Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

For my Masters of Arts in Teaching Portfolio, I wrote my philosophy of teaching and learning in the various content areas, in addition to education as a whole. These were written in the spring of 2001.

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Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

I have a balanced approach to learning that includes constructivism, acquirement and practice of skills, and "inquiry learning." I view "inquiry learning" as the Scientific Method being applied to real life. As we experience life, we are curious and ask questions; we form and test hypotheses. My constructivist view of learning is that children use what they know to make sense of what is new. In this way, they are actively participating in their learning rather than passively absorbing. Also, they are often more motivated when what they are learning has applications to real life. This, I believe, is especially evident when the content areas of math, reading, writing, science, social studies, and the arts are integrated. This integration occurs naturally when technology, such as the use of online conferencing and collaboration with other classrooms, is used to lower the walls of the classroom, and extend them to a global potential.

With technology, ideas and information may be explored, shared, and exchanged in a global classroom. As this Age of Information becomes more and more digital, the ability to use technology is paramount for students' success in our ever-changing world. It also allows for students to learn about and celebrate the differences and similarities between themselves and children of other cultures around the world. Finally, it helps children to realize that they can have a voice in this world, and that they can make a difference in this world – whether that be in their school, their local community, their country, or the world as a whole.

For me, I love making a difference in the lives of children. They are our future, and they are naturally curious about life. It is so rewarding to fan the embers of their interest in the world around us, and bring to life their fire for learning – for being explorers, scientists, inventors, authors, and investigators, as well as responsible citizens who realize they have a voice in this world.

I consider teaching to be about guiding and encouraging children, acting as a facilitator of their learning, and opening doors by asking "what if?" My goal is to be a part of opening those doors for the children of my own community.

Philosophy of Teaching Mathematics

"Students learn mathematics through the experiences that teachers provide. Thus, students' understanding of mathematics, their ability to use it to solve problems, and their confidence in, and disposition toward, mathematics are all shaped by the teaching they encounter in school."

Principles and Standards for School Mathematics
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000

Math was my favorite subject up through ninth grade. I was very fortunate to spend my primary grade years in a small school, with only six students in my grade, and with teachers who believed in the constructivist view of learning. I had the opportunity to be actively involved my learning. We were always doing math – by creating, constructing, and exploring all sorts of things that we would use in everyday life. I got to feel the joy and excitement that comes with discovering the why behind mathematical concepts. I would find a pattern and say "a-ha!" Place value became fascinating as we studied base systems other than base-10. To this day, I still love looking for patterns, creating my own patterns, and solving puzzles.

My love for math took a long break, however, from tenth grade all the way until January, 2000. What happened in tenth grade? I found myself in an honors Algebra II class with a teacher who took all the life out of math. He never wrote on the chalkboard. He orally recited answers from the textbook, and assumed that everyone followed along. Most of the class did seem to follow along. But I didn't. The next year, for Trigonometry, the same thing happened. The teacher just read the answers from the book. He never took the time to work them out on the board and explain *the why* behind each step in the solution. Even though I managed to somehow get A's, depending on procedural knowledge but no conceptual knowledge, those two years managed to convince me that I was just not good at math. I wasn't smart enough. It wasn't any fun if I didn't understand any of the *whys* behind the procedures. I became so afraid of math that I was very careful to avoid it all the way through college, and through the next many years.

It wasn't until I had to study for the GRE exam in preparation for graduate school that I had to face math again. I was so afraid. But I got a study book, and began to review algebra and geometry. To my great surprise and delight, I found that it was fun, and that I was good at it. It came alive for me again. I fell in love with math! As I had before tenth grade, I experienced how rewarding it is to face the challenge of an analytical math problem and use skills of problem-solving, reasoning, making connections, and communication to solve it. There is nothing better than the "a-ha!" that comes with finding a why, a pattern, an application to real life, or a strategy that works. While it is always exciting to find a solution, it is the process of working through a mathematical problem that is so engaging.

My lifetime experience with math has made me very aware of how much a teacher can make or break a class, and even influence a child's confidence in, and disposition toward, mathematics for future years. The math teachers I had in tenth and eleventh grades did not meet my learning style, nor did they have a constructivist view of learning. I take seriously my responsibility as a teacher to meet different learning styles, and to provide the scaffolding necessary for my students to feel successful. While I may not have the luxury of only having six students in my class, every student in my class will have the opportunity to be an active, hands-on mathematician. We will solve problems that may not have solutions, just as we find in real life every day! We will collaborate and communicate with each other about ideas and possibilities for how to approach and work through problems. My goals are for math to be meaningful and purposeful by being applicable to real life, and to be more than just procedural. I know how empowering it is to have conceptual knowledge in addition to procedural knowledge, and I want my students to experience how exciting it is to have those "a-ha's!"

