

Anne Billington's 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 the intellectual growth of young minds through development of critical thinking, moral and ethical sophistication, awareness of other perspectives, and development of social skills 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 make this love accessible to my students.

Some fundamental skills needed for changing students' mind about ELA is listening and the use of technology. Listening and paying attention to students' interests will help me develop curriculums that students will want to take part in and simultaneously hit key standards. A good way of creating units is to allow students to pick from three school approved novels that accomplish the same literary goals; this empowers students by having a voice in their curriculum. Technology can benefit students by connecting the novel to their world, making distant places or people seem real, and by preparing them for the outside world. It is important when using technology not to get distracted 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 using technology. I believe these two teaching methods are the most effective because they allow students to be independent learners and thinkers.

I was asked once to create a list of the top twelve qualities I thought were essential for good teaching. From this list I feel the top three qualities are: flexibility, content knowledge, and love. Flexibility because lesson plans don't always work AS 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 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 they see only the aspects that discourage them. Groups must be wisely arranged with structured positions and individual participation grades. When students get into groups they often seek out friends, this possibly defeats the purpose of group work; to learn to properly communicate with people that are not their friends. Having structured positions 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 with rotations each week. When every member has acted as each position and reform groups so they encounter new people and new positions. All of this would be unnecessary if the students did not recognize the importance of participating; providing 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 key 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 allows teachers to track each student learning and the effectiveness of lessons. Student led discussions are essential because it allows students to develop as speakers, to make conclusions about a text, and identify outside of school, people will not tell them if their conclusions are correct.

One of the best ways to stay innovative and keep track of your classroom is through self-assessment. This can be done through pop quizzes to determine the classes' grasp of a topic, student evaluations, and observation. A key tool here is peer observation for the teacher. If this is not possible, I found videotaping to be a useful way to self-reflect. Self-reflections as a teacher are important because they allow teachers to discover new ways to help struggling students. In the same way

student reflections allow students to review their motivation, teacher reflections help teachers stay on their toes with current information and techniques.

Research is commonly over looked, not just of your classroom to determine efficiency but reaching out to other faculty and keeping current with education theory. Other teachers are huge resources when it comes to developing strategies that 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. The same goes for keeping current with teaching theories. Although something has always been done a certain way does not mean that there isn't a better way. Teaching is not a solitary career; we need to support one another.

When I first started tutoring I believed that all students loved English or that they would eventually love English, as long as the books were interesting. Through my TIME in classrooms I have discovered that many students struggle with reading and writing and that no matter how interesting the topic they will never love it on their own. I have discovered that just because I find a book interesting does not mean the students will. Though English will not be enjoyable for every student they will need these skills for 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 and value reading and writing.

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