**Teaching Philosophy**

Growing up, I did not plan on becoming a teacher. The thought had crossed my mind during high school, but it had seemed too difficult for me to pursue at the time. Instead, I joined the Navy at the age of seventeen and after finishing my four years, I began going to school for funeral service. During that time, I spent over a year working as both a crematory operator and an apprentice in a funeral home. Eventually, I decided I needed to find another career path because I was not comfortable with the sales aspect of the industry. I want to help people; not sell them things they do not need.

Once I decided to leave the funeral industry, I thought long and hard about the skills I have and how they may be applied in a career I could find fulfillment in. I returned to my high school contemplations of teaching. Despite my love of learning, I had not done well in high school. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was struggling with several learning disabilities that went undiagnosed, including ADHD. I found it difficult to complete homework and lacked a support system to assist me and hold me accountable. By the time I decided to start college, I had matured enough and developed coping skills that allowed me to excel. I felt that I was ready to finally pursue a career that had seemed impossible to me in my youth. I believe my own academic struggles allow me unique insight into the issues my students may be experiencing. My goal as a teacher is to share my love of learning and fascination with the natural world in a compassionate, accessible, and low-stress classroom environment.

**Compassion:** Compassion is probably the most important trait a teacher can have; second maybe only to competence. When students see that you care about their well-being, they are more inclined to trust you. You cannot assume that students already know that you care about their success; you need to show them you care through your behavior. According to Henri Tafjel’s views on identity theory, students that have already categorized themselves in one way may be resistant to guidance because of an “us” versus “them” mentality. The easiest way for me to demonstrate to my students that I care is by showing genuine interest in their lives and accomplishments. Hopefully, this will be enough to convince the majority of my students of my sincerity. Once they believe in my sincerity, they may be more open to my instruction and assistance. A teacher that does not seem to care, is also a teacher that students will not feel comfortable approaching.

**Accessibility and Inclusivity:** As a teacher, I strive for an accessible and inclusive classroom. There are many small ways to make students feel more comfortable in the classroom. Language is important in creating an inclusive environment; using non-gendered terms can help children of all gender identities and family structures feel welcome. Asking students to take a few minutes to think about a question, gives students that may need more time the opportunity to participate. Allowing students to answer questions anonymously may also encourage introverted or anxious students to participate. Additionally, many classes require computers now, but those may be unavailable to some students. The majority of my homework is capable of being completed with a pencil and the textbook.

I believe earth science is the least abstract of the natural sciences and that makes it more readily accessible to students that may not have been interested otherwise. Very little understanding of chemistry, physics, and math are necessary to learn about basic geology, plate tectonics, volcanoes, and other subjects within earth science. Earth science is also relevant to immediate real-world problems and applications and may allow students to feel like the class is more necessary, rather than “something they’ll never use.” In addition to being less abstract conceptually, earth science is the best subject for tactile experiences. Both Jerome Bruner and Maria Montessori encouraged the direct manipulation of objects while learning. In earth science, students would be able to handle rock and fossil specimens instead of relying on illustrations.

**Low-Stress Classroom Environment:** The environment students learn in is potentially as influential as the teacher. I remember as a teenager sitting in rooms covered in colorful posters and I do not remember a single thing those posters contained. Neutral and pastel décor is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also easier for students with sensory processing disorders that may be overwhelmed by brighter and busier fonts and color schemes. The Montessori Method, based on Maria Montessori’s teachings, emphasizes aesthetics in the classroom. She believed that outer order leads to inner order and that children will develop a sense of order by interacting with it in the classroom. Furthermore, I have observed through mentor teachers how important seating is. Students placed in simple seating arrangements (facing forward, single or paired) had a much easier time focusing than the students sitting at desks clustered in groups of up to six.

I want to nurture my students’ curiosity and to encourage them in their pursuit of becoming better people through critical thought and rationality. The purpose of our education system should not be attempting to be “the best”; it should be producing well-rounded individuals with enough knowledge to allow them to pursue their goals. We should strive to allow our students to be *their* best, not *the* best. School systems may have test scores in mind, but a teacher should have their student’s development at heart.