiosity by integrating the knowledge they bring from home into the school curriculum. I am an advocate for an activity-based curriculum that maximizes hands-on learning opportunities with real life applications that are relevant to students.

As a teacher, I plan to facilitate and nurture my students as they continue to assimilate or accommodate new information they are exposed to in school. Through effective lesson planning, I envision structuring learning activities that challenge them in the zone of proximal development, while I provide them the scaffolding they need to continue to make progress and learn. Like Lev Vygotsky, I also support cooperative learning exercises where children work in heterogeneous pairs to solve problems and learn from one another. I recognize that some research has questioned whether students actually benefit from this type of activity so I plan to take an active role to ensure students are set up to succeed in their pairings.

I have embraced Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences. I believe everyone has strengths and opportunity areas, and that our strengths represent forms of intelligence. Further, I think it is critical that all children realize they are talented and they bring a unique set of skills and life experiences to the class. If need be, I will use attribute retraining to address a child who has developed learned helplessness.

In order to keep my students motivated, I plan to not only make learning active, fun, and engaging, but also provide them with plenty of encouragement and positive reinforcement. I will continually assess how I can create meaningful learning opportunities for my students to keep them interested in school so they can achieve their learning goals. I also understand that children’s home environments plays a role in their education and that part of my responsibility is to work with parents and/or guardians to get them involved in their child’s education. If every home is augmenting what the students are learning at school, the probability of all students meeting their achievement goals greatly increases.

**Instruction (ACEI Standard 3.1 – 3.5)**

First and foremost, effective teaching requires effective planning. In order to integrate and apply knowledge for instruction it is imperative that I have a firm understanding of the national and/or state standards that apply to the grade level I am teaching. Additionally, I need to familiarize myself with the instructional programs and approaches my district has chosen to implement. Once that is complete, I can then begin to creatively personalize my unit and lesson plans.

In order to adapt my plans and approaches to meet the needs of a diverse classroom, I need to get to know my students so I can ascertain what teaching methods are optimal for their preferred learning style. I am a strong advocate for inclusive classrooms, and I realize that will require my spending additional time planning lessons in order for everyone to have successful outcomes. To do so, I will need to meet all students where they are at and design exercises that will allow them to continue to make measurable progress toward their learning goals.

I will introduce and teach inquiry as a means by which students can develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. I will also make a point to challenge them to apply what they learn through the extensions of my lesson plans. Ultimately, I am interested in my students understanding and applying the concepts they learned, versus strictly memorizing facts.

In order for children to actively engage in their learning, I think it is imperative that they understand the relationship between their comfort zone and their learning zone. In order to enter their learning zone, students need to make a conscious choice to step out of their comfort zone and take risks by experiencing the disequilibrium that comes when outcomes are unknown. I will encourage them to embrace the concept of “failing forward” as they take chances in the learning zone and will work diligently to build and maintain a supportive community that is safe both physically and emotionally for everyone. I realize that without a safe and supportive community, children will be less apt - and possibly unwilling - to take the necessary risks in order to truly aim high and achieve greatness. The German educator Kurt Hahn claimed that in order to win the young, you should tell them “You are needed!” I envision creating a classroom ethos where everyone, students and staff alike, feel a real sense of ownership in how our classroom runs and the positive outcomes we achieve throughout the school year.

In order to achieve that vision of shared ownership and collaboration, I envision spending a good deal of time building our classroom community at the start of the school year. The first step in building bonds and ultimately trusting one another is identifying common ground and/or connections we share with each other. Through cooperative games and problem solving initiatives, students will get to know and respect one another and achieve successes as a group. Ultimately, respect, empathy, and conflict resolution will be taught and discussed openly as we learn to work with one another and settle differences in a non-threatening, positive manner. I plan to lead by example - serving as a positive role model for my students to observe through the interactions I have with them throughout the year.

**Assessment (ACEI Standard 4.0)**

Cathcart, Pothier, Vance, & Bezuk (2006) state that assessments are critical not only to monitor students’ progress but also to make instructional decisions, as well as to evaluate both the programs we are using within our district, and my own performance as a teacher. At the start of the school year, I will need to assess my students to determine their starting points. These initial assessments will provide me the data necessary to determine where the zone of proximal development is for each student. That information is essential for me to develop lesson plans tailored to the needs of every student.

Future assessments throughout the year will provide me valuable information to measure progress both at the individual level and as an entire class. End of the year assessments will be the ultimate measure of how well we did in achieving our goals and provide measurable progress for each student over the course of the school year.

In order to effectively assess my students, Cathcart et al. (2006) states that I will need to determine what type of assessment to use, gather evidence during the assessment, analyze and interpret the data that was gathered, and act upon the results of the assessment. These assessments could take the form of observations, conferences, interviews, performance assessments, or portfolios of children’s work throughout the school year.

Clearly, quality performance assessments would be advantageous in that they are a true measure of what students have learned and I get to see them perform the assessment face to face. I can gather a tremendous amount of information by watching the students perform and the assessment requires them to think and apply what they’ve learned versus simply guessing the right answer.

**Professionalism (ACEI Standard 5.1, 5.2)**

I am a lifelong learner and am committed to growing as an individual and an educator. I plan to take ownership of my professional development and actively pursue opportunities to expand my knowledge base and skill-set as a teacher. I have always solicited feedback from the people with whom I’ve worked and will continue that habit as I reflect on my instruction, lesson plans, and classroom management.

I intend to collaborate with the families of my students. First and foremost, I can learn a great deal about my students by soliciting information about them from their parents or guardians. I will also share the personalized learning goals for each student with their parents/guardians and discuss with these adults how they can best support their children. I also hope to recruit parent volunteers into our classroom and create an environment that is both welcoming to them and appreciative of their contributions.

I plan to take advantage of the wide array of skills and experience of my colleagues by tapping into their collective knowledge. I will look for opportunities to collaborate with them on class projects, same-grade curriculum integration, and mentoring opportunities. I also hope to conduct action research with some of my fellow teachers in an effort to better understand how students learn, and in doing so, help students achieve more.

Given our proximity to several higher-education institutions, I plan to reach out to the colleges and universities to take advantage of both the professionals on campus and the diverse student bodies they attract to our region.

**Closing**

I look forward with great anticipation to teaching at the elementary level. It is such an important job that will challenge me daily. In the end, I will strive to teach my students not only how to read, write, and do math, but also the importance of respecting themselves and those around them and what it takes to an active, effective member of a community. I will aspire to instill in all of my students a passion for learning and a willingness to choose to step out of their comfort zones in order to learn and grow.**Reference List**

Cathcart, W.G, Pothier, Y.M., Vance, J.H., Bezuk, N.S. (2006). Learning mathematics in elementary and middle schools (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Labaree, D.F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: the American struggle over educational goals. American Educational Research Journal, 34 (1), 39-81.