In creating the national standards for school mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics have recognized the importance of actively "doing" mathematics rather than passively absorbing it, of constructivist views of how children learn, of teaching through problem solving, and of integrating assessment with teaching. There are ten standards that address content and process. The five content standards are number and operations, algebra, geometry, measurement, and data analysis and probability. The five process standards are problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, connections, and representation. Each of these standards is applicable to every grade level. The standards provide an effective blueprint for mathematics instruction. With that, I believe teachers need only bring a positive attitude, effective presentation, an understanding of how children learn, and a respect for the different learning styles in the classroom.

Philosophy of Reading and Writing

How often does one see a movie and say, or hear said, that the book was better? How is it that a book with no pictures can be more entertaining than the multi-sensory rush of the wide screen with Surround Sound and popcorn of a movie theater?

Written words have incredible power. They allow us to visualize a setting, a character, an adventure, a mystery, a real-life suspense – and transport us there, to a world seen by our minds rather than by our eyes. But words have no power at all without a writer to use them. A writer is like an artist who uses words as the medium for painting pictures. How powerful is a painting before the paint is applied to the canvas? Do we interpret, or find meaning, in the red paint that lies untouched on the artist's palette? It hasn't yet been used. Once it has been applied to the canvas and mixed with other colors, we see the red paint in the context of the whole painting. It is the painting as a whole that has meaning for us. After noticing the whole, we may be struck by individual aspects, or parts, of the painting, such as the particular shade of red, that we appreciate in that context. Take that shade of red out and place it on a white board, and it will no longer have the same meaning for us. Words are like that red paint. Until they are used, they have no meaning. Their meaning will change depending on the context in which they are used. It is from a whole sentence or piece of writing that we find and interpret meaning. After that, we may notice specific parts (shades of paint), such as descriptive words or metaphors that we particularly appreciate or find effective.

What is Reading?

If a written page is the writer's art, then reading is the reader's interpretation and appreciation of that art. Reading is the ability to see and hear not with one's eyes and ears, but in the vivid imagination of one's mind – as directed by the written words. No two people have exactly the same imagination, or the same set of prior knowledge and experiences, and so no two people will see exactly the same picture unfolding as they read the same words. How often do two people interpret a painting in different ways?! Consider the following sentence:

"The fierce whitecaps rode the sea alone."

Having lived on the ocean, I picture myself standing at the ocean's edge as I read the above sentence. I feel the wind, taste the salt, hear the roar of the waves crashing on the rocky cliffs, and smile with pleasure. If one has never seen the ocean in person, their picture would most likely be very different than mine! Different readers, different meanings.

Meaning is what reading is all about. The psycho-sociolinguistic philosophy of literacy instruction, also referred to as "whole language" when the term is not being misinterpreted, considers reading to be the attainment of meaning from written words. Since, like the red paint in the painting, words only have meaning within the context of the whole sentence, it follows that the reader must look first at the whole

sentence or page, rather than just focusing on individual words and parts of words. In addition, *meaning* depends on the transaction that takes place between the reader and text. Every reader brings a special array of prior experiences, knowledge, brain function, and personality to the text. Because no two readers have this exact same array, or schema, no two readers will gain exactly the same meaning from the text. This is an important point for a writer to consider. It is possible that the text will not mean the same thing to the reader as it does to the writer, or to two different readers. A writer, then, needs to consider his/her audience – the readers – and what point of view that audience will bring to their transaction with the text.

What is Writing?

The process of writing, as well as of reading, speaking, and listening, is all about language. Language is the vehicle by which we can communicate with each other. It is how we share the world. Language can be verbal, non-verbal, musical, or symbolic. Writing is a way of expressing this language. We can write using hieroglyphics and pictographs, ideographs, alphabet-based words, or musical notes. The purpose of writing is social; it is to interact with the reader. Learning how to write – how to create and pass on a meaningful message to the reader, and learning how to read – how to attain meaning from what is written, are important skills for human beings to develop. After all, human beings are social creatures.

Principles of Language Learning

Learning how to read and write follow the same principles of language learning that are followed when a child learns to speak. First, a child has choice. A child is the activator of his/her own learning. No one teaches a child how to talk. We don't say to babies, "bbb-aaa-nnn-aaa ." We say the whole word: "banana." A child learns to say the words from hearing us say the whole words, not from our sounding out the words as we speak. A child controls his/her own learning. Some children don't learn to speak until age 2 or 3, and then they come out with whole sentences. Other kids begin with single words at an earlier age. In other words, language learning moves from whole to part, as words are spoken as a whole before they are pronounced correctly, and as sentences are formed before a child necessarily uses the right verb tenses. Language learning also moves from part to whole, as most children learn individual words before they begin stringing them together in two, three, and four word sentences.

