

After twenty-nine years in the classroom, my teaching philosophy has evolved as I have grown as an educator. In the beginning, I was considering how I wanted to manage my class and what methods I would use to engage my students. I discovered that the best way to achieve classroom management is with mutual respect combined with clear expectations and fair consequences. I also realized that I operate better with flexible lessons. I always have a plan, but it is malleable enough to move with not just the needs of my students but with my needs as a teacher as well. It is important to have a plethora of activities for the classroom. Lessons that can pivot if needed are the teacher's bread and butter. Along with these techniques, I have found these qualities are key for a successful classroom and have molded my teaching philosophy: adaptability, a sense of humor, willingness to learn, and love of students.

You must be able to adapt. Every class is different. Every student is different. Every day is different. What worked one day, in one class, with one student, could not be as effective the next day or with another class. My most successful lessons were often born out of the need to stop and change directions, creating on the fly. It is so important to be able to adapt to your students' needs and be open to unexpected changes.

Teaching provides many opportunities to laugh at yourself. Let those moments not only build relationships with students but provide a valuable lesson for them. Let them see you are human and can find humor in all of life's moments. When things do not go quite as planned, it is an opportunity to gain experience, grow, and laugh together. Trying new things and learning new skills can be challenging. Teaching those who are in the process of growing also holds its challenges. You must have a sense of humor and be able to laugh along with your students.

You must love learning. As a teacher, you must never stop being a student. I have been so fortunate to work with the most amazing teachers in the business. It does not matter if they have been teaching for 1 year or 30 years, you can learn from your peers: lessons, strategies, coping skills, everything you need to survive being a teacher. Collaborate, celebrate, and learn from your cohort. But your colleagues are not the only ones teaching: learn from your students. Mine has changed my life. They have moved me, inspired me, and challenged me. I love learning about their unique backgrounds, their pasts, their struggles, their successes. I call myself the human sponge. I am always soaking in everything around me to make me a better teacher and person.

You must love students. Love them at their best and their worst. Love them when they make you proud and love them when they fail. They come to us from every situation and lifestyle, and it is our job to open our classrooms and our hearts. Now loving someone does not mean you always like them. It also does not mean that you do not set rules and boundaries. It means that through the good and bad, thick, and thin, sunshine and rain, the students know that even when they break the rules and consequences happen, you have their best interest at heart. They need to know that you are in their corner cheering them on or when necessary, calling them on the carpet. They know that you want the best for them and that you love them.