November 15th, 2015

Dear Mom,

I know we haven’t spoken in a while so I am writing you this letter in the hope that it will bring us closer as well as give you a little insight about what’s going on in my life right now. I recently got a job teaching Kindergarten at the Anderson Elementary school in New York City. I have 16 students aged between 5 and 6 who are all bright and eager to learn.

Every morning, I begin my class with circle time. During this time, I give my students the opportunity to share anything they would like with the class. One of my aims is to create a positive and comfortable environment in order to make students feel secure and at ease. I read an article by Nel Noddings which described how many students feel as though their teachers do not care about them. This really touched me because I want to make a difference in my students’ lives. I want them to grow up and remember me for having impacted them in a certain way. Most importantly, not only do I want my students to know that I care about them, I want them to feel it. I told my students that circle-time is a time to share anything they would like without having any one to judge them. I explained to them that if there is something bothering them, they can always come to me and discuss any issue that they have. I believe this circle-time makes students feel like I value their thoughts and opinions and really shows them that I do care about them. I also saw an amazing CBC documentary called “Children Full of Life” which followed a fourth grade class in Kanazawa, northwest of Tokyo. Their teacher, Toshiro Kanamori, really put an emphasis on making his students feel like a family and also helped them by giving them opportunities to share their feelings and lives. Through letters, classroom activities and discussions, this teacher really helped his students realize the importance of caring for each other. This documentary really inspired me to incorporate certain activities into my own classroom. I really believe that it is crucial to show students how important it is to care, respect and forgive.

Another one of my aims in the classroom is to challenge my students. I feel that many teachers and adults undermine young children’s capabilities. In my opinion, students need someone who believes in them and believes that they are capable of achieving big and great things. I read an article entitled “Kindergarteners can do it too! Comprehension strategies for early readers” by Anne E. Gregory and Mary Ann Cahill, which really put this into perspective for me. The article was about a teacher who taught her Kindergarteners how to make connections, visualisations and ask questions about different books they were reading. I decided to incorporate their wonderful strategy into my classroom. At some point during the day, we always have a reading activity. During this time, the students gather on the carpet while I read them a book. Firstly, I begin by showing my students a picture of a brain with smaller pictures of ideas spinning around inside. I explain to them that whenever we learn a new piece of information, it is easily remembered if we connect it to something that is already in our heads. During the story, I give my students the opportunity to raise their hand and make a connection. The children can connect anything in the book to themselves, the world or even another book we have read. I also encourage my students to share their visualisations of the story. Finally, I tell my students to ask questions about things that they are wondering. I believe this is extremely effective because it is giving the students the opportunity to begin thinking and reflecting at a really young age. Sometimes I ask the students to draw their visualisations on paper and later compare them to the illustrations in the book. In my opinion, this is a great instructional strategy because it allows students to get used to visualising and will benefit them as they move from picture books to chapter books. Children are also naturally inquisitive and are constantly asking questions. I always give students the chance to ask questions before they begin reading the story and write them down in the form “I wonder...” After the story is over, we go through the list of questions as a class and discuss if the answer was clearly stated in the book or if we have to use our brains in order to answer the question. When I tell people about this activity, they are usually shocked that children in Kindergarten are able to accomplish such a difficult task. If you believe in your students, you can help them to accomplish anything and this is why I put such a great emphasis on challenging them and pushing them to succeed.

An article entitled “Pathways to Reform: Start with Values” by David J. Ferraro brings up several valid points about schools and curriculum. He mentions that many schools have different curriculums and philosophies, all with their own beliefs and values. Every individual is different and they all have different opinions on the proper way to educate students. This article really inspired me to start thinking about my own teaching philosophy. I am a big believer in learning by doing. Students do not want to be lectured to, they simply want to do. Hands-on activities, discovery learning and classroom discussions are all strategies which I believe are extremely beneficial to a child’s education.

Since one of my goals is to have students learn through discovery, I decided to have an art activity with Play Doh and paint. My objective was to teach students the difference between primary and secondary colors. I gave them a basic overview of the difference and explained that colors such as yellow and blue are primary colors but when mixed together, they make a new secondary color. The students were then given the opportunity to mix Play Doh or paint together and see for themselves the different colors that come out of it. In my opinion, this is a great strategy to teach children of all ages because they are using their minds and thinking creatively instead of simply listening to a teacher feed them all the information and answers.

Some of my daily objectives, which are also on-going throughout the semester, are to have students be respectful, kind, generous and caring in the classroom. I spend a lot of time talking to students about the importance of basic moral principles and how these values will have a positive influence in their lives. Students help me keep track of all the positive things that occur in the classroom and we mark it on our Moral Chart. For example, if a student forgot their pencil case and another student offers to share their crayons, then this is an act of kindness and generosity. I encourage my students to look out for these acts of kindness and as a class we mark it on our chart. Since I ask my students to look out for these acts on their own, it really helps them to build a deeper understanding as well as develop an awareness of the importance of these moral principles.

I hope this letter helped give you an overview of my typical day in the Kindergarten classroom. I want you to know that you had a major impact on my life and you helped mould me into the person I am today. Through your teaching and guidance, I was able to grow and become a teacher myself, with the opportunity to guide many students in the right direction. I just want to say thank you for everything.

Love always,

Tiffany