Sheryl Smith

My Teaching Philosophy

My core belief is this: teaching is more about the student than the subject. Yes, getting the content across is important and covering the material is essential; however, if the student doesn’t come first in a teacher’s mind, I truly believe the knowledge will never come. A student needs to be valued and involved in order to truly learn. I find the best learning occurs when students don’t even know it’s happening! It’s rare that a child wants to sit and “learn;” nothing about that idea sounds appealing to most young adults. Therefore, I make my classroom as creative and active as possible. I encourage my students to think outside of the box and make their own discoveries. Students in my classroom are encouraged to speak up and help create new discussions on a topic. It’s essential that students in my classroom be active not passive learners. I think student-centered teaching allows students to feel more valued, appreciated, and in control, and therefore, leads to better learning.

As a student, I was never a lecture-learner, and I therefore try to never teach in that fashion either. Students need to ask questions and be asked questions in order to really comprehend the material and in order for me, as a teacher, to check on student comprehension. In an English classroom, I think discussion is especially important. Literature is not a subject that always has definite rights and wrongs – there is much more interpretation that can be found, much more discussion about writer’s choices, styles, themes, etc, that we, as a class, can indulge in. To deprive the students of making those discoveries on their own, through facilitating classroom discussions, would just be wrong, in my eyes.

I also try to encourage creativity in my students above all else. Along with being an English teacher, I’ve also studied theater, and that training definitely bleeds into my teaching. I encourage students to think outside of the box and look for different ways to see things. I also love to find new ways for students to get up and be theatrical. Let’s not just read the story; let’s get up and act out a page or two. Let’s not just discuss grammar; let’s make up goofy acronyms and chants to help us remember the rules. Let’s not just learn vocabulary words; let’s draw pictures to help us make connections. In my classroom, creativity and learning are inseparably linked.

I value my students, and therefore, I want them to be a part of their own learning. I find that when my students feel like they have control, when they’re having fun, and when they feel like a teacher is taking them and their needs into account, they will be better learners and students. The subject will come, but the student needs to be addressed first in order for that learning to occur.