

At the core of my desire to be a teacher is the power to help kids believe in themselves.

I have seen kids who had to get up at 5:30 in the morning to take a one and a half hour bus ride to school. Kids who came back exhausted and still did their homework only to do it all again. I helped a student struggling with his work by breaking it up into timed segments and drawing a page of a comic with him after each segment as a reward. When we finished the assignment he turned to me and said in amazement "I did it!". I watched kids struggle with anger over math homework. We took breaks because homework is not worth crying over. Sometimes there is so much at play that the lesson you get to teach is not the lesson you planned.

Every kid learns differently. It is worth the time it takes to work out a solution that meets the requirements and also allows for creative liberties. If the way you are teaching is not working find something your students are interested in and help them figure how it relates. Meeting students where they are and having the patience to help them get on track builds trust. What I noticed as a paraeducator is that students are most captivated by teachers who show genuine enthusiasm about what they are teaching. When teachers role model excitement in their material, kids follow suit. Some students expect you to give up on them if they cannot do what you are asking of them so they give up on themselves first. That is when it is most important for teachers to assist and encourage. The joy in their eyes when they see that they can accomplish a task is worth all of the struggles to get there.

Trusting students to have complex thoughts and reflective answers shows them that you believe they are capable of thinking beyond obstacles. I noticed that when teachers ask big questions and create space for group discussion students are more likely to take risks with their answers thus expanding their learning in the process. Its all about giving power back to the students. Students engage more thoroughly when we as educators incorporate challenging topics and encourage deep thinking. The key is to listen to the answers. Half of the teaching process is active listening. A couple of sheets of printer paper and a box of markers can spark open ended discussions about the nature of life, math, memories, and puzzle solving if you give it significance.

In a rapidly evolving social climate, my job as an educator is to provide a banquet of knowledge so that my students can walk into the world armed enough to not be dangerous. I will provide the tools for my students to question the world around them and not only think outside of the box but to see the box and its limitations. I see injustice and I want to help be part of a solution that starts with our younger generation.