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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY I

 Choosing to become an English teacher has been a long journey that began for me when I was thirteen years old. First helping my mother as a Sunday school teacher, I loved helping younger children discover something new and working with them on projects and the lessons that were prepared. For the next five years, my position helped me grow into a youth ministry leader. I was in charge of youth ministry night and retreats that also involved lesson plans, speaking to peers and children younger than myself. Finally, I encountered a job opportunity as an afterschool teacher my freshman year of college which radically changed my career path. After one year of teaching reading and math advancement classes, my major switched from biology to English education. While I taught, I saw creativity from children, their great potential and how with the right tools, I could change their lives. I always cite one example of a student I had who had immigrated to America from Taiwan. He had great difficulty in reading books, had low self confidence and almost never participated in class activities. While most of his class was on level N books, rated A to Z, he was on level D. By the end of the school year, he had advanced several letter levels, had greater confidence and was vibrant in my class. Reflecting upon this, I had not chosen to become an English teacher; indirectly I was shaping myself to be one almost my whole life.

 My major goals as an English teacher would heavily revolve around showing students that reading and writing in school does not have to laborious or boring. Through reading novels, I was able to relate to several characters. Even if I could not relate to the characters, I found a particular instance or an emotion that I could connect to in each novel. A lot of students view works taught in schools as distant from their lives, never seeing how it can be interconnected. By teaching my students to make these connections, they might be able to appreciate a notoriously dense text for qualities they could relate to. In the course of my own academic career, I have studied several books up to five times. I would also want to introduce non classical works that can still provide the same academic value as many of the classics taught in schools. This way, students would have a different experience and potentially find a new book that they would not have explored otherwise. By the end of my time as their teacher, I would hope to show them how texts can help them discover themselves and help them discover a genre that they can actually enjoy reading in their spare time.

 After thinking about my past English teachers throughout my academic career, as well as viewing my English professors now in college, there are several strategies that I think can benefit students. Creative writing is a great outlet for students to think independently and write about a subject that they are passionate about. Whether it be writing in a journal or composing a poem, giving this kind of literary freedom can show students that reading and writing does not always have to be guided by strict rules and regulations. Working with materials other than just literary works and paper is also a good strategy in the classroom. Some of my best memories in English classes were ones that incorporated arts and crafts, constructing a house from a novel out of tongue depressors and even using props to have impromptu performances of characters from a play. Modeling the process is also another good practice for teachers. By showing students your own work, they can have a solid guideline for expectations. In addition, it is also good because they know that you are not just throwing work at them but that you have thought it through and done it yourself.

 There are also some strategies that I have seen that I believe are unacceptable. Teaching rote memorization and dissecting a text for pure grammatical or test- taking value is terrible. It devalues the essence of the text and takes out almost any ounce of enjoyment for students. Students who can memorize passages may do so without understanding its content or what the author was trying to convey. Teachers who constantly remind students that they “need to know it for the test” make students focus on the test instead of the text. In addition to these, I also believe that telling a student that they are absolutely wrong is not a good practice. Instead, I would try to understand why they thought that way and show them the correct answer.

 When it comes to controversies in teaching, I most always tend to take the side which lets students share their opinions in a healthy and respectful way. Schools are institutions where students learn; in many instances it is a place where they will learn their own viewpoints on social issues or political opinions. By having healthy discussions in the classroom, I believe that students can gain from the perspectives shared by their classmates and foster an understanding of the society they live in. I would not want to pick highly controversial works to teach in my classrooms, but if age appropriate, I would choose not to censor any text taught in my class. I would give notice to parents and faculty alike and as long as I can prove the academic value of the book to these authorities, I will stand strong with my lessons.

 My greatest hope is that I can make a difference in each of the lives of my students, in turn positively affecting the world. In this I find self-fulfillment and possibly one of the greatest occupations available to any human in the world.