Second, language learning is flooded with meaning. Language learning occurs within the context of that which is concrete and tangible, and that which is occurring in present time. As the child develops, language related to abstract concepts and the past or future will be learned. Initially, acquisition of language is dependent on others because what the words actually are is social knowledge. Eventually, a person will be able to learn more language independently because one will be able to use the language already learned to help with learning more. We don't sit kids down in empty rooms and say, "Now learn about the world." Everything a child sees, hears, touches, tastes, and smells has meaning for the child.

Language learning takes place within the context of all that the child experiences in life. The more a child experiences, the more a child learns that language has a real purpose. Children want to communicate their needs. Children learn to talk when crying and pointing his finger no longer meets their needs. Children also learn to talk for social purposes. Perhaps they see mom and dad talking and think it looks like fun. They want to do that too.

Third, language is learned from having models. By listening to adults, children hear what the structure of sentences sounds like. They begin to learn that "I want a cookie" sounds better than "me cookie." They listen to the language used by others. Fourth, language is learned when children are able to take risks without fear of being rejected or admonished. If we let kids start out doing things non-conventionally, they will eventually adopt conventional ways. Fifth, language is learned through lots of practice in a meaningful context. When kids learn to talk, they don't stop talking! If they want to learn how to play baseball, they have to practice. Reading and writing is the same way. Learning anything new takes lots of practice.

Learning to Read: Cueing Systems, Reading Recovery Strategies

As with learning to speak, learning to read involves both whole to part, as in looking at the meaning of the whole page (including the picture) before focusing on the individual words, and part to whole, as in considering first letters, word families, and word endings for clues as to what the word is. There are three Reading Recovery strategies that children will learn to use, when modeled for them, that will help them become successful readers. These strategies involve meaning, structure, and visual cues. When reading, the children will consider *Does it make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right?* The first has to do with the context of the story. An emergent reader will depend heavily on the picture for a clue as to what words would makes sense. The second has to do with the sentence structure. If a child reads, "The clown smiling," she may realize that it doesn't sound quite right, and self-correct herself by saying, "The clown smiled." The third has to do with the grapho-phonemic cues. An emergent reader will learn to look at the first letter of the word in conjunction with the picture, and come up with a word that makes sense with the picture, and for which they hear the beginning sound matching that of the first letter they see in the word. Visual cues also include one-to-one matching of the spoken words with the written words, and sight words. When used together, these three cueing systems help children learn how to read, and how to continue developing as readers.

Strategies for Development of Reading Comprehension

The reader's level of comprehension is always important. There are many fun ways to help readers develop better comprehension of a story. For example, have the children read only so far in a story, and then predict what will happen next, or even write their own endings to the story. Story maps, a type of graphic organizer, are a great way to aid a reader's comprehension of a story. A story map may focus on identifying what is the main problem in the story and how it is solved, or on the setting,

character, and sequence of events taking place throughout the story. Story maps may even be used for looking at a story from different points of view, or for looking at cause and effect. Venn Diagrams are useful for comparing similarities and differences. K-W-L charts are useful for activating each student's schema, for setting a purpose in reading, and for helping them organize what they know, what they want to know, and what they have learned. Inquiry learning, such as RT (right there) questions, T & S (think and search), and OYO (on your own) questions, provides scaffolds that help students find deeper meaning what they read. Literature circles have the benefit of allowing kids to work together, learn from each other, and experience how much fun talking about literature can be. As a way of providing scaffolding for students who are new to literature circles, assigning jobs gives each child a more structured focus. Jobs may include a Discussion Director, a Story Mapper, a Literary Luminary, an Artful Artist, a Schema Connector, a Summarizer, a Word Watcher, a Travel Tracer, a Passage Master, and an Investigator. Each job comes with a job description and a recommended plan for how the job can be accomplished. Socratic Seminars are particularly effective as the outer circle has the opportunity to observe what types of communication are most effective. Readers' Theater, puppetry, and other types of story dramatizations are also fun ways that improve comprehension of a story, and they draw on a variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences. Drama is especially beneficial for the kinesthetic learner. With all of these activities, the purpose is to make reading meaningful – to develop the reader's skills of comprehension.

