**My Core Beliefs: Teachers Should be Both Inclusive and Push Their Students To Succeed**

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I believe the most important aspect of an effective teacher is making a connection with your students. I remember growing up in I never really felt connected in my school. I loved hanging out with my friends and some of the subjects really caught my attention, but I never was excited to go to school just to see my teachers. A lot of my teachers were seen as a fixture in the school. Teachers were something that you had to interact with but only for the short periods of time when you had their classes. The problem was only exacerbated by the high turnover of teachers here in Alaska. I remember betting my friends how long our new teachers would last. Most of the time we would bet the school year and a good percentage of the time we were right. In some rural communities teacher turnover rate can be as high as 50%. How are students supposed to make connection if half of their teachers are replaced every year? The average turnover for teachers in Alaska is roughly 10%. That number climbs to an average of 20% in rural schools (Hill & Hirshberg, 2013). I also feel the problem of students not making personal connections with their teacher is not just due to the high turnover rate in Alaska schools. Teachers need to take the initiative to form interpersonal connections with their students.

I want to be a teacher that is not separated from my community. I need to think hard before I apply for a teaching position because wherever I teach I hope will be my home for the rest of my life. I want to know the people in my community. I want to know the families, and from developing these connections I want to know my students. When I think back to my favorite teachers I realize they were not my favorite because they taught an interesting subject or because they developed amazing lesson plans. They were my favorite teachers because they saw me for who I was. They noticed me outside of school, nodded, and talked to me in the grocery store. These teachers acknowledged my existence when they weren’t on the clock, when it wasn’t their job to know I existed at all. It reminded me of a book I read. There was this teacher that fought hard to get to where he was. Facing obstacles no other teacher had to face. He was acknowledged as one of the best teachers and even won an award for best new teacher in the state of Georgia. The thing that I noticed most in the book though is a family invited him to dinner. They wanted to meet this man that their son admired in school. But he turned them down. The reason being was “that was not something a teacher would do.” I don’t want to be that teacher even if it costs me awards. Having dinner with your student and their family is the only award I need. Knowing that I have influenced my students enough that I was invited to the dinner table is a huge complement, and in my opinion you would missing out on a great opportunity by declining. You get to learn so much about your student, their home environment and supports, while they in turn get a chance to learn about you.

I am not saying that just being there for your students and getting to know them is enough to be a great teacher. While I plan on being an inclusive teacher and connect with my students on a personal level, by no means is my class going to be easy. It is because I plan on knowing my students I will know what they are capable of. I will always express my high expectations for my students and let them know I believe they all can succeed. This idea goes hand in hand with my passion for connection making. I have always believed that if I develop a personal connection with my students and showed my belief in them, they to would come to believe in themselves and strive to succeed. This idea was only further cemented by my research regarding exemplary teachers. A statement that caught my attention was, “there is a misconception that students like easy teachers and classes. This is false. I have found that students like to be liked, and respond to challenges when they first know that their teacher respects them and likes them” (Gentry et al., 2011). When I think of my favorite teachers I realize that their classes were some of the hardest I could remember. They assigned work that seemed too difficult, like something you would assign to a college student. That didn’t matter to me though. I wanted to do all the assigned work not just for a good grade. I wanted to do the work to make the teacher proud. I had developed such a connection with them that I worried about what they thought about me. I thought if I did bad they would worry about me when they went home.

That is what I want to be most of all. I want to be the teacher that is strict. I want my students going to college and for the first few years thinking, “This is easy. I learned this in tenth grade.” I want my students to know that I worry about them. I am not sure if my teachers were really worrying about me. Though they said hello and asked me how I was, that might have been the extent of our interaction. I know for sure though that I will worry about my students. It will keep me up at night wondering what I could do to help them understand the subject better. If they fail an assignment I want them to know I feel worse than them. That I feel I failed them as their teacher. I know now I will be living a restless life as a teacher. Constantly thinking how I can make my homework assignments and classwork more comprehensive as well as accessible. Worrying about my students because of their schoolwork as well as home lives. I have been an offered easy way out all throughout my education. Jobs that pay better and have a lot less stress. The thing is though I am not meant for those jobs. They won’t fulfill me in a spiritual sense. I want to go home stressed and battered, because I am taking on that stress so my students won’t have to. I am at a point in my life where I can handle it, and they are at the point where it can hurt them the most.

References

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