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Educational Philosophy

In my experience, a teacher's mindset plays a major role in determining how the teacher approaches students and ultimately is able to help them succeed. Education opens pathways of opportunities for students and teachers serve as gatekeepers along the pathway. I know that I can serve to be one that opens up pathways for students, or one that could potential close off such pathways. Throughout my teaching experience, in order to serve as one that opens pathways, I have formed three core beliefs about teaching that influence how I approach my job as a teacher. These core beliefs include students have a zone of proximal development that must be assessed and catered to by the teacher, students must engage with topics rigorously and students must be allowed to bring their prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences into the classroom. These practices allow for students to become members of a classroom environment that allows for open expression of ideas and beliefs, and such freedom enables students to think critically and monitor their learning. This will allow students to own their learning and open their educational pathways for themselves.

Students have a zone of proximal development (ZPD) that refers to the range of development a student can achieve without adult guidance and with adult guidance. In the classroom, students must be challenged to the peak of their ability to work with adult guidance, and then given the confidence to do work without the aid of an adult. One of the biggest challenges has been when releasing students to independently work, many complain that they can perform a task when I am present, but they struggle heavily when they are alone. Upon reflection, I realized that I might not have gradually released students to be able to cope with performing these tasks alone. This is an essential skill and the students who were able to cope with the material on their own were much more successful. This requires that I scaffold my instruction in the classroom. This also requires an in depth knowledge of your students, and time and effort must be put in to make such assessments of students.

Once the teacher has an in depth understanding of the students, it is important that lessons are designed to engage students with rigorous topics. To engage students, they must see value in their learning and application to their lives. This experiential learning imitates how we learn outside of school as well. Therefore I have to design my instruction to include such experiences and I must invest students in the hard work that comes with dealing with real world problems. Rigor must be included as students must be challenged (as determined by their zone of proximal development) or else their potential may not be fulfilled. Real world problems require deep thinking and higher order

thinking skills. They also require elements of teamwork, leadership, and accountability. Exposing students to such experiences in the classroom (with guidance) provide them with opportunities to work through the intricacies of such requirements and help them appreciate the diverse perspectives of others. To cope with the requirements of such problems, students must be challenged and pushed with rigor. To do otherwise would be a disservice and exemplifies low expectations for students.

Finally, students must bring their prior knowledge and experiences to the forefront of the classroom. The teacher must take the time to research the history of their students, learn about the communities they come from and garner how students perceive their world. Such information is vital to making real connections with students that can lead to academic success. The teacher must then find ways to support students by allowing them opportunities to use their prior knowledge and beliefs to tackle problems. This requires an element of freedom given to the students, and teachers must be flexible with their practice to accommodate such flexibility. Pedagogy must also be culturally responsive which allow students to see themselves in the work. If they cannot see the work matching with their cultural context, most will more than likely resist such work.

Overall, students must be the center of the classroom. Teachers are merely guides to help students along their educational journey. Patience is key in this type of work and a sincere desire to know students, their stories, and their communities. I have a long way to go in my ability to take these core beliefs to heart and truly implement them. Teaching is a great passion of mine and I hope that as my craft improves, more students will be able to open more pathways for themselves.