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The Educator's Beautiful Struggle: A Teaching Philosophy

Thinking about my future classroom and role as an educator, many possibilities, expectations, and goals come to mind. I hope to have and maintain a nourishing and mindful classroom, where students, myself, and others find positivity and development. Everyone who enters my classroom or interacts with me will be not only fully welcomed and accepted, but also be fully understood as a three-dimensional human being with individual characteristics, beliefs, and traits (that may not necessarily mesh with my own). School is the place where the minds and souls of students have a chance to grow, create, change, and blossom into effervescent and productive members of society. This all starts with a teacher and a classroom that allows for openness and opportunity for this to happen. The aforementioned requirements and following essential theory and philosophy are the absolute minimum of what I hope to encourage and implement in my classroom.

Beyond the course materials throughout my undergraduate career, I did more reading and research about the field of education. One book, in particular, spoke to me about philosophies I value deeply; the essays and theorists expound these philosophies in a direct manner of well-formed sentences, opposed to floating abstractions throughout my brain. Lisa Delpit's *Teaching When the World is on Fire* allowed me to analyze and capture the mindsets of various experts in the educational world through essays that range from race and gender issues to politics and safety in schools. Many of the ideas in this book correlate with my own philosophies as a pre-service teacher. With too much to say and not enough space to say them all, there is one key theorist, William Ayers, that I deeply relate to and find he has many of the same philosophies

and beliefs about teaching and the classroom as I do. The following is a crucial and impactful philosophy I hold dearly as an educator. Before meeting the students, before decorating my classroom, before planning the curriculum, the following philosophy, with the help of Ayers, is quintessential for me as a teacher and comes first-and-foremost and above all else.

The teacher has an opportunity (obligation) of building a community of creativity and freedom in the classroom for their students to thrive and become established citizens.

An American elementary education theorist, professor emeritus of education, and founder of the Small Schools Workshop and Center for Youth and Society, William (Bill) Ayers has written many books and essays about social, cultural, political issues and topics around education. Ayers also often examines “teaching as an essentially intellectual, ethical, and political enterprise” (Biography). In his essay, “I Shall Create! Teaching Toward Freedom,” Ayers describes how teaching can be difficult for some, as many teachers wish to use education as a tool to connect with students, to help them develop into prosperous human beings, and “to make a difference—in the children’s lives and in the larger world.” He goes on to say that far too often, schools “are organized to smash curiosity, impede imagination, shatter self-respect, and deflate the dreams of youth. They reward obedience and compliance while punishing creativity and courage, initiative and ingenuity” (4). Because of this, many teachers are discouraged as they find that their teaching may not be as grandiose and plentiful as they had once believed it would be as they prepared to become a teacher.

Due to this struggle or let-down, Ayers suggests we, as educators, have a set of reminders as to why we continue to step into the classroom every day. One of his personal reminders he shares inspires me and how I teach or create lessons. He reminds himself (and others): “Today and every day (and in a zillion ways) [human beings are] learning to live together—the

environment we strive to create is characterized by honesty, dialogue, critical questioning, fairness, and recognition, not monologue, management, control, or punishment” (6).

This philosophy, which I thought of as “the beautiful struggle of teaching,” is *exactly* how I see the classroom to be: like an ecosystem or community. In each class, each period, the students and I have a chance to learn from one another and build each other up. The classroom is a place to question and discuss, to recognize and adjust thinking. The classroom provides us the possible opportunity to explicate issues, topics, or themes that the world outside the classroom has trouble figuring out or talking about. To discourage this openness for thinking, expression, and creativity in the classroom is a disservice to our students; doing so gives them the message that their ponderings, confusions, imaginations, heart, and ideas they cherish are merely their own and have no place in the classroom, school, community, country, or world. Every student needs the chance to not only share themselves and their thoughts, but also challenge themselves and their beliefs. The only way to do that is to allow for open-mindedness and freedom to create and build off of each other, mistakes and failures, and by questioning. Ayers would agree with this, as he states in his essay: “

Teachers can create classrooms where students with a range of backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and beliefs can learn to live with and learn from one another. A pedagogy of dialogue... is the basic teaching gesture in and for a free and democratic society. Learning the fine art of speaking with the possibility of being heard, and listening with the possibility of being changed, is a practical contribution to finding one’s way in a wildly diverse democracy” (8).

One additional statement Ayers makes, I feel, summarizes my thoughts and feelings on this philosophy: “

I want to move a step beyond noting that they can look at the world through critical lenses; I want them to know that they need no one's permission to interrogate the world, no one else's reading list to comprehend the world, and no one's approval to link arms with others in order to change things. Students should leave every class with their imaginations nourished and their curiosities engaged—they should have experienced the ecstasy of creation, the joy of making something from the materials at hand" (13).

This also perfectly details how I view education. I believe that students should not have to beg or wish for their school or education to be beneficial for them. They shouldn't need to hope that *someday* they'll be heard or able to express themselves. Students have the right to their learning and education, not a privilege but a right. With this right, they also should have the right to question and honestly suck up all the information, resources, experiences, and skills they can glean from their education. As important as standards and testing are, they mean nothing if the students aren't involved and active within the curriculum. The objectives and lessons are also meaningless if the curriculum is not geared towards inclusion, does not challenge and evolve the students inside and outside of the education system, and cannot be "interrogated," as Ayers puts it. As the motivational speaker, Lisa Nichols once said, "give the world notice," and by this she means don't ask for permission to be heard, to question, to express, to achieve your goals and dreams, to succeed, instead, "give the world notice that you're coming." This is exactly what I expect of myself and my students.

Works Cited

Ayers, Bill. "Biography." Bill Ayers, 7 Apr. 2018, billayers.org/biographyhistory/.

Ayers, William. "I Shall Create! Teaching Toward Freedom." *Teaching When the World Is on Fire*, by Lisa Delpit, The New Press, 2019, pp. 3–15.