Learning to Write: Having a Purpose, Invented Spelling, Phonics, Reading Connection

As with reading, and in line with the principles of language learning, writing also needs to have a purpose. Why should kids learn to write? The purpose of writing is to express oneself, and to communicate. I believe it is important that we read what children write so that they can see there is a purpose to it. By reading their pieces of writing, it will become clearer to them that writing records what they have to say. When we treat children as writers, just as we treat toddlers as talkers, they will consider themselves as such. When I handed kindergarteners, first graders, and second graders little notebooks to use on our detective hunts, they put pencil to paper and felt like writers! When we started out on our first hunt, which was for any place we found water within the school, we stopped every time someone noticed a location of water. I would pull out my notebook and ask, "Water Fountain…What sound do you hear at the beginning of water fountain? What letter do you think water fountains starts with?" Of course, they mostly said, "wh…wh…wh…Y!" I had to smile. I told them they could write the word, the first letter, squiggly lines, or a quick picture. I modeled this for them every time we stopped to make a notation in our notebooks – books that they named "The Clue Book." The next time we pulled out our Clue Books and went on a hunt, they wrote independently. I would look around and see lots of young children busy making notes of some kind in their notebooks. They saw themselves as writers.

When children begin to write, they progress through several stages of spelling. I believe that invented spelling is developmentally appropriate. A child needs to be allowed to write freely, without

concern for spelling, in order for the child to feel empowered as a writer, and to feel ownership of his/her writing. If a child is restricted by spelling, then the child will be less likely to take risks and more likely to fear failure. I believe that early writers should be encouraged to use "kid spelling" rather than "book spelling." If they feel the need to ask the teacher how to spell every word, then they aren't learning how to take risks and how to have independence in their writing. When children are encouraged to say the word out loud and listen to how it sounds, and make an attempt at spelling it themselves, they are gaining experience in the skills of phonics.

Not only do children receive some focus on phonics when writing, but they gain a better understanding of the concepts of print. They get hands-on experience with print moving from left to right and from top to bottom, with one-to-one matching of spoken and written words, of spaces between words, and of capitals and periods. Interactive writing demonstrates the process of writing, shows that writing is useful, records children's ideas, provides writing that children can read, and gives children a chance to write part of the message. Language Experience activities allow children to participate in writing, to find it personally meaningful, and to have the concepts of print reinforced. Because the writing process is so beneficial to the reading process, and vice versa, it is helpful to have these interconnected as much as possible.

Balanced Literacy

A Balanced Literacy program achieves this interconnection between reading and writing. The components of a Balanced Literacy program include, for both writing and reading, time for modeled experience, shared experience, guided experience, and independent experience. Modeling refers to time in which the teacher models reading, by reading out loud, or models writing, such as in the Morning Message. Examples of Shared Reading and Shared Writing are, respectively, Choral Reading and Language Experience activities. An example of Guided Reading is small groups that include some instruction, support, and strategies for the students. In regards to Guided Writing, an example for intermediate students is Writers' Workshop, while for emergent writers it may be a time to work on handwriting. A balanced reading program also includes opportunities for independent reading, such as D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read), and re-reading of familiar books. A balanced writing program also includes opportunities for independent writing, such as during journal time, and Interactive Writing or Group Writing. I recommend the use of poetry during any of these times.

In regards to handwriting, I believe it is important for writers to know that there is a natural consequence for illegible writing – it can't be read! However, it is also important that handwriting activities be separate from activities that focus on writing for meaning. When students are trying to generate ideas, concern about spelling and handwriting may be too distracting. Those can come later, when a student is ready to publish.

Writers' Workshop

Writers' Workshop is a process in which the teacher guides the students from a blank page to a published piece of writing. I recommend that Writers' Workshop occur each day, and that a mini-lesson be given right before it. At the beginning of a new piece of writing, the writers focus only on fluency. This is when their ideas are turned into language. They can write what they want to write, without worrying about spelling or handwriting. Prompts, fast-writes, talking, drawing pictures, and brainstorming can aid in the development of ideas during this period of pre-writing. Once they have their ideas written down, they put together a first draft. Once that is complete, they begin to focus on form. This is the revision step, and the work it requires is similar to that done first by an architect, and then by a carpenter. Like an architect, the writers work on designing and organizing their writing in a beautiful way, with an emphasis on meaning – the big picture. This is when the writers need to conference with a peer who provide them with a reader's response. Then, like a carpenter, the writers actually get down to the nitty-gritty and make the building. Mini-lessons for the architect may focus on character building, plot expansion, point of view, voice, and tone. Mini-lessons for the carpenter may focus on sentence expansion with descriptive words, metaphors and similes, and how to create and use a variety of sentence structures to influence meaning. It is during this part of the process that mini-lessons can introduce grammar in a non-traditional way. After the revision is complete, the next step focuses on correctness. This is the editing part of the process, and it requires the work of a judge. The writers evaluate their writing based on social conventions: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, use of quotations, etc. Then, finally, there is the publishing step. The final piece of writing is written with neat handwriting, or typed on the computer. It is very exciting for students to become published authors, and it honors them to read their writing out loud, or share it in some way with others. Publishing it on a classroom web site is another fun and exciting thing to do.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my philosophy of teaching is based on the constructivist view of learning that, in reference to reading and writing, is referred to as Whole Language. This approach incorporates the principles of language learning and those of a Balanced Literacy program. It is an approach that allows children to construct their own learning by connecting their prior knowledge and experiences with what they discover anew. It brings purpose and meaning to reading and writing by connecting them to real life, to the child's personal life. Learning does not become lifeless to them, because the focus is on the big picture first, and then on appreciating the smaller parts. This approach empowers children to think of themselves as readers and writers, and as learners.

