

Being an Effective and Authentic Teacher

Authenticity

One of the most important skills that I should have as a teacher is authenticity. It is a quality that I will need to use with anyone that I interact with, I need to go into teaching knowing myself and how to show that to everyone that I work with. Being aware of the type of person that I am, working with my strengths and weaknesses, and always being genuine, will help me to be a more effective teacher. In her 2004 article “Perspectives on Authenticity in Teaching” Patricia Cranton explores this idea of authenticity, defining it as “a multifaceted concept that includes at least four parts: being genuine, showing consistency between values and actions, relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity, and living a critical life... When we bring our sense of self into our teaching, or in other words, work toward becoming authentic, we are able to critically question that which is right for us from the literature, develop our own personal style, and thereby communicate with students and others in a genuine way” (p. 3). In this statement, I will explore Cranton’s definition and explanation of authenticity as it applies to my personal teaching philosophy.

Student Motivation and Respect

Rules and Respect

In order for learning to take place, I believe that there needs to be a connection between the teacher and the students, as well as a mutual respect. As Cranton discussed, an authentic teacher needs to be genuine. I feel that being genuine with my students will be the base of establishing a functional relationship with them. In order to establish this mutual respect, and in order to motivate my students, I will make every effort to create and maintain consistency in the rules that I set out in the classroom. An example of this is one of my favorite activities that we did in my grade school classrooms during the first class of the year. We would create the classroom rules together. We would discuss how we thought the class rules should be about things like taking turns, raising your hand, homework assignment due dates etc., all of the parameters that we would adhere to, to create a functional classroom, and we had them posted on the board throughout the year. This encouraged us to be critical of ourselves and of how we were going to interact, allowing for a better understanding and respect between us and the teacher. By setting rules and classroom etiquette from the beginning, allowing the students to have a voice in creating rules which in turn gives them ownership, and by upholding these rules, students will feel like they aren’t getting blindsided with anything, and that I, the teacher, will do what I say I will.

Consistency

It is important to me that I present myself as authentically as possible so that my students can learn to trust and to respect me. Having been a student for the past seventeen years of my life, I know immediately when a teacher is not being genuine, especially a new teacher. There is always a transition period into a new job, especially with teaching, where the person is learning how the job works and how to act, this awkward period needs to be minimized because of the affect it has on the classroom

atmosphere. Throughout the school year it is important to be consistent with carrying out the rules and classroom standards that you set, as much as possible, and to be consistent with how you act as a teacher. This is in line with what Cranton talks about in her article, that authenticity requires consistency between values and actions. In essence, if I set a rule or a policy for my students, like a tardiness policy, I need to expect that of myself as well as of my students and show consistency.

Extracurriculars

Following the idea of having a good relationship with my students, something that I consider salient to being a successful teacher is getting to know my students outside of the classroom. Participating in extracurriculars like coaching a team, or making a club, are other ways that I can get to know my students, and that they can get to know me. By participating in extracurriculars with my students, I am further emphasizing my genuine interest in their success, and in them as people. This can create a stronger mutual respect and help me to be a more effective teacher.

Classroom Management

Physical Presence of the Classroom

Knowing that I am going to be a new teacher I will have to experiment with what works and what doesn't when it comes to my classroom management and rules. I know that it will be different with each student and therein lies the challenge. I am very excited to begin to explore how I manage a classroom because it is a very important teaching skill. One way that I would employ classroom management techniques is leading by example; this shows my genuineness in that I am demonstrating how I practice what I preach in terms of what I can expect from my students. For example, I could serve as a role model by keeping my desk neat, participating in discussions, and respecting others. In addition, I think that the physical presence of a class can help or hurt the atmosphere of the classroom and the mentality that the students carry throughout the lessons. I have always liked a classroom setup where there is a U shape or even a circle, to create more of an even playing field between the students and the teachers. I like that setup because then there isn't a front row or a back row, and it sets it up to be better for discussion, which would be very important in a language arts/ social studies classroom.

