

What are some core beliefs and values that you hold as a teacher?

My core beliefs and values as a teacher are reflected in my goals for teaching, which are to:

- produce empathetic humans who are prepared to tackle important topics like racism, classism, equity and equality, colonialism and all the things that negatively affect our society and who are moved toward social action and effecting change.
- honor student background and culture and integrate them into the classroom community and the curriculum.
- establish a classroom community based on mutual respect and understanding where everyone feels safe enough to take educational risks.
- help students find their own identities, voices and power and nurture them once they are found.
- forge agentic students who are invested in and create their own learning.

How are you committed to your practice as a teacher? How will you implement your core values through teaching, learning, and reflection?

- "How can she teach her mostly affluent, White students to read and write narratives in ways that confront their own privilege, push back against inequitable systems, and be moved toward social action as a result?" (Garcia & O'Donnell, p. 52) In my professional situation, I ask myself this question almost every day. I teach mostly white, mostly affluent children who are unaware of the privilege afforded to them and whose conservative parents would likely have something to say if I try to open their children's eyes to that privilege. Yet I do not believe that my classroom should be a politically neutral "safe space" that avoids "conflict and controversy in favor of minimizing the discomfort students are likely to feel when their thinking is challenged." (Garcia & O'Donnell, p. 40) Instead it should be a safe space in that we feel comfortable enough to examine our own privilege, what that privilege affords us, and challenge society's ways of marginalizing large groups of people due their skin color, the amount of money in their pockets, or who they love and care for.
- All students' lived experiences are valuable. Literally. They can and do add value to our curriculum, our classroom community, and our lives. The students sharing their experiences get to feel heard and valued, they obtain a sense of belonging. The students listening to others' lived experiences start (or continue) to form empathy. It's a cliché term, but this is a win-win pose for both sides.

- I think that in order to establish a classroom community of respect and bravery, I need to model being a vulnerable learner and a normal human being. (NOTE: This section isn't finished yet.)
- Teaching should be humanizing. It should help students find their identities and identify their values. Teaching should create better humans, not promote rote memorization. You can learn any fact on the internet, but you can only learn how to be human from other humans. It is not a measurable outcome, which is why the system has used standardized tests, but I didn't go into teaching to help students get better at taking tests. Even Garcia & O'Donnell say "we don't know a single teacher who chose the profession with the guiding purpose of helping students bubble in the correct answers on standardized tests." (p. 46). I try to help my students become better humans every single day by asking them to think deeply about themselves and their values, by asking them questions and actually listening to them. Their identities and ideas matter to me and I try to show them that their choices and their voices are important and can have the power to change the world.
- Inspiring students to invest in and create their own learning seems like a monumental task. It has always seemed that way for me, and I think it stems from the comfort I feel being the person who does all the work to teach my students. I have the information, and I just pass it along to the students in a linear fashion. It is familiar, it is easy. Yet I agree with Garcia & O'Donnell when they say that this is a traditional model of teaching and learning that privileges my authority over my students' agency. (p. 40). So I am actively working through letting go of that mindset and comfort and trying to plan lessons, units, even entire curriculums that are student-centered and inquiry based where the students do the bulk of the work instead of me. It is unfamiliar because I was never this type of learner in school. I LOVED the guidelines of rubrics and task checklists because it was easier for me to follow direct instructions than to have to think critically about how to accomplish something on my own. Or as one of Garcia & O'Donnell's interviewees theorizes, "“Why is it so much easier when we're told what to do?” Because you don't have to use all of your brain or all the parts of your heart to actually get invested in this." (p. 38) And she was right! Looking back now, I don't think I was ever truly invested in my learning. I didn't do it because I wanted to, I did it because I had to in order to graduate from high school. I think that in order to get that buy-in from my students, in order to teach them agency and investment in their own learning, I will have to continue to wobble through the pose of using inquiry-oriented approaches to teaching because, as Garcia & O'Donnell point out, "This inquiry-oriented approach increased the chances for student buy-in and positioned them as constructors of their own knowledge rather than recipients of someone else's." (p. 47)

What are a few things that represent and remind you of your values and commitments as an educator?

- An email from one of my students sharing a funny French video with me (out of the blue) because he knew it was safe to do so and that I would appreciate it instead of telling him off for emailing me something not class-related.
- “I wonder if it is possible to teach literature in such a way that people stop killing each other?” (O’Reilly, 1984, p. 109) This quote is so inspiring and embodies the whole reason I wanted to be a teacher. I want the world to be a better place and I think that by sharing these values with my students and encouraging them to take them up as their own values, I have a chance at helping to create a nicer and more just world through them. I think I’m going to have this quote printed onto something so I can keep it on my desk.
- A bundle of emails from parents and students that are all positive things (such as thanking me for being their teacher, exclaiming how much they love class, telling me about how their kids are excited to go to school every day because of me, etc.). I pull these out whenever I’m having a rough day.

Works Cited

Garcia, Antero; O’Donnell-Allen, Cindy. *Pose, Wobble, Flow: A Culturally Proactive Approach to Literacy Instruction (Language and Literacy Series)*. Teachers College Press. Kindle Edition.