

Teaching Philosophy- Sr. Maryam Mahmood

I truly believe the foundation of any learning lies in the existence of a **safe, respectful environment** where the **diverse needs** of students are acknowledged and learners feel **secure** enough to speak up and **take risks** with their peers. In order to allow the true magic of inspired learning to occur, a framework of **trust, acceptance and community** must be built among students, upon which they can then gradually layer their learning. Deep understanding can only come from a place where you are **not afraid to ask questions or be wrong**, and so I firmly believe profound learning can only stem from a place of **comfort** and communal risk-taking. In addition, to truly learn, one must be **aware** of the strengths and gaps within oneself and have the **courage** to identify areas in which you need to improve; therefore, I believe an optimal learning environment is one where **meta-cognition** is encouraged and there is an emphasis on **continual progress** rather than permanently labeling learners.

It is evident from these conceptions of what constitutes an optimal learning environment that I place **great emphasis on the role of a teacher in facilitating** and orchestrating such dynamic surroundings. Indeed, the teacher is a skilled artist seated at a complex loom, creatively weaving together **instructional techniques**, knowledge of **learning styles** and needs, diverse personalities of students, community building strategies and curriculum expectations to create a vibrant tapestry of profound instruction that will help advance his or her students **academically, socially and emotionally**. Though it may initially seem like a daunting task to do all of the above, I feel simply getting to know your students and **valuing and respecting them** as human beings allows you to better understand how to address their needs and personalities and create an optimal environment in which they can thrive. Following that, keeping an **open mind** and never failing to realize there's always **more to learn** will allow us as educators to continue to add to our toolbox of instructional strategies and will enable us to respond to the diversity we notice in our classroom effectively. As a teacher, I believe it is my job to convey my **passion** for what I do with **humour and enthusiasm**, and my **genuine interest** in my students will drive me to add tools to my repertoire to build a welcoming, stimulating, differentiated classroom they can call **home**.

Just as I consider it my duty as an educator to push myself and **continue to grow**, I expect the same of my students and feel it is important to convey the importance of such **motivation** and **perseverance** in their academic lives. Though we often underestimate students and often subconsciously lower the bar by virtue of their age, I feel having **high expectations** for students and, more importantly, letting them see that you **genuinely believe they can achieve them** will pass the torch of responsibility on to them and help them become **self-motivated learners**. For I want my students to come away with more than an understanding of the formula for the area of a circle or Canada's political history- I wish for them to learn about how best to learn and furthermore to acquire a **passion for inquiry**. By infusing my lessons with enthusiasm and **modelling** my dedication to continual growth, I will highlight the importance of caring about the activities you are involved in. As well, by continuously pushing **self-assessment** and asking students to reflect on their **motivation and commitment to their education**, I will continue to emphasize the importance of being self-directed learners and express my hope that my time with them will prepare them to enter the world as **independent thinkers**.

To lift these above ideals and visions from paper into life in a classroom, I would implement a wide variety of techniques including drama and media to **make subjects exciting**, different modes of teaching (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) to appeal to **diverse learning styles**, Tribes activities and cooperative learning to promote **community and collaboration** and constant **positive reinforcement** to push my students towards further success. At all points, I would make it a priority to **reflect** on my teaching style and push deeper within myself to assess whether I am truly doing all that I can for my students; I have found that inward reflection allows me to **continue to grow** and to get a pulse on what I need to be doing to optimize my students' experiences. As most of my teaching philosophy revolves around positive interactions with and amongst my students, I would make an effort to be a **welcoming, engaging** presence in the classroom, which would then open up **dialogue with my students** for conversations on future growth, possible lesson ideas and class activities as well as how to better meet their needs.

For that is what is so wondrous about teaching- the idea that the **learning never stops** and there is always more to discover and learn from instructional strategies to brain research to new programs. As a **professional**, I personally aim to continue to learn new ways to **differentiate instruction** as well as always learning new **community-building strategies** and keeping up with new innovations in classrooms. I do have an interest in special education as well as working with ELL students, so that is something I will likely pursue down the road with additional qualifications. I feel that with a constant awareness of the importance of **reflection** and courageously looking inward, I will always be **driven to assess myself** and do what it takes to be the kind of teacher students remember decades after they have left my classroom.