Philosophy Statement

Math education is a very important topic in today’s society. All students need mathematics in their everyday lives, whether they are buying products from the store, calculating their taxes, or simply reading the time off a clock. Unlike other subjects, most students find math courses extremely difficult because they have trouble understanding the concepts and cannot figure out how to study for exams. I believe that the most difficult part of mathematics is applying textbook concepts to solving real-life problems, because working out problems on a sheet of paper is different than real-world math. After all, the most challenging type of math problem is a word problem, because it cannot be typed directly into a computer or calculator; it requires higher level thinking skills. One look at a math word problem and students’ pencils seem to rapidly drop.

Teaching math requires a great deal of time and effort. There is rarely a time that a student is completely proficient with a topic on the first day. Patience and repetition are good practices to use to make sure students can solve problems in different contexts. After tutoring and observing classes over the past semesters, I feel that students generally learn math best by doing math. A wide variety of informal assessment must take place in a classroom, and sometimes works best when students work through example problems alone or in groups. A teacher that stands in front of the room and lectures for the whole period is not likely to achieve the same results as one that integrates interactive activities, group work, and individual exercises into their lesson plans. Collaboration with the students is a key part of teaching and needs to be utilized in the most efficient fashion.

I believe that all teachers must care about their students, and want them to succeed. If a teacher does not put forth their full potential, then students are going to stop caring about the course. A wise man once said “[p]eople do not care how much you know until they know how much you care”. Whenever I write a lesson plan, I always try my best to anticipate students’ responses and envision how the lesson will go even before it is taught. If I think that an activity will work well with one section but not with another, I adjust it to make it the most meaningful to students. After the lesson is taught, I also reflect upon how I think it went. Perhaps it will change dramatically or never be used again if I feel it was not very engaging. Students need a teacher that takes initiative, facilitates discussions, and periodically gives out sample problems. Teachers should also explore new ideas daily and engage in lifelong learning. A teacher that shows an interest in the subject itself and is available before and after school hours to help struggling students shows a lot more initiative than one that leaves right after school has ended.

When I tell adults that I plan to become a math teacher, I often get the response “I was happy to have passed math with a D when I was in high school”. I truly believe that mathematics is a beautiful subject, and should not be degraded because of a bad experience or teacher. As a math educator, I do not expect my students to be like me. All students come from different backgrounds, and may not be interested in coming to math class each day. I look back upon the classes that I disliked in high school and sympathize with the struggling students. One day, they might be famous, though not for their knowledge in this field.
A teacher’s job is not only to educate students, but also to act as a guide or mentor. They have to be knowledgeable about diversity, which includes feelings of race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs, as well as students with disabilities. As a teacher, I treat all students equally, and I will make sure they all receive the same education. In my classroom, a student that comes from a low income household has the same chance to succeed as one from an affluent household. If I find that a student is struggling in math, I will recommend that they move down a level. On the contrary, if I see a student excelling in math, I will tell them to move up a level. I cater my classes to the average student because I do not want the excelling students to be bored, yet I do not want many students to struggle. If I find that students are excelling, I might give them some tough problems for extra credit. It might make them more interested in the subject, and at the same time, they probably would earn an A in the course anyway.

Classroom management plays a big role when teaching in my classroom. At the beginning of the year, I will always have a pre-made seating chart which can be altered as needed. This will satisfy two major classroom management problems: allow me to learn names quickly and keep talkative students apart. Some students learn best when they are closer to the chalkboard, so they can be switched around accordingly too. I also have a discipline policy which I announce to students at the beginning of the year. Students are first given a verbal warning, and if they keep misbehaving, their name will go up on the board along with a short detention after school. The final strike is a phone call home/discipline referral. I try to write the least number of discipline referrals as possible since the front office is busy handling other issues. On the other hand, certain actions warrant discipline referrals immediately such as if two students engage in a fight on school grounds. I try to be as fair to my students as possible and will listen to both sides if it becomes necessary.

Becoming a math teacher is not only a dream, but also the profession that I hope to have for the rest of my life. After tutoring and observing in classrooms for the past few semesters, it has become clear that I love working with students, whether they are my friends, new people whom I have never met before, or even people in my family. All teachers once were beginning teachers, so I hope that I will be successful in this field.