Philosophy of Teaching Science

"Inquiry into authentic questions generated from student experiences is the central strategy for teaching science. At all stages of inquiry, teachers guide, focus, challenge, and encourage student learning. Teachers who are enthusiastic, interested, and who speak of the power and beauty of scientific understanding instill in their students some of those same attitudes."

- *National Science Education Standards 1995*

Why do we use rock salt when making homemade ice cream? Where will we find the most bacteria within the school? Two summers ago, when I taught a class in *Science Secrets* to children age 6 – 8, these were two of the many questions we asked and explored. I hadn't yet heard of the term, *inquiry-based science*, but we experienced it every day for three weeks. By using the Scientific Method to research our questions, the children learned about forming hypotheses and controlling variables. They also learned that being scientists is FUN!

I believe that children are naturally curious about the world in which we live. They love the idea of being explorers, inventors, investigators, detectives, and scientists. Designing an experiment to test out their hypotheses often begins before they even enter school. A four-year-old may wonder if the cat likes chocolate milk better than white milk. What does the child do? Test it out, of course! Imagine walking into a kitchen in which some young children are surrounded by spilled flour, sugar, milk, eggs…And you ask, "What's going on in here?" And the children excitedly reply, "We're doing an experiment!" Yes, children are curious. Their curiosity is like a light that shines within them, and it is completely natural for them to search for answers to their questions through exploration and "experiments." If we shame them for making a mess, we are dimming the light inside them just a little. The more we want them to stay neat and tidy, and not mess up their clothes or the room, the more we dim that light. When we sit them down at a desk, and pass out textbooks and worksheets, and expect no talking, we risk blowing out that light altogether. I believe that children are natural scientists at a very young age, and it is our job, as teachers, to keep that light of curiosity burning as they grow older. To do so, children need to feel empowered, rather than guilty, in regards to designing experiments to test out their hypotheses.

In line with the constructivist view of learning, I believe that children learn by building on what they already know, by forming connections between the familiar and the unfamiliar, by the freedom to actively use all of their senses, and by discovering that what they are leaning is both meaningful and purposeful in real life. The process of Inquiry Learning parallels that of the Scientific Method: Identify a problem or question of personal interest and form a hypothesis about it; develop a plan for how to explore it; interact with others while collecting data and information; assess what one discovers from one's own research as well as from what others have discovered; and draw conclusions about one's original hypothesis. Inquiry Learning puts each student in the driver's seat

of learning. Rather than sitting docile while a teacher pours information into their heads, children take an active part in their learning. In real life, questions are often open-ended. There are often many possible answers, with many possible strategies for getting the answers. Inquiry Learning is about getting people to think, to focus on the process of coming up with an answer, rather than on the answer itself. Understanding the process by which one is able to come up with answers is a skill that can be transferred to new situations throughout life. It is empowering. I am excited about the National Science Education Standards because they support this philosophy of inquiry-based science.

Philosophy of Social Studies

"The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world."

- National Council for the Social Studies
  Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (1994)

In regards to my philosophy of social studies, I am in agreement with the position set forth by The National Council for Social Studies in *Curriculum Standards for Students* (1994) and *National Standards for Social Studies Teachers* (1997). One of their goals is that "students become able to connect knowledge, skills, and values to civic action as they engage in social inquiry" (NCSS, 1994). Skills include being able to acquire and manipulate data, develop and present policies and arguments, construct new knowledge, and participate in groups. Values in a democratic society such as ours include the fundamental rights to "life, liberty, individual dignity, equality of opportunity, justice, privacy, security, and ownership of private property. They include as well the basic freedoms of worship, thought, conscience, expression, inquiry, assembly, and participation in the political process" (NCSS, 1994). There are more controversial issues in a democratic society, however, such as individual beliefs vs. majority rule, national security vs. individual freedom, obeying the law vs. the right to dissent. It is important for young people to learn that their voices make a difference in a democratic society, and in the future of this world.

