**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_TEACHING PHILOSOPHY\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**THERESA SCHALLHORN**

It wouldn’t be fair to say that I know everything there is about teaching because I have a teaching certificate. In fact, I believe that I have only experienced the tip of the iceberg that teaching is. But I can say that I have spent a lot of time as a student and that those experiences have contributed a great deal to the educator that I am today.

As a student, I always held three expectations of my teachers. First, as I’m sure any student would agree, I expected my teacher to be *fun*. They didn’t need to be my friend or make jokes all of the time but they needed to keep my interest piqued; to make their class the one class that I looked forward to every day. Second, I expected my teacher to be *caring.* If I had questions, comments or concerns, I wanted to know for a fact that my teacher would be willing to take a couple of minutes out of their schedule to hear me out. There were plenty of times where I was struggling in school with the content or because of social stresses and I needed that one person to be there to support me and believe in me. Third, I expected my teacher to *challenge me.* A multitude of people told me that I could be whatever I wanted in life because I was naturally successful; school came easy to me. But I thoroughly enjoyed having my understanding challenged. It helped broaden my perspectives of life including its philosophies, cultures and, of course, scientific phenomena.

As a young teacher, I have taken these experiences and my own interests and have used them to construct the foundation of my own teaching philosophy. My primary goal that I have that supports all behaviors I possess as a teacher is that students should leave my classroom knowing more than when they first walked in. Whether it is about science or about how to work with others, I guarantee that my students are challenged every day to better themselves not only as students but as members of the larger community. In order to reach this goal, I focus on three specific classroom attributes.

First, I support all students and treat each one as an individual. Each student has their own set of strengths and weaknesses and no matter the ratio of each, I know and let each student know that they have the potential to be successful both in and out of school. For each student academically and socially, I provide affirmative and constructive feedback which students can use for the future. What has been working well and should keep doing? What hasn’t been working and should be changed? I mentor students as they make decisions in concurrence with the rules and routines that I specifically set up in my classroom. Students know that they can rely on me when a tough decision is ahead of them. In addition, I strongly believe in being involved in a student’s life in more than one avenue. I advocate that students be involved in extracurriculars and to show my support I both coach both academic and fitness related activities as well as attend various after school events.

Second, I recognize and fully accept the inherent diversity found within a classroom. I know that there are students who truly enjoy science and that there are students who do not. In an attempt to show every student the relevance of what they are learning, I always try to connect concepts to the students other classes, to their interests and to their everyday lives. There are a variety of learners in each class, and I deliberately plan my lessons to account for this. I try to create creative outlets, especially, that allow students to manipulate the material in ways other than what is found in short lectures and experiments.

Third, I consistently challenge students to think critically and work to expand their knowledge. At the beginning of the topic, students are asked to share what they already know about the topic and from there, I immediately launch into an activity sequence that will make them either confirm their ideas or question their understanding. At the end of the topic, each student should be able to see how their knowledge has evolved with the influx of information they received through the models, experiments, and activities we have done.

By using these as guiding principles for my planning and implementation, I have seen students flourish as knowledge seekers and young adults. They have begun to critically analyze the world around them and use the skills they have learned from working independently, in small groups and as a large team to become the successful students and contributing young adults that I knew they always could be.