

# **Sabrina M. Knopf**

## **Philosophy of Education**

*“The mediocre teacher tells.  
The good teacher explains.  
The superior teacher demonstrates.  
The great teacher inspires.”  
~William Arthur Ward*

Aspiring to pursue a career as an educator is a decision that not only requires the mastery of a subject, but a passion for the deeper aspects of a career as an educator. I grew up loving math class. I remember being excited to do math homework at a very young age. In my mind, it was a fun puzzle to work on and try to decode – and I always wanted to know the correct answers when I got to school the next day. As the years went on, my love for math remained strong. I have always loved helping others and began teaching swimming lessons as soon as I was able to get a job at the age of 15. Growing up as a competitive swimmer, the muscle memory I had for each stroke was so embedded in me. I had to learn how to break down what was so familiar to me and explain it to children who were very young and barely wanted to get into the pool! I had to learn to work with students of all ages – even only a few years younger than I was at the time. I loved every minute that I was at work. I loved helping my students, I loved seeing them progress and watching their face light up when they finally were able to swim through the water with confidence. I knew with certainty at this point in my life, being a 16-year-old high schooler, that I wanted to teach and that it was going to be math.

When I was 18 years old, I began teaching swimming lessons to children and young adults with autism. Some of these students were non-verbal, and some even had severe behavioral issues. I had to learn quickly how to work with both the swimmer and their parents. It was a team effort in the pool. I had to watch parents cry in frustration, but I also was able to watch them cry with joy when their child progressed. Not only was I a swim instructor, but I was an emotional support for the parent and the student. It was very challenging, and sometimes heartbreaking, but after weeks – you realize that small victories are sometimes large victories depending on your viewpoint and situation. Progress is progress, no matter how small. Working with students with special needs taught me about the amount of patience I had. As challenging as that job was, I truly loved it. It was that much more rewarding being able to get the student to smile, laugh and enjoy being in the water. I realized that along with mathematics, I wanted to be able to teach special education. I wanted to learn more and be able to help ALL learners.

While my first job and love of math absolutely had an impact on my decision to become a teacher, it was also the amazing teachers that I was so lucky to have over the years. They were vibrant, loving, supportive educators who cared about their student's success and happiness. I had classes where I felt like I was at home – and of course I also had classes where I did not feel at home. The latter teachers had no passion, and it was evident. That stuck with me, and I have always strived to create a classroom environment that feels like home for my students. I remember loving every math class I was in because, well, I loved math. To me, it did not matter if the teacher was dancing in front of the room or reading from a textbook – I was engaged and interested because I loved the subject. On the contrary, I know that is not the situation for all students, and therefore I try to find ways to make math relatable and fun. I make sure my passion is presented in the classroom; merged with a profound understanding of the learners to ultimately create an environment that will allow students of all abilities to succeed. I have always tried to find ways to incorporate the differences and similarities between students to create lesson plans that will be intellectually stimulating while creating a safe environment. I strive to form a classroom environment where students are not afraid to ask questions, answer questions, and teach others what they know.

A classroom should be welcoming and warm, but also have a solid structure. Using a multitude of resources and the technology that is so readily available, the classroom can be transformed into a place of wonder and excitement. From group work to applications like Mathspace and Quizizz, students are able to get a variety of ways to learn, practice, and collaborate. The ideal classroom should be a supportive environment that empowers students to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens. The teacher should always model their expectations and be a lifelong learner as well, through continuously assessing and improving their craft. My students will always know what is expected and know that I believe in them. They will be held to high expectations that will foster not only their cognitive growth, but their personal growth as well. When the students can sense that a teacher is enthusiastic and passionate about their job, they tend to get more enthusiastic about the subject as well. Teachers are not only sharing knowledge, but also acting as role models. It is important to display the attitude in which you want your students to display. The responsibility of the classroom teacher is shown through both attitude and classroom organization.

I believe in a set structure of a classroom. When students are used to a daily routine, the class will ultimately run smoother. I believe in incorporating group work when applicable. Students who work in diverse groups of a variety of cognitive abilities can help one another achieve. Group work is important not only to learn the material, but also to indirectly teach students the necessary life skills of working with others. Group work can serve as a means of differentiated instruction. When a student does not understand the material, another student may be able to help. This will not only help the struggling student, but also help the other student grasp the material even better by reiterating what they know. Differentiated instruction is a critical component. I believe that it can be incorporated into most lessons using one-to-one technology. With access to many applications, websites, videos, and games, lessons can become extremely engaging when using the resources available. A quick video can tie a lesson together and help the struggling students understand; a few pictures can help the visual learners' better grasp the material, a group review game can strengthen their ambition. I believe that technology is an excellent source of material and an irreplaceable tool to use daily to continuously review material and assess learning.

Overall, teaching is not a career—it is a passion. There must be an evident passion in the classroom every day, or the students will be keen to not sensing it. The students must know that you care; they must know that you hold high expectations of them and want them to succeed. Effective teaching requires a fervent endeavor on behalf of the teacher to create a successful class as a whole. Learning is far from a simple process, and each individual student has his or her own unique way of learning—teachers must be well aware of this fact. Becoming a teacher is much more than a career; it is a way of life. A teacher not only relays information, but serves as a mentor and a role model. I aspire to have a positive effect on the lives of students. I hope to not only instill knowledge into the lives of adolescents, but life lessons as well. I believe that my passion for my chosen career and my desire to help others will indubitably lead me down a successful road and allow my students to perform to their fullest potential. Teachers not only teach, they make a difference—I hope to continue the tradition and guide students down the path to a successful future.