Life is a Box of Crayons

I have discovered that many interesting similes can be made between education and a box of crayons. It seems simple, but the more I think about the comparisons, the more connections come to me. As a starting point, a box of crayons is something fun that can be found in most elementary classrooms and is usually associated with fun activities or crafts. I believe creativity is essential in the classroom and it should be implemented every single day. The comparison gets a lot deeper than this, however.

The actual box may be seen as the job of an educator. As an educator, the box is in charge of keeping all the students (crayons) in line. However, it is not just the box that keeps the students up and active because they are constantly relying on their surrounding peers for support and guidance and on themselves to stay up straight (flat bottoms). An educator must pay sufficient attention to each student and do whatever it takes to keep students from ‘slipping between the cracks’ and being trampled on at the bottom of the box. It is also important to me, however, that those who do fall and get stuck can work their way back up with some help; perhaps some scaffolding or verbal interaction will reopen that box for the student and show him/her a way out. A teacher can never believe that a certain student is gone and can never be brought out again. A teacher must be organized but flexible, enthusiastic and colorful, knowledgeable about the subject, believe in the students, and have a big heart so each student can have a spot in it. A teacher should also be open and willing to assist students in any way possible.

The teacher should simultaneously be considered one of the crayons. Teachers do not simply pass on knowledge to students. They learn something everyday, just as the students do. The job of a teacher is to guide students to the necessary end, although many important sides and expansions will come unexpectedly along the way, such as every use of the crayon box. Students must be active to reach their knowledge and learning potential. If one crayon in the box never gets used (participates), no matter how intelligent or sharp it is, it won’t feel it has the same value or importance to the box as the others. This is the same as those being trampled at the bottom except the crayon is visible but is ignored or feels unimportant. Therefore, it is again the teacher’s responsibility to work to get this child engaged in the learning experience of becoming part of the ‘big picture.’ Students and teachers should learn respect and understanding of all people (who are all a part of this big picture) from all different areas—how to treat them, not to offend them, and what commonalities and differences exist (not only multicultural curriculum but also general knowledge of different groups).

Each crayon in a box will be different, and should be, especially as the box is used year after year. With use, some crayons will break, lose some wrapping, get scratched, and need sharpening. Students should learn their strengths and weaknesses and how to deal with or change them, whether it be through asking for help or going about it on their own. A teacher must not enforce assimilation, know when to point out differences or quietly pass by them, and how to pick battles. A relationship must be formed between the crayons, especially between the teacher and each student. A certain level of respect and authority should be generally known to the students, such as for the box, but they also realize there is a blending between the teacher as a crayon and the learner. These experiences are represented by the orange-yellow, blue-green, or brownish-purple crayons. Other relationships must be built through group work and cooperation. It is not enough to listen and learn about one another, students and teachers must also work together and incorporate opinions, ideas, and suggestions. As the box is being used to draw or decorate, students learn to take turns, observe others, collaborate, and be creative.
The relationships are important to the individuals and to the masterpiece that will eventually be the output. These things make the classroom and content important and unique each year.

What is this content? Now suppose the box is the curriculum. I believe the general aspects of curriculum should be mandated by all states, but the methods should be individually based, by both districts and teachers (maybe there is a new 1000-crayon box out there representing still not enough choices of methods to reach the same general end!). Students will learn more if the teacher is comfortable and really believes what she/he is teaching. Some type of SBM (school based management) system is very attractive, but only if there is commitment in time and effort. Parents and families should be involved as much as possible and can play a critical role (the smaller separators within the big boxes of crayons). The basics (primary colors) need to be deeply understood by students at different levels (shades), not just memorized for the tests. This content must also be integrated throughout the subjects. When one is creating a real work of art, some blending and mixing must occur to get the right effect. There should be language and writing involved in science and history and art and music taught with physical education and science. The subjects could be represented by the smaller separators in the box, but one should notice not all the greens are in one, they are thoroughly mixed.

It is important to consider that every student can not always excel in the basic/standard subjects, but another important part of education and curriculum should be the arts and activities. This will support social aspects of education and also give more chances for success. With an appropriate sense of community and uniqueness of class as well as individual, children will feel comfortable and safe in their ‘box,’ as well as outside of it. Although they will move on the next year, the relationships and knowledge should stick with the children. Students should be able to use the knowledge they have in new and different situations, requiring the ability to adapt and really use what they learn. Students will learn, but it may not always be shown on traditional tests (standardized or otherwise). It is more important that it be useful in live or authentic situations and in the future.

Teaching is the most important and essential occupation in society and I feel great obligation to do my very best to have an appropriate impact on students and their families. I feel very lucky to have the desire and need to be accepted into this occupation. I want to help students to like school and learning. Students should be as excited when they finally “get it” as their teacher. I would like students to feel prepared for the world by the time they graduate, although I am at the basis of the educational line (elementary), students may understand that the knowledge and experiences (scratches, missing paper, finished/unfinished pictures) they take on from an early age will affect them and possibly their success. The knowledge is likely to change, but I would also like to prepare kids to be comfortable with change, to adapt, and also to succeed at whatever level they aim for. Learning to set goals and understand the accomplishment when they reach them is very satisfying. I want to reach each child in some way during those important early years of their educational and developmental life and watch them leave my classroom with confidence in their success. I certainly plan to be a teacher who encourages my students, and myself, NOT to stay inside the lines.