

Teaching Philosophy

I was drawn to teaching to make a difference in my community. I believe the purpose of English Language Arts (ELA) education is for the intellectual growth of young minds through development of critical thinking, moral and ethical sophistication, awareness of other perspectives, and development of social skills in order to become productive independent thinkers in society. For me teaching English is especially attractive because I love reading, writing, and the power of a good story. I hope to be able to transfer this love into accessibility for students that have struggled with these topics in the past.

Some core skills needed for changing a students mind about ELA are listening and use of technology. Listening and paying attention to students interests will help me develop curriculums that students will want to be a part of and that still hit all the key standards. A good way of creating units is to allow students to pick from three schools approved novels that accomplish the same literary goals; this way students are empowered by having a voice in their curriculum. Technology can help students by relating the novel to their world, making distant places or people seem real, making learning fun and by preparing them for the outside world. It is very important when using technology not to get carried away by the flash and to make sure students understand connections to the text. A great way to do this is to encourage students to provide textual evidence when relating technology use and the novel. I believe these two teaching methods are the most effective because they allow students to be independent learners and thinkers.

An important aspect of my teaching philosophy is my opinions on the craft of teaching. I was asked once to create a list of the top twelve qualities I thought were essential for good teaching, though no list can ever be truly complete, what I came up with was this: flexibility, passion for the craft, acceptance, patience, content knowledge, love for the subject and the job, innovation, positivity, organization, awareness, respect, and cultural awareness. From this list I was also asked to pick which three qualities I felt were the most important; I chose flexibility, content knowledge, and love. Flexibility because lesson plans don't always work out like I planned, life often gets in the way of education, and learning to change with the times is paramount. Content knowledge because passion and love cannot replace being well read, having authorial awareness, understanding proper grammar and paper structures, and the ability to connect texts to the bigger picture through critical analysis. Love of course is the key component because without love for the students, the education field, and the subject you would be done before you even started.

To develop communication skills I believe it is imperative that students learn how to properly participate in a group setting, reflect on their own learning, and participate in student led discussions. Students often overlook the importance of group work and instead they see the aspects that discourage them. This is why groups must be wisely arranged with structured positions and individual participation grades. When students get in their own groups they often seek out friends, and though they might work well with their friends it defeats the purpose of

group work; to learn how to properly communicate with people that are not their friends. Having structured positions also encourages each member of the group to participate equally. An interesting way to do this technique is to have a speaker, writer, group leader, and quote manager and each week have the positions rotate within the group. When every member has acted as each position have the groups switch so they encounter new people and new positions. All of this would be for naught if the students did not recognize the importance of participating; giving a group grade and an individual grade can solve this problem. The group grade reaches the students who will participate for the sake of others and the individual grade affects students that believe they can skate by on other people's effort.

Reflection is one of the keys to communication skills both through peer and individual reflection. When the students have to sit down and write out how much they participated or what they learned it makes them realize the connection between effort and grades. This also allows teachers to track what each student is learning and if the lessons are effective. Having student led discussions are also important because they allows students to develop as speakers, come to their own conclusions about a text and identify that outside of school people will not be telling you if your conclusions are right or wrong.

Some of the best ways to stay innovative and keep track of your classroom is constant self-assessment. This can be done through pop quizzes to determine the classes grasp of a topic, student evaluations, and observation. The key factor here is peer observation for the teacher. If this is not possible I always found videotaping to be a useful way to self-reflect. Self-reflections as a teacher are important because it allows teachers to discover new ways to help students that are struggling. In the same way student reflection allows students to review their motivation while teacher reflections help teachers stay on their toes with up to date information and techniques.

This gets at a new factor of teaching that is often overlooked; research. Not just researching your classroom to find what is effective but reaching out to other faculty and keeping up to date with education theory. Other teachers are a huge resource when it comes to developing strategies that really work in the classroom. Their experience is a useful tool that could help me understand why a lesson is not working or what improvements I could make to the classroom. The same goes for keeping up to date with teaching theories. Just because something has always been done a certain way does not mean that there isn't a better way out there.

When I first started tutoring I believed that all students loved English or that they would all eventually love English so long as the books were interesting. Through my time spent in classrooms I have discovered that many students struggle with reading and writing and then no matter how interesting the topic they will not love it. I have also discovered that just because I find a book interesting does not mean the students do. Though English will not be fun for every student they will need these skills to function in future careers. If I can help students see the link between their future careers, critical thinking, and novels then I can help students learn to appreciate ELA instruction. Through appreciation students will start to give reading and writing a new look and that is all I need.