Teaching Philosophy

 As an 8th grade English teacher, it is my duty to ensure that students master the communication skills, reading skills, writing skills, and researching skills of the society in which they will be disperse into. Being a 21st century teacher, I strongly understand that in order for students to be able to master concepts in these areas they must learn basic literacy skills as well as 21st century skills. It is my goal to include technology into my instructional strategies in order to enhance my students’ learning. I think it is important for students to begin with tools and programs they are familiar with, such as social media sites, laptops, cell phones, Google Docs, etc. The reason is because technology can be very overwhelming, and while they are what we call digital natives, there are a lot of programs and devices students are not use to using. Introducing students to programs and tools – video conferencing, flipped classroom, video blogging, Google Trek, avatars, etc. – at a slower pace may limit the anxiousness or lack of confidence students may develop while learning how to use the tools and programs. I honestly believe that the best way to teach students how to communicate, read, and write is through the proper utilization of tools that allow them to ask questions amongst their peers and others outside of the classroom, research the questions, and choose ways they find most beneficial to record and report their new knowledge.

Incorporating technology is not enough to ensure that students master the 21st century skills. They must see how the content matters in real life; essentially be able to answer “why do I need to know this”? This can only happen if I provide engaging and authentic instruction One example would be to have them choose a social injustice from a novel they are reading and research to find incidents of that of the same or similar injustice in today’s society. By researching news articles, reading blogs, reading or watching interviews done with victims of injustice, skyping with victims, students can create media presentations to bring awareness to the injustices. Through questioning, research, and collaboration students are learning about the current issues in their society, as well as making connections to the novel. Another activity I learned from the educational community Education 2.0 is to have members of the community come in to assist with an activity such as a mock trial. Students can learn about real-world careers, collaborate and connect with people in the field, and learn the debating process. Utilizing what students are already familiar with and enjoy doing is another way to provide authentic instruction. While social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have received some backlash, when used correctly they can be great learning tools. Twitter can be used to teach grammar, punctuation, and summarizing skills because of the 140 character limitations. Facebook can be used to teach characterization as students create profiles based on a character’s personality traits. Most importantly, students can use their cell phones to access these sites and educational sites. Authentic instruction and activities that are engaging, relevant to the current day, hold some interests, and get the students actively participating in their learning are the ones that will help them master the 21st century skills and content.

I believe in a “safe learning zone” where engaging, meaningful, and positive learning takes place. Students will feel safe to learn at their own pace, to comfortably ask questions, to voice their thoughts and opinions, and to be themselves at all times. More importantly, students will learn to respect one another’s cultural differences and utilize those differences to help enhance their learning experience. In order to provide my students with this learning environment I must meet their academic and social needs, provide them with opportunities to employ their academic and social strengths to problem solve independently and collectively, and utilize their weaknesses to enhance their leaning. This cannot take place without positive classroom management. As the facilitator of learning I will set the tone of respect by focusing on my students positive behaviors, recognize how their differences can contribute to their behaviors, and redirect their undesired or negative behavior so that they can be successful in my classroom. Assertively setting rules, guidelines and procedures that allow students to practice self-discipline are an important component to my classroom. Students must first clearly understand the expectations set for them. In the event that students do not meet the expectations, they will understand the mistake they made and what they need to do differently in the future.

An effective teacher realizes that the only way to deliver valuable instruction and provide students with a safe learning environment is to get to know their students on a personal and academic level. This is not to say become friends with them, but it does mean investing time in learning their interests, dislikes, academic needs, learning differences, and cultural background. When students recognize that the teacher does care about what it is important to them they begin to build a trusting relationship with that teacher. It is my desire to build such a relationship with my students. It is important that they know what matters to them matters to me. It is also important for them to understand that I want to use their interests and differences to help them learn the skills and content for English 8. Teaching is not easy; however, it can be more enjoyable when we as teachers listen to our students and use what they say to help improve our strategies and instruction. I have learned that students know what they want and what works best for them, all we have to do is listen (and eliminate all the things we know just cannot happen in our class).