Philosophy of Education

Simone Tchagou

As I approached graduation, I was not confident I could actually teach — which is part of why I stayed in school for two more years to finish my Master's in Elementary Education. My first teaching assignment was a combined first-and-second-grade classroom, and for two years I quietly looked for a way out of the profession. Everything changed a few years later, during my first stretch teaching kindergarten, when I watched a struggling reader's eyes light up the moment the letters she had been sounding out for weeks suddenly turned into words she understood. She read everything she could get her hands on from that day forward. That was the moment my “why” was born, and it has shaped what I believe about teaching ever since.

Every Child Deserves to Feel Safe First

I believe every child has a right to an education, and that before any of us can teach a student, that student has to feel emotionally and physically safe in the room. Children walk into a classroom wanting to be known, not just instructed. Building an environment on active listening, warmth, and genuine care comes before anything else, because a student who does not feel safe to make mistakes will not take the risks that real learning requires.

Knowing Each Student

Getting to know each student — personally as well as academically — is not an extra; it is the foundation everything else rests on. I take time to observe, record, and analyze how each child learns, through weekly tests, one-on-one conferencing, DRA and IXL diagnostics, and plain anecdotal notes from day to day. That picture of each student shapes both the whole-group lessons I plan and the individual support a particular child needs, because a teacher can only truly reach a student after learning how that student actually learns.

Instruction That Blends Old and New

I lean toward student-centered instruction: lessons built around my students' own experiences, interests, and abilities, using inquiry and project-based learning so students practice critical thinking, problem-solving, and cooperation rather than simply receiving information. At the same time, thirty years in the classroom have taught me to hold onto the fundamentals that have always worked — handwriting, phonemic awareness, basic math fluency — rather than treating every new trend as a replacement for what came before. The best classroom blends both: time-tested skills taught through methods that keep students genuinely engaged.

A Classroom That Teaches Character, Not Just Content

A classroom is a small community that has to be taught how to function, not just academically but socially. I ground that community in the Six Pillars of Character — trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship — and in the IB Learner Profile traits, so students have a shared, concrete vocabulary for the kind of people we are trying to become together, not just the kind of students we are trying to be. Naming a student as a thoughtful risk-taker or pointing out principled behavior in the moment gives character feedback the same weight and specificity I give academic feedback, which makes it something students can actually practice and grow into rather than a poster on the wall.

Partnering With Families, and Growing as a Teacher

None of this happens in a vacuum. I build relationships with families through email, face-to-face conversation, phone calls, and regular newsletters, because the plans that work best are the ones built with a family, not just handed to them. And I keep growing myself — staying current on new teaching strategies, reflecting honestly on what worked and what did not, and adjusting rather than repeating a lesson simply because I taught it the same way last year.

My Vision

My vision for my classroom is simple: I want it to be a place where students feel valued, heard, and free to be exactly who they are — a home away from home. If my students were to write me a thank-you letter years from now, I would want it to thank me for listening, for noticing them, and for making it safe to try, fail, and try again. Teaching is a tremendous responsibility, and I do not take lightly the chance to shape how a child feels about learning for the rest of their life. My classroom is my second home, and I am grateful to spend my days there with them.