Philosophy of Teaching Writing—Sample 1

 My philosophy of writing has evolved from a rather simple core concept, 'perfection, not punishment.' To me, teaching writing involves showing students the 'right' way to write, but not lambasting them for failing to meet some arbitrary standard. I exist as a writing teacher to show them what I know and teach them how I reached the standards I currently write at. Whether they adapt my methods entirely or mold them into something that works for them is another manner entirely.

 I am more than willing to allow them to write in the way that works for them, but that does not mean that anything goes when it comes to them. I am a definite believer in the idea that assessment is at least half of the power of teaching, as it allows me to show them where they're falling short, and how to fix what problems they possess. By the very nature of assessment, there have to be solid, consistent standards that each student must meet, and to me, these standards cannot be simply the basics, as I'm not trying to teach them to write at a basic level. I'm trying to inspire them to want to become the best writers they can be, and part of that inspiration is showing them that writing is difficult, exacting, and requires constant practice to improve.

 As part of providing that constant practice, I think it is important that students be given time to both experience writing and reading at a high level in the classroom. With whatever spare time I am given, I plan to give my students a designated amount of minutes for free-reading time, whatever novel they choose to read, and for a graded assignment, provide a short journal on this book at the end of the week. I want them to explain in their journal why they picked the book that they did, as well as what particular parts of the book resonated with them, and what parts of their lessons they recognized in the text they chose to read. This journal will be an important tool in teaching them to organize their thoughts properly on a subject they actually CARE about, rather than another piece of assigned writing that they have no personal attachment to. Through this journal, I can show my students how to critically assess the writing of some of their favorite authors, and show them how to incorporate lessons from those writers into their own style, learning to write by seeing how others write.

 While I assess these journals, and the work the other students turn into me, I must make sure to assess them in a very distinct way. Our debates in class on assessment were one of the things that struck me the most, and one of the smallest, but most important takeaways there was to avoid the use of the red pen. And when I say 'avoid the red pen,' I mean that in two respects. I think it's important to move away from the red pen itself, that often terrifying symbolic ink on a student's paper that screams out 'YOU DID THIS WRONG' in bright, glaring letters. I think the red pen should be put away because its purpose is not one of learning, it's one of punishment, and my idea of student assessment is to avoid having the students feel as if they are being punished. The symbolic aspect of the red pen is that desire for punishment that has to be gone from my method of assessment. When I go over the student's in-class writing, journals, and papers, my goal is to show them where they went wrong, where the holes in their work are, and how they can improve. If I had to label punishment as red pen, I'd like to refer to my method as black pen, simple, to the point correction, that not only shows students what they did wrong, but how they can avoid making that mistake.

 As someone who is training to become a teacher, and who is coming to understand the concept of a teacher-researcher, it's my goal to show the students that I will be teaching the benefit to the education their parents are paying for. I'm not just there to teach them how to write, I'm there to teach them -why- to write. The reason I'm trying to get a job teaching in the first place is to show children that there is a joy in putting your thoughts down in paper, that reading can be as much fun as playing a video game or reading a book. I want these kids, all kids, to look at literature not as something boring they have to suffer through, but one of the classes they look forward to most in the day. A class where students write is a class where students are given the opportunity to express themselves freely, and have no fear in doing so. If I can accomplish that much as an educator, then I've done my job.