How My Experiences Have Shaped My Educational Philosophy:

An Autobiography

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Although I was not aware of it at the time, I began to develop my educational philosophy in the first grade. My grade one teacher, Ms. Manette, was an older lady with short, jet black hair and a highly contagious smile. When I was in Ms. Manette’s class, I was quite sick. I have Celiac Disease, an autoimmune disorder that prevents my body from digesting gluten properly, which means I must maintain a strict gluten free diet. I was diagnosed near the end of my grade one year. Before being diagnosed, I experienced daily stomach aches, fatigue, and hunger due to the fact my body was only absorbing a minuscule amount of the nutrients from my food. To this day, I can still vividly remember the stomach aches I experienced on a daily basis. There were days the pain was so intense I would just lay curled up on the couch, crying in discomfort. Since my body was constantly expending energy to fight the gluten in my system, I also experienced a great deal of fatigue. Ms. Manette never once made me feel as if I was being weak or overexaggerating my pain.

One day, my classmates and I were sitting on the floor at the front of the room while Ms. Manette read a picture book to us. I remember trying my very hardest to listen to her words and follow along with the story, but my eyes slowly got heavier and heavier. Her words began to distance from my mind, as my head started to fall. Then suddenly, I heard her say, “Sarah?” I quickly jolted awake and realized everyone was looking at me. “Are you listening?” Ms. Manette asked. “Yes,” I lied, worried that she was mad that I was not paying attention. To my relief, she carried on with the story. After finishing the book, she instructed everyone to go to their backpacks to get something. Loud chatter filled the room, as my classmates walked to the back to retrieve their belongings. Ms. Manette brought me into the hallway. My stomach dropped; I was positive I was about to get in trouble. To my surprise, instead of yelling at me for falling asleep in class, Ms. Manette calmly suggested that I go to the nurses’ room to take a nap. I was hesitant, but she led me there and ensured I was comfortable before returning back to the class. In the previous lecture, we discussed the importance of getting to know your students so that you can evaluate and support them in their individual needs. Ms. Manette was a shining example of this. She took the time to understand my difficult situation and was accommodating to my needs. I hope to follow her example; I desire to get to know my future students on a personal level and make a conscious effort to accommodate their needs. Acknowledging my student’s individual struggles will allow them to further succeed academically, while also allowing them to grow emotionally.

My dad is a high school mathematics teacher, so I grew up observing the reality of being a teacher and hearing his stories. As a young girl, I would assist my dad in marking the multiple-choice portion of his student’s exams, always leaving a small happy face at the top of the page. Although I loved helping my dad mark exams, I was not yet set on being a teacher. I seriously considered a variety of different careers before deciding on education. It was not until the beginning of my grade twelve year that I realized teaching was the only career I felt truly passionate and excited about. One of the reasons I feel so excited about being a teacher is the hilarious stories my dad has shared about his experiences. A perfect example of this is the time he was teaching an algebra lesson and a student begrudgingly asked the classic question, “when are we ever going to use this in real life?” At this exact moment, a repair man working in the roof of the school yelled to his co-worker, “it’s three and a half inches by two and five eights!” My dad paused, looked up at the ceiling dramatically, and with a shocked expression he said, “I think God just answered your question!” The entire class erupted with laughter. My dad also likes to tell very corny, often math related, jokes. While he is aware the jokes are not necessarily good, they are a way for him to connect with his students and bring joy into the classroom. As a future teacher, I hope to mirror my dad in this way. I want my classroom to be filled with smiles and laughter, as it should be an enjoyable environment for my students. By engaging students in this way, learning becomes less taxing and more fun for everyone involved.

