

## Teaching Philosophy

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Teaching is about making connections with students and helping them discover who they truly are through building understanding of the world around them. The journey begins with accessing prior knowledge to create relevant and engaging provocations. Next, we co-design learning experiences to explore, challenge and expand conceptual understanding. If I were to simply tell students what they needed to know and how they should learn it, they would all be taking my path as opposed to finding their own way - and the bigger purpose would be lost. When they understand how they learn and take ownership of their learning, students are able to reach their full potential. However, the end is not what the students learn but what they do with what they learn. When they are connected to and motivated by their learning, they will be able to make positive contributions to the world around them.

I provide a safe and engaging environment that promotes respect and risk-taking. By building a community of trust in the classroom, students develop independence and are comfortable sharing their thinking, asking questions and debating ideas. This allows students to construct their own knowledge and helps them become lifelong learners. This isn't to say that I am not fully present to support them. I always get to know each student as an individual with specific needs and wants. I try to find ways to connect on a personal level so I truly understand what makes them "tick." With connection comes trust. I trust that they will be responsible learners and they trust that I will make their education challenging, engaging and relevant.

I believe connecting students to their learning in authentic ways is vital for engaging them, and experiential learning is the key to this authenticity. Students need to have a primary experience with what they are learning to truly develop conceptual understand. Getting dirt under their fingernails is vastly more effective than reading content out of a book. And getting them out of their seats is vital for engaging their whole brain. For example, if students are learning about ecosystems in their country of residence, it is important for them to spend time outdoors. If they are learning about economics, then they should spend time with local business owners. These engagements need to be more than just a field trip. They should be woven into the curriculum.

The tempo of the classroom needs to vary between these high energy interactions and calm independent work. Calm periods in my classroom allow for mindfulness. I begin with mindfulness as quietness and move into mindfulness as reflection. Students are surprised how their self-awareness grows over time. When they can quiet their constantly racing minds and bring attention to the present moment, they are able to better reflect on their learning. This allows them to see their successes, improvements, and areas that need more work.

Beyond their own learning, they also need to think critically about the world around them. With confidence and the right tools, students can evaluate the vast amounts of information they receive on a daily basis to determine what is important, which is an essential twenty-first century skill. Another important skill when looking toward the future is their ability to be leaders in the classroom and beyond. I help them develop leadership in several ways. First, I allow students the freedom to make many choices about their learning. Second, I plan learning experiences that require students to take responsibility for their actions. I emphasize how much difference they can make in the world, even as young people. When they are owning their learning, making choices about how they want to take action in their community, and designing and implementing service projects, students shine and discover who they really can be.

Authentic learning engagements, metacognition, reflection and choice are all examples of how differentiation occurs naturally in my classroom. However, because my students have various

levels of English and conceptual understanding, and they all deserve to be challenged and realize their potential, I also explicitly implement differentiation strategies. One example is visible thinking routines, which are used throughout the learning process to help students articulate their learning and see how it changes. Flexible grouping is an effective way of reaching students needs. This strategy keeps them from automatically seeing themselves as belonging to one level of achievement and helps them see that we all have talents and things we need to work on. It also keeps them from getting stuck in a rut because groups frequently change.

Assessment is also vital to meeting students' needs. When planning, I consider summative tasks first so I know which skills and learning behaviors students need to develop throughout the unit. I use formative assessments throughout to ensure students are progressing. As I gain more information about each student, I adjust my lessons and teaching strategies accordingly. Involving them in this goal-setting and progress-monitoring makes the data and outcomes even more valuable. I use a variety of performance-based summative assessments for student to show their understanding. They are given some guidelines about what must be included but must choose how to demonstrate what they have learned. This allows them to use their strengths and enjoy the assessment process. The tools I use to measure understanding vary to match the assessment guidelines, but generally include co-constructed rubrics, checklists or continuums.

I am continuously trying to improve my teaching practice through collaboration and professional development. I feel collaboration is the most important aspect of teaching. I know I don't have all the ideas, and I am open-minded and adaptable to changing the way I do things. I look to my grade team, single subject teachers, instructional coaches, learning support specialists, and professional learning network to offer relevant ideas. All of the contributions come together to make the best learning opportunities for my students. As for professional development, I try to be honest about areas of my teaching that need improvement and look for opportunities to learn something new that I can share with colleagues. My ultimate goal is to continuously improve myself as a teacher so that I can effectively guide students through their educational journey and ensure they reach their full potential.