

Philosophy of Teaching

As a high school student, I vividly recall one of my freshman teachers sitting back in his chair, looking around at us- his students- as we discussed a text in a socratic seminar. For the last decade this image has lived in my mind; it wasn't until I was an Academic Coach and I realized what he had done: created a classroom where the students were the center. In becoming a teacher, having been a student who's experienced a student-centered classroom, I find myself in the position to mold a similar community wherein our students have agency in our classroom. One of my favorite quotes comes from a rap song- *Dust Up* by R.A.P. Ferreira- that encapsulates my overall life philosophy, "And I hope to only ever be utilized and in service of another's journey."

In my classroom, I strive to form students who can collaborate and work independently to learn and grow. One of the best moments I had as a student was when my English teacher, Paul, asked me to teach the class about metaphors using my own music, and from that I believe the best way I can be of service to students is to be a bridge for student interaction, wherein they learn from each other. After all, something I have learned in my own life and I feel reflects my thoughts, "...true knowledge is not given; it is discovered...[it] creates the conditions that allow young people to make their own discoveries" (Emdin). The classroom is built around collaboration and interaction (discussion, projects, etc.). One day they may be working in pairs to sift through a text they have been assigned, annotating and adding notes as they go along, the next they may be engaged in a socratic seminar having a dynamic conversation. In our classroom, I believe there is no "final" draft, but one that is so tightly crafted and shows profound growth from the earlier versions. This is to break against the perfectionism mold, tied to a capitalist culture, which has ensnared many students and adults in our nation.

One of the most important (and favorite) parts of my work is in building and maintaining genuine relationships with my students. This goes beyond making a quick connection and using that as the whole basis of our relationship from teacher to student. I believe in recognizing every individuals' aspirations and doing my best to provide the opportunity for them to move closer to that aspiration. When a student feels seen and understood as a human being with their own sense of agency, they feel more open to communicate their needs and goals with myself as an educator. Creating a genuine, honest relationship with my students is important in ascertaining which needs are and aren't being met, and how I can best be of service. To do this I will incorporate icebreaker activities, open project work time to check in with students, and one on one check-ins with students to evaluate where they see themselves in the classroom.

Being a liberatory educator means to be *myself* in the classroom and to encourage students to come as they are. At my authentic core I toe the line between incredibly energetic and relaxed, I love music intensely and always work with it playing, and I can be sarcastic. My teaching will incorporate music and art because both are so essential to my being and tie closely to many of our students. We must recognize that our students come from a variety of backgrounds with differing lived experiences and I believe, as their teacher, that I have a responsibility to do my best to understand and respect their backgrounds. My hope is that being

who I am, unapologetically, will lead to students doing the same because I want students to feel comfortable being their authentic selves in a place that traditionally teaches them not to be.

In my classroom I see students who have an array of abilities, strengths, and learning needs. Being a high school humanities teacher and knowing the content can be at times, text heavy, I recognize that some students may grasp a text quickly, while others may struggle with that same text. I recognize that fluency may vary depending on the subject, and even if the students feel they aren't fluent in history or English, I will do my best to provide the support they need. Not having strong fluency in the humanities doesn't mean that the student is a poor student, it signals to me that they need the proper literacy tools to succeed, such as scaffolded assignments, in class demonstration, and I intend to provide those for them.

Once I have my own classroom, it will be filled with books from a diverse set of authors toeing between fiction and nonfiction, for students to be able to select from and see themselves in. Whether it be Howard Zinn, Maya Angelou, Amal El-Mohtar, Haruki Murakami, Pablo Neruda, Ibram X. Kendi, bell hooks, Carlos Bulosan, or someone a student asks for; I want our students to feel represented in the classroom. I remember not seeing myself in the classroom, in the books or the teachers, for most of my education- including undergrad- and the otherness I felt from that, and want to use this privilege to ensure our students don't feel that way too.