The National Council for Social Studies has defined ten themes of inquiry for students to pursue in social studies. These ten themes include: 1) Culture; 2) Time, Continuity and Change; 3) People, Places and Environments; 4) Individual Development and Identity; 5) Individuals, Groups and Institutions; 6) Power, Authority and Governance; 7) Production, Distribution and Consumption; 8) Science, Technology and Society; 9) Global Connections; and 10) Civic Ideals and Practices. These themes explore questions such as: *What are the common characteristics of different cultures? How am I connected to those in the past? What patterns are reflected in the groupings of things? How do landforms change, and what implications do these changes have for people? What influences how people learn, perceive, and grow? How do institutions change? What is power? How are governments created, structured, maintained, and changed? What is to be produced? How are the goods and services to be distributed? Is new technology always better than that which it will replace? What is civic participation and how can I be involved?* (NCSS, 1994). These themes of inquiry incorporate the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology.

I believe that social studies are most effectively taught by integrating these themes of inquiry into the content areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, technology, art, music, and drama. I believe that a constructivist view of learning is particularly applicable to social studies. Students construct

knowledge by fitting new experiences with what they have learned from prior experiences. Because each child has a unique set of past experiences, no two children will construct new ideas in the same way. In support of a constructivist view of learning, the National Council for the Social Studies advocates for social studies to be taught in a way that is meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active. Children, who are naturally curious, are always trying to make sense out of the world – to find meaning and purpose in it. When encouraged to actively participate in collaborative groups, to contribute to the community, and to take risks, students will connect their knowledge, skills, and values with meaningful applications to the real world.

An example of how social studies may be integrated into the curriculum in an active and meaningful way is to present a hypothetical political dilemma in a historical setting and time, and to assign small groups of students to work together in writing a conclusion to the story. Requirements may include development of characters and consideration of cause and effect. The students may choose to make a story map, to act out their story, or to create a model of the setting in which their story is taking place. It would be interesting to see the variety of resolutions that groups came up with for the dilemma. It would also be interesting to have the groups discuss, debate, and defend their own ideas.

Social studies is all about life, and finding meaningful connections between one's prior experiences and one's new experiences is what makes life an adventure of learning. Rote memorization of facts is taking the life out of social studies, and detaching the meaningful connections that children can make. I believe strongly in the importance of demonstrating how inquiry-based social studies can make every subject meaningful and fun.

Philosophy of Special Education

I believe that everyone has a different style of learning. Thus, there is diversity in every class because *all* children have special needs. Different children learn in different ways. If a teacher isn't able to challenge the exceptional learner, and modify the material for the learner with disabilities, both students will be bored and their time will be wasted. They will not learn either because they already know the material or because it is too far beyond their level of ability (Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development). I value each individual child, and want to respect the diversity of learning styles, languages, and cultures. It is my goal to design curriculum that has personal meaning and applications to real life, and to select instructional strategies that reach out to a wide variety of learning styles and modalities, as well as tap into the full range of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. When a child is interested in the content, and able to use his/her preferred learning style at least part of the time, the child will be more likely to become engaged in the learning process, and thus less likely to have behavior problems. I believe one of the best ways to accomplish this goal is to integrate drama, art, and music into the subject areas.

Research has shown music to have a positive effect on the brain's ability to learn. Rhythm and rhyme are patterns to which the brain responds well. Not only are the arts fun, but they access the right lobe of the brain, thus making learning an activity that uses the whole brain. Knitting and Form Drawing, for example, help students gain the fine motor skills required for writing, and they use both sides of the brain. Puppet theater and plays are an excellent way to help children view situations from other perspectives. By acting a story out, the abstract inquiry into other points of view is made more concrete. Just as manipulatives allow for an abstract mathematical problem to become concrete, the concrete nature of drama scaffolds understanding of behavior, motivations, and perspectives. Drama is also wonderful for the ESL student as it provides the opportunity for communication and expression that is not dependent on verbal language.