I have been a member of Girl Guides of Canada since the age of six. The organization has played a major role in my life, as my experiences in Girl Guides have allowed me to grow and develop into an outgoing, confident, and strong woman. As a girl, Girl Guides was an activity I loved because it was a safe place for me and a great deal of fun. However, when I became a leader everything changed. Over the last three years I have volunteered hundreds of hours planning meetings, executing activities, explaining new topics, coordinating games, and attending sleepovers and camps. Every second has been completely worth it. Being a Girl Guide leader has opened my eyes and allowed me to grow in ways I never even imagined possible. There have been a countless number of moments I have experienced as a Brownie leader that have shaped my beliefs on the type of teacher I hope to become.

One chilly evening last spring, the Brownies were playing a group game in the courtyard. I was sitting on the grass chatting with a fellow leader while the girls played together, many of them shrieking with excitement. As I looked around, I noticed one girl sitting in the corner alone. Her legs were curled up to her chest and her face buried into her arms. Calmly, I walked over to the girl, sat down next to her, and then preceded to ask her what was wrong. Fighting back tears, she began to tell me how the other girls would not choose any of the ideas she suggested. As the conversation continued, I soon realized her pain was about much more than her ideas being shot down. She proceeded to open up to me about how she had no friends at school, how she was being bullied, and the struggles she was facing at home. Sadly, these are common struggles many kids are facing. As a Girl Guide leader, and as a teacher one day, I want to always be there for the kids I work alongside. I desire to personally get to know each of them individually and create connections with them. Most importantly, this experience showed me how vital it is for children to have a safe environment outside of their homes where they feel comfortable sharing their feelings, which is something I hope to create within my future classroom.

At the age of sixteen, I got my first job as a cashier. My experience working as a cashier has opened my eyes to the importance and true power of inclusion. Throughout the past two years, I have encountered a countless number of customers, leaving me with a multitude of stories. However, one experience sticks out in my mind like no other. I was standing at my cash register when an older woman in a wheelchair came up to the till. There was a man following behind her, carrying a basket with their groceries. I smiled and gave an energetic hello to the woman before asking for her Coop number, as I do with every customer. Her face immediately lit up, as she smiled from ear to ear. After giving me her number, she pushed her wheelchair up to the counter, looking up at me and smiling the entire time. I proceeded to ask her how she was doing; she replied with a wholehearted “great!” What she said next shattered my heart in pieces. This sweet, joyful woman looked at me and told me I was an angel. Of course, I was very confused and quickly denied the overgenerous compliment. She then looked me in the eyes and said, “most people don’t talk to me because I’m in a wheelchair.” Words cannot describe how I felt at that moment. I was filled with sorrow, yet at the same time I felt great joy, as I realized how much my actions meant to her. This experience proved to me how impactful my actions are. It has inspired me to strive to be an incredibly kind teacher; one who shows each of my students that they are important and valuable to me. I will work diligently to ensure my future classroom is a place of unconditional inclusivity and teach every single one of my students to embrace diversity among their peers.

All of my experiences, whether they be minor or significant, have led me to become the eager University of Regina education student that I am today. I am so incredibly proud of my decision to pursue a career in teaching, despite many of my family members and peers telling me that I could make so much more money in another profession or that I am too smart to be a teacher, whatever that means. I have already begun imagining my future classroom and developing my educational philosophy, which will guide my actions as an educator. I believe education should reflect student’s individual needs; this part of my philosophy comes from the fact I know first hand how much it meant to me, a student struggling with health issues, to have a teacher that cared enough to accommodate my needs in a non-judgemental manner. I believe education should be engaging and enjoyable for everyone involved; this belief comes from the stories my dad has shared with me about how vital it is to bring joy into the classroom and make learning fun. I believe a classroom should be a safe and inviting environment; this statement stems from my experiences as a Girl Guide leader and how I have come to realize that students truly need a place they feel comfortable to share their situations and emotions. Finally, I believe in inclusive education; this belief arises from an unforgettable encounter with a customer who showed me the immense impact kind actions can have. Over time, as I continue to grow and further examine my beliefs, my educational philosophy will change. One thing I am confident will stay the same though, is my intense passion to be the greatest teacher I can possibly be.