Ellie Morton's Teaching Philosophy & Practices

My journey with writing began with trying my hardest. Like many students, I have a learning disability that made writing more challenging for me than it was for my peers. I struggled with spelling and grammar leading me to often feel frustrated when my writing did not match my intentions. However, through specialized schooling, I learned how to write without hesitation or doubt—no longer fearing mistakes but focusing on the content I produced. I was encouraged to view writing as a process, not just a product. This mindset shift helped me become more confident in my abilities. The support I received, both from teachers and peers, was invaluable, and it's something I want to pass on to my own students. I hope to specialize in teaching middle school because I believe this is a pivotal time in a young person's academic development. Middle school students are at an age where they are beginning to find their own voices and form opinions, but they are still building the foundational skills needed for academic success.

Writing plays a central role in helping them express their ideas clearly, and I want to help them navigate this process. By introducing writing techniques early, I can help students develop their skills and confidence before the shift to high school and beyond. One of the key aspects of my teaching philosophy is creating a "mistake-welcomed" classroom. Mistakes are a natural part of the learning process, and they should not be feared. I want to foster an environment where students can take risks in their writing, knowing that their ideas are valuable even if they do not always come out perfectly. I believe this approach will allow them to experiment with different styles and voices, ultimately helping them become more confident and effective communicators. I will encourage peer feedback, giving students the opportunity to learn from one another's strengths and weaknesses, rather than relying solely on a red-pen-wielding teacher to point out their errors. The rise of AI in writing poses a significant challenge to the way I plan to teach.

While AI tools may offer convenience, such as catching spelling errors or fixing verb tenses, I believe they also undermine the essential skills of critical thinking and creativity that are central to the writing process. Writing is not just about generating text or polishing a draft; it is about engaging with ideas, expressing unique thoughts, and developing a personal voice. Rather than turning to AI as a crutch, I want students to feel empowered to trust their own judgment and embrace the trial-and-error process that comes with becoming a better writer. Finally, I want my students to leave my classroom with an appreciation for writing—not necessarily as aspiring English majors, but as people who understand that writing is a tool for communication, expression, and creativity. I will help them unlearn the negative beliefs they may have developed about their writing abilities, showing them that with practice and perseverance, they can become strong, confident writers. Together, we will prove the myth that they "can't write" wrong.

Writing is often regarded as a straightforward skill—something that either comes naturally or not at all. However, many assumptions about writing can shape how people approach the craft and influence their perception of their abilities. These assumptions, while deeply ingrained in educational systems and cultural norms, can be limiting. As an educator, I hope to recognize and challenge these myths, particularly when guiding students through the writing process. One of the most pervasive assumptions is that writing is an inborn skill. Many people believe that writing talent is either innate or absent, which can discourage students who struggle with the craft. This myth assumes that those who are "good" writers somehow possess a special gift, while others are simply incapable. In reality, writing is a skill that develops over time with practice, feedback, and revision. Struggling with writing does not mean a student is bad at it—it simply means they are in the process of learning. In my classroom, I want to encourage all students to view writing as a skill they can improve, rather than an unchangeable trait. Another

common assumption is that writing should be flawless from the start. Many students enter the writing process with the belief that their first draft must be perfect, leading to hesitation and writer's block. This belief can paralyze their creativity and hinder their ability to generate ideas freely, often leading to the dependance of AI to help craft what they believe is the "right answer". In truth, writing is a process of discovery, and the first draft is merely the beginning. Writers refine and revise their work through multiple drafts, shaping their ideas and improving clarity. I want to help my students understand that mistakes are a natural part of writing and that the real work happens in the revision process. By embracing imperfection, students will feel more empowered to take risks with their writing and see mistakes as opportunities for growth.

An equally damaging assumption is that good writing is all about grammar and mechanics. While grammar is important, it should not overshadow the more fundamental aspects of writing—ideas, structure, and voice. This assumption often leads students to focus primarily on punctuation and sentence structure, which can make them lose sight of the broader purpose of their writing: communicating their ideas clearly and persuasively. I hope to prioritize helping my students develop their ideas and refine their ability to communicate effectively. Once students understand their own voice and message, grammar and mechanics can be more easily addressed as a part of the larger process.

