

Throughout my years of taking classes in the field of education and gaining experience with children in traditional and non-traditional classroom settings, I have developed a clear sense of what I believe to be most important in the classroom. While I welcome the fact that these beliefs will change over the years based on new experiences and theory, I know that the core will remain relatively the same. My philosophy of teaching revolves around a core that emphasizes the importance of connections made with students, as well as the ability for *all* students to grow and achieve their goals.

Connections, care, and empathy. These all revolve around certain experiences I think should happen in the classroom in order to make students feel safe, comfortable, and wanted. Sometimes, we as teachers are the only adults students have to rely on for these feelings. Nel Noddings, American feminist, educationalist, and philosopher, has stated that care is basic in human life. Since this is so, she argues, care *must* be a part of the school system as well as individual classrooms. In her model of caring in the classroom, educators *model how to care, talk directly about caring, have students practice caring, and encourage the best in each student*. Care in my classroom looks like asking students how their morning went, or what they did over the weekend. It also looks like sharing personal experiences and stories with students. It looks like teaching students more than just academic subjects, but teaching them life and home skills. And, most importantly, making all of this learning...fun.

Central to my philosophy of teaching and learning is that all students have the capability to learn and grow not only academically but as individuals as well. In my classroom, in order to achieve this, I implement the Growth Mindset philosophy. In her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Carol Dweck describes two mindsets: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. The fixed mindset focuses on achieving the results no matter the means (i.e. cheating in order to get an A on an exam) and has been proven to increase anxiety and antisocial behavior. The growth mindset, however, is the belief that learning occurs as a process, and it encourages the effort put into something, not just the end-result. I think that Dweck brings up a critical point about the average schooling mindset when she says, "Isn't that what school is for, to teach? They're there to learn how to do these things, not because they already know everything." (*Mindset* pg. 29). In my classroom, this looks like encouraging phrases such as "I don't know *yet*" and "I can't do that *yet*." It also looks like praise of effort, rather than the final grade: "You worked so hard on that, I'm proud of your effort!" It looks like practicing mindfulness in order to help students achieve this "growth mindset" and become familiar with it. Most importantly, it looks like children actually *enjoying* what they are learning because they are not so worried about looking 'smart' or 'good.'

Teachers often say that one of the reasons they teach is in order to see a student's eyes light up and experience that 'a-ha' moment. I can attest that this is one of the most rewarding experiences while teaching, and I believe that the emphasizing the connections made with students and the encouragement of a growth mindset classroom can help achieve this true learning experience.

Sources:

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol Dweck (2008)

Nel Noddings, *the ethics of care and education* <http://infed.org/mobi/nel-noddings-the-ethics-of-care-and-education/>