In addition to the integration of drama, art, and music, there are other instructional strategies that provide scaffolds for children who, according to Piaget, are in different cognitive stages. One of these strategies is Cognitive Guided Instruction, or CGI, as developed by Tom Carpenter. CGI is based on the process by which children problem-solve. Children follow the action in a sentence. If a problem is worded in a way in which there is no action for the child to simulate, it will be a more challenging problem. The wording, or structure of the sentence, affects the difficulty level. By understanding how a child thinks through a problem, adjusting the wording of the problem is a way of scaffolding the child's problem solving skills. Another strategy for scaffolding is that of Inquiry Learning. As with other constructivist approaches, open-ended questions are encouraged. In real life, questions often don't have a right or wrong answer. Problems are messy. There is more than one way to look at things. If children are only asked questions that have one correct answer, they won't learn how to handle the questions and problems in real life. When scaffolded from "right there" questions which are concrete and literal, to "think

and search" questions which require inference, to "on your own" questions which are abstract and require personal opinion, children learn how to think for themselves. Although open-ended questions may create some disequilibrium for students who are uncomfortable without an exact answer, disequilibrium allows a child's potential to be stretched. It precedes learning.

Another way to differentiate the curriculum for children of different abilities is to emphasize the process of construction and problem solving, rather than just focusing on the product or solution. There is so much joy and excitement that a child can experience as he or she makes new discoveries, or "a-ha's!" during the process. I also believe in the importance of forming connections between school and real life. When what is learned can be applied to real life, there is personal meaning. No matter what the learning style of the child, it is helpful when there is personal meaning in what one learns. It is also helpful when a child is able to teach others what he/she has learned. More knowledge is retained from teaching others than from reading or writing. Jigsawing is a type of cooperative learning where children can solidify their learning by teaching their peers. In cooperative groups, children are given the opportunity to work together to construct knowledge. When correctly modeled and practiced, cooperative groups allow children to encourage each other and learn from each other. They also provide opportunities for guidance in social skills, positive messages, respect for others, and responsibility. As part of a constructivist classroom, children take an active role in learning self-discipline, moral autonomy, and mutual respect. As a class, rules and consequences may be established. Class meetings, perhaps led by a rotating student government, empower children to be a part of a democracy where they have some choices and control over their lives.

Some children need more structure than others. For example, if a child needs to know what to expect at all times, and struggles with surprises, daily and weekly schedules may be posted for his/her benefit. If the schedule is going to change, the teacher may give the children advance warning of when and why the change will occur. If a child is easily overwhelmed by too many choices or things going on at the same time, the teacher may give that child one task to focus on at a time. If a class constructs its own rules and consequences for behavior that breaks those rules, then the students feel a sense of control over their lives.

In the real world, the end product matters, the solution is important, and behavior has consequences. In regards to learning, however, so much comes from focusing on the process rather than the end product. Because each student has a different brain, different gifts and talents, and learns differently, there is a need for differentiation in instruction, and that is possible during the processing of a task. There are many means to achieving an end.

Philosophy of Education (emphasis on constructivism)

What is our world's greatest natural resource? To me, the answer is children. The future will be in the hands of today's children. It is important, therefore, for children *to care* about this world, each other, and themselves. In order to care, I believe that children have to achieve Erik Erikson's stages of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. They need to learn how to trust, to make choices, to create, to invent, to pretend, to take risks, to engage in lively and imaginative activities with peers, and to experience successes. In short, my philosophy of education is that by providing opportunities for children to actively participate in the construction of their own learning and sense of responsibility, they will learn to care.

My philosophy of education has been greatly influenced by John Dewey. Dewey is a constructivist and a pragmatist. He maintains that children have instincts, one of which is to make and construct things. Another is to talk about what they have made. As the child makes something and talks about it, he or she becomes excited about finding out why, and about realizing there is more that can be discovered. This excitement brings out one's creativity. Dewey believes that when a child is allowed to explore something that is of interest to him or her, and finds out how innovative and useful he or she can be, motivation to learn will come from within the child. Dewey believes in the importance of real-life applications for school projects. Working on projects that contribute to the community will make children feel like productive members of the community, be that the community of the classroom, or the community of the townspeople. When children feel part of a community, their sense of usefulness, productivity, responsibility, respect for self and others, confidence, and creativity will increase.

There are several aspects of constructivism that I really appreciate. One is the emphasis on the process of construction and problem solving, rather than just focusing on the product or solution. There is so much joy and excitement that a child can experience as he or she makes new discoveries, or "a-ha's!" during the process. I also believe in the importance of forming connections between school and real life. When what is learned can be applied to real life, there is personal meaning. No matter what the learning style of the child, it is helpful when there is personal meaning in what one learns. It is also helpful when a child is able to teach others what he/she has learned. More knowledge is retained from teaching others than from reading or writing. Jigsawing is a type of cooperative learning where children can solidify their learning by teaching their peers. In cooperative groups, children are given the opportunity to work together to construct knowledge. When correctly modeled and practiced, cooperative groups allow children to encourage each other and learn from each other. They also provide opportunities for guidance in social skills, positive messages, respect for others, and responsibility. As part of a constructivist classroom, children take an active role in learning self-discipline, moral autonomy, and mutual respect. As a class, rules and consequences may be established. Class meetings, perhaps led

by a rotating student government, empower children to be a part of a democracy where they have some choices and control over their lives.