The assumption that writing is a solitary activity is also limiting. Many students see writing as a lone endeavor—something that they must do entirely on their own. However, writing can and should be collaborative. Peer feedback and group work allow students to see different perspectives and learn from one another. Writing does not have to be a process of isolation; it is often in the sharing of ideas that a piece of writing truly comes to life. I hope to create

opportunities for students to collaborate, whether through peer revision sessions or group brainstorming exercises. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of community and allows students to see the value in working together to improve their writing.

The last assumption that I would like to address is the idea that everyone should write the same way. This assumption disregards the individuality of each writer and their unique voice. Writing should not be formulaic. It should reflect the writer's thoughts, experiences, and perspective. By encouraging students to develop their own writing style, I hope to help them find their authentic voice. I believe that when students are allowed to explore and experiment with their writing, they will develop a deeper connection to the craft and build their confidence in themselves as writers. To help students recognize and develop their writing voice, activities like reading short excerpts of their work aloud to the class can be incredibly beneficial. This exercise allows students to hear their writing in a new way, which can be eye-opening. It helps them identify areas where their voice shines and where they might want to adjust. It is important to note that this would not be a graded activity, but rather a tool to promote self-awareness and reflection. The goal is for students to hear their own words, which can sometimes reveal small mistakes or areas for improvement that they might not notice while reading silently. By sharing their work in a low-stakes environment, students can begin to feel more comfortable with their own voice, build confidence, and develop a deeper connection to their writing. Additionally, hearing others' work can help students recognize the diversity of voices in the classroom and encourage a supportive, collaborative atmosphere.

In developing my philosophy of teaching writing, I align my practices with several key ideas proposed by scholars in composition studies. These ideas challenge traditional approaches and emphasize the importance of student voice, personal identity, and writing as a process of

engagement rather than mere adherence to standardized rules. Branson argues that the traditional focus of writing instruction—often centered on formulaic approaches and isolated grammar lessons—fails to capture the true complexity of writing. He notes that research in composition studies has debunked the narrow view that writing instruction should be reduced to mechanical rule-following. This perspective, shared by scholars like Lunsford and Lunsford, shows that teaching grammar in isolation does not effectively improve writing. I believe in embracing a more holistic approach to writing that emphasizes brainstorming, revising, and engaging critically with ideas. For my students, this means that the writing process is far more important than the perfection of a final product. Writing is a space for exploration, where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning and growth rather than as failures. By fostering a classroom environment where writing is seen as a process—one that involves generating ideas, revising, and engaging with feedback—I aim to empower students to view writing as an ongoing journey rather than a one-time task. This process-oriented approach supports Branson's argument that writing instruction should help students engage with writing as an evolving and dynamic practice, not merely an exercise in "correctness."

Rodríguez and Parker offer a powerful critique of the traditional academic expectation that students "disembody" their writing by avoiding the use of the first-person pronoun. They highlight how this expectation often stifles students' personal connection to their work, reducing their writing to a detached and mechanical task. I see this as a harmful approach, one that disregards the importance of the self in the writing process. Students often begin their writing journey with a strong connection to their personal experiences and perspectives, and this should be nurtured rather than suppressed. When students are encouraged to write with their own voice and perspective, they create more meaningful and authentic work. Rodríguez and Parker's

perspective aligns with my belief that writing is a tool for self-expression and personal exploration. By allowing students to use the first-person "I," they are not only given the freedom to express themselves more clearly but also empowered to connect deeply with their writing. I want to create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences without fear of conforming to a rigid academic standard. Writing should be a space for students to bring their full selves to the page, creating narratives that are relatable, authentic, and impactful.