Mannerisms of the Teacher

Another important quality of an effective teacher is teacher presence. As a student I have always been strongly affected by my teachers' mannerisms. If my teacher is sad, quiet, bored-looking, tired etc. I am less inclined to be excited by the material and to care about it. For example, I had one graduate student teacher in an English 101 class whose mannerisms showed he did not want to be there. He was consistently bored, and not only did that make me bored, but it made me want to not pay attention and do something else instead. Even his folder for the class was titled "S*** for English 101", showing he didn't seem to care about the class. In a way you could argue that he was at least being authentic and not trying to put on a front for the class as it was probably a requirement for his degree to teach but it just set the stage for the class to be disinterested. In contrast, my all time favorite teacher was my High

School AP Biology teacher. She was so incredibly knowledgeable and passionate about her subject, she always had a smile on her face, and that encouraged us to want to participate and to love the class. How I present myself, and my knowledge of the material, to my class can have a strong effect on them and I need to be constantly aware of my behaviors and my demeanor. This ties into the theme of authenticity because by being genuine and consistent with my demeanor and the way I present myself to my students, I can gain their respect and hopefully encourage them to learn.

Collaboration

With Teachers

Collaboration with teachers is another important tool. I need to be able to work with my fellow teachers to benefit from the experience that they bring to the table and hopefully make strong professional ties with them. In addition to the teachers that I will work with at Wheeler Middle School, I also need to be able to work with other Teach For America (TFA) teachers in Hawaii. TFA also has group collaborations for the teachers to share activities and stories and to further our work. As an example of effective collaboration and communication-- I was asked what I would do if I were put in a situation in which I had to change a lesson plan that had already been agreed on amongst the other teachers in my department, and the creator of the lesson plan was upset at me for these changes. My response was that I would show him/her what I did and explain why I did it. In this situation, by being genuine with my coworker and consistent with my students, meeting their needs first and foremost, I would be further displaying my authenticity to my co workers and to my students, because at the end of the day it's the effect that you have on your students that matters. It is also important to foster a mutual respect with your fellow teachers and be authentic and collaborative with them so that everyone is comfortable with working together.

With Students

I think that it is very important to be able to work with students just as much as you work with fellow teachers. In a classroom that I observed, I found it interesting that the teacher worked with the students to negotiate a rubric. In one case, she gave them her ideas for how the assignment would be graded, and let them go from there. After about five minutes they were able to come up with an assessment rubric for the assignment that was satisfying to the teacher and the students. The teacher also exercised her right to veto when the students gave silly proposals, but in addition to vetoing she explained to them why. For example: if a student said something like "there shouldn't be a page limit" she said, "I'm going to veto that and propose at least a two page paper because we already agreed that we should have three sources and covering all of that should take at least two pages". This was something that I would like to try as a teacher because instead of having a subjective, or an abstract rubric, with the sense of "because I said so" attached to explanations for grading, the students understand each part of the rubric and can feel like they know exactly what they're doing and why. This also helps to foster critical thinking because they are able to assess themselves as students, and what they feel should be required of them and of the quality of work. This sort of collaboration and encouraging of mutual understanding between

teachers and students can help to show my authenticity as a teacher, and also to build a mutual respect, because my students would be comfortable talking to me and know I have their best interests at heart.

In Conclusion

In closing, authenticity through genuine interactions between me and everyone that I work with as a teacher will be key for me as an educator. By being consistent with my students with regards to rules, assignments, classroom etiquette, and extracurriculars, I can create a stronger student-teacher relationship, and, in this way be a more effective teacher. Collaborating with my fellow teachers and students will also help to create a more comfortable learning environment. By being as authentic, genuine, and consistent as possible, I hope to develop into a successful teacher and to make a difference for my students.

References:

Cranton, P. & Carusetta, E. *Perspectives on authenticity in teaching*. Adult Education Quarterly, Vol. 55 No. 1, November 2004 5-22.