**Stephanie’s Statement of Beliefs and Values**

One of my favorites quotes from Elie Wiesel states that “every question possesses a power that is lost in the answer.” Too often teachers are thought of as answer givers, or at least, those who decide if the answer is right or wrong. As a teacher, I do not want to be an answer giver for my students, I want to inspire their questions. As Wiesel suggests, questions are powerful. They are a sign of engaged thinkers who are excited and willing enough to think about the content, and desirous enough to know more about their world. An unanswered question is an adventure waiting to happen. Answers kill the creative process of learning, but questions encourage growth and development. My job is to guide students through this journey and ensure they are willing and courageous enough to seek out the answers themselves, and most importantly, continue asking questions.

This curiosity, while an essential part of being a student, is also an essential part of being a kid. Children are some of these most imaginative, inquisitive, and creative creatures in existence.  They are biologically programmed to learn! Therefore, my job is to harness those abilities and guide students toward discovery. I do not need to fill them with knowledge, but expand on the knowledge, talent, and experience that they already possess.  As such, I want to foster play, wonder, and excitement in my classroom because these are a natural part of youth. However, there is a balance between preparing students for the future and having them enjoy their school experience. An important element of this balance is the classroom environment. I want to create a space where my students feel safe, but is appealing enough to interest and engage them. Of course, the classroom environment does not just refer to what happens within the four walls of the school, but in the world outside as well. I want my students to learn through a variety of experiences, and travel beyond the desks. Through movement and exploration, students encounter a variety of tactile, visual, and auditory methods in learning. These experiences help students better remember the content as well as the fun. Ultimately, it helps each student discover what style of learning works best for them on an individual level. For a student to feel a part of the learning group, they need to first feel confident in their own skills and abilities. Each student needs to feel like they are traveling on their own personalized learning adventure, rather than comparing themselves to the work of the class.

And finally, as a person passionate about the arts, the incorporation of music, drama, story, and various other art forms will be a vital part of the environment in my future classroom. These art forms are way of expression, transformation, and teleportation. Stories allow travel without leaving your seat, music unites people in a shared complexity of emotions, and a painting offers a unique perspective on the mundane. As such, the arts are vital in developing empathy and understanding. If brought into the routine of the classroom, they can be a way of teaching complex social relationships, as well as facts and figures. Most importantly, they engage students on a creative level, which molds effective problem solvers.

In the end, I must admit that I am going into the teaching profession for selfish reasons. I do not want to grow up. I would happily be a kid for the rest of my life, and teaching forces you to think like your students. I am hoping their comments will constantly remind me of the wonderful nature of being young, and that I will get to join them on the journey of learning as we pursue questions to more questions. I will be a fellow explorer with “Ms.” as my title.