The principles outlined in "Students' Right to Their Own Language" resonate deeply with my approach to writing instruction. As Branson and Rodríguez & Parker emphasize, students should not be expected to abandon their home dialects or linguistic practices in order to succeed in academic writing. In fact, linguistic diversity is a strength, not a barrier. I want to create a classroom where students feel proud of their linguistic backgrounds and can bring their cultural identity into their writing. The CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication) resolution on linguistic diversity and the validity of multiple dialects in the classroom supports this inclusive approach. It's crucial that my students know their voices matter, whether they write in Standard English or their own home dialects. Embracing these diverse linguistic practices allows students to engage with writing in a way that is authentic to their lived experiences and cultural identities.

Lastly, I would like to implement Catherine Denial's "Pedagogy of Kindness" in my teaching philosophy by emphasizing the transformative power of compassion and trust in the classroom. Denial advocates for a shift from a transactional, adversarial model of teaching—one that views students as antagonists or consumers—to an approach grounded in kindness, which fosters genuine connections and mutual respect between teachers and students. She encourages

educators to believe in their students, offering them the benefit of the doubt and creating a supportive environment that prioritizes understanding and care over suspicion and punitive measures. This pedagogy calls for designing inclusive, accessible learning experiences that honor the diverse needs and experiences of all students and challenges the notion that rigor and compassion are mutually exclusive. By applying kindness in both practice and design, Denial's philosophy helps build trust, collaboration, and student agency, fostering a more humane and effective educational experience.

Ultimately, my teaching philosophy centers around creating an environment where students' voices are valued, where they are encouraged to take risks in their writing, and where they can express their identities freely. By incorporating the ideas of Branson, Rodríguez, Parker, and the CCCC resolution, I reject the outdated belief that academic writing must conform to a standardized, impersonal form. Writing, to me, is not about erasing the self, but about bringing one's full identity to the page. By nurturing students' personal voices, we allow them to engage more meaningfully with the world and with each other. This inclusive, process-oriented, and self-expressive approach to writing instruction empowers students to overcome the limiting beliefs about their writing abilities, while fostering a deeper connection to the material. Writing becomes not just an academic task, but a means of communication, personal reflection, and creative exploration—one where students can truly hear their own voices and the voices of others. This approach is further reinforced by Denial, which encourages a shift from a transactional, adversarial model of teaching to one grounded in compassion, trust, and mutual respect. Denial's emphasis on believing in students, offering them the benefit of the doubt, and creating a supportive environment directly complements my goal of fostering student agency through writing. By applying kindness, we create space for students to take risks, reflect on their

learning, and collaborate in meaningful ways. This, in turn, challenges the traditional notion of writing as a solitary, standardized activity and instead frames it as an ongoing process of personal and collective growth. In my classroom, kindness is not just an act of empathy; it is a strategy for deepening engagement and facilitating transformative learning experiences.

At the start of this semester, I emphasized the value of honesty in my teaching, both with my students and in their writing. I believe that effective teaching relies on an open, authentic relationship where students feel they can be honest about their thoughts and struggles, and I promised to create a space where their voices would be heard and respected. I aimed to foster an environment where my students could express themselves freely and take risks in their writing without fear of judgment. One of my key goals this semester has been to encourage students to embrace risks in their writing, whether that means exploring unconventional ideas, experimenting with different forms, or diving into personal topics. I believe that when students take risks, their work becomes more engaging and authentic. As a result, I reward this boldness, focusing on the strength of their ideas rather than just the technical aspects of their writing. I've seen firsthand the positive impact of this approach. Students who were initially hesitant to take risks have gained confidence, and their writing has become more expressive and original. They have moved from writing to please others to writing with their own voices and perspectives. Of course, not all of my students were ready to take those risks immediately, but by providing ongoing encouragement and constructive feedback, I hope that I have helped them find their way.

Ultimately, my goal has been to help students see writing not just as a skill, but as a means of self-expression. By creating a classroom environment that values honesty and risk-taking, I hope they feel empowered to explore their ideas fully, knowing their voices matter. Moving forward,

I'll continue to foster this open, honest space, where students can write with courage, authenticity, and creativity.