As some children need more structure than others, I believe there is room in a constructivist classroom for some behaviorist techniques. If some children need to know what to expect at all times, and struggle with surprises, daily and weekly schedules may be posted for their benefit. If the schedule is going to change, the teacher may give the children advance warning of when and why the change will occur. If a child is easily overwhelmed by too many choices or things going on at the same time, the teacher may give that child one task to focus on at a time. If a class constructs its own rules and consequences for behavior that breaks those rules, then there is a behaviorist technique being used in a constructivist classroom. In other words, it is possible to find a balance between the benefits of pure constructivism, and the practical aspects of how life works in the real world. In the real world, the end product matters, the solution is important, and behavior has consequences. In regards to learning, however, so much comes from focusing on the process rather than the end product.

I believe that everyone has a different style of learning. Thus, there is diversity in every class because *all* children have special needs. Different children learn in different ways. If a teacher isn't able to challenge the exceptional learner, and modify the material for the learner with disabilities, both students will be bored and their time will be wasted. They will not learn either because they already know the material or because it is too far beyond their level of ability (Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development). I value each individual child, and want to respect the diversity of learning styles, languages, and cultures. It is my goal to design curriculum that has personal meaning and applications to real life, and to select instructional strategies that reach out to a wide variety of learning styles and modalities, as well as tap into the full range of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. When a child is interested in the content, and able to use his/her preferred learning style at least part of the time, the child will be more likely to become engaged in the learning process, and thus less likely to have behavior problems. I believe one of the best ways to accomplish this goal is to integrate drama, art, and music into the subject areas.

Research has shown music to have a positive effect on the brain's ability to learn. Rhythm and rhyme are patterns to which the brain responds well. Not only are the arts fun, but they access the right lobe of the brain, thus making learning an activity that uses the whole brain. Puppet theater and plays are an excellent way to help children view situations from other perspectives. By acting a story out, the abstract inquiry into other points of view is made more concrete. Just as manipulatives allow for an abstract mathematical problem to become concrete, the concrete nature of drama scaffolds understanding of behavior, motivations, and perspectives. Drama is also wonderful for the ESL student as it provides the opportunity for communication and expression that is not dependent on verbal language.

In addition to the integration of drama, art, and music, there are other instructional strategies that provide scaffolds for children who, according to Piaget, are in different cognitive stages. One of these strategies is Cognitive Guided Instruction, or CGI, as developed by Tom Carpenter. CGI is based on the process by which children problem-solve. Children follow the action in a sentence. If a problem is worded in a way in which there is no action for the child to simulate, it will be a more challenging problem. The wording, or structure of the sentence, affects the difficulty level. By understanding how a child thinks through a problem, adjusting the wording of the problem is a way of scaffolding the child's problem solving skills. Another strategy for scaffolding is that of Inquiry Learning. As with other constructivist approaches, open-ended questions are encouraged. In real life, questions often don't have a right or wrong answer. Problems are messy. There is more than one way to look at things. If children are only asked questions that have one correct answer, they won't learn how to handle the questions and problems in real life. When scaffolded from "right there" questions which are concrete and literal, to "think and search" questions which require inference, to "on your own" questions which are abstract and require personal opinion, children learn how to think for themselves. Although open-ended questions may create some disequilibrium for students who are uncomfortable without an exact answer, disequilibrium allows a child's potential to be stretched. It precedes learning.

In conclusion, I believe that teaching is about giving of oneself to the community, and making a contribution to the future of our world. It is about paying attention to children, and taking joy in the discovery of how each child thinks and figures things out. I believe that giving attention to a child may increase the child's motivation, sense of responsibility, and self-esteem. Within each child are planted the seeds of excitement for learning, and I want to water and feed those seeds. Being a teacher is also about attitude. Through my example and attitude, I want children to see that learning is about exploring, being curious, laughing, playing, helping, wondering, giving, creating, loving, knowing joy… I want children to find the world a fascinating and beautiful place. I want to foster in children a love of literature, a sense of wonder about science, and a respect for the special individuality of each human being. I want to challenge and excite the children who may understand more than I do about some topics, and to also provide for the children with special needs the opportunities that they, like all children, need for independent successes. Through modeling and guidance, I want to encourage children in how to make behavior choices, how to determine right from wrong for themselves, and how to accept personal responsibility for their actions. I want to have a class in which individual ideas are voiced and respected. Most of all, I want us to have fun as we enjoy the adventure of learning together.