Teaching Philosophy

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Throughout my career as a classroom teacher, school administrator, instructional coach, and college and university instructor, I have come to believe that meaningful learning occurs when individuals are challenged intellectually, supported through trusting relationships, and given opportunities to reflect on their growth. My teaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that learners bring valuable experiences, knowledge, and perspectives into every learning environment. My responsibility as an educator is to build on those strengths while creating conditions where individuals can question, collaborate, take intellectual risks, and develop the confidence to apply what they learn.

Learning Through Inquiry and Meaningful Engagement

I view learning as an active process of constructing understanding through experience, discussion, and reflection. Influenced by constructivist learning theory, ambitious teaching practices, and research on instructional effectiveness, I design learning experiences that move beyond memorization toward deeper understanding and application. I believe effective teaching requires clear learning goals, intellectually demanding tasks, purposeful assessment, and opportunities for learners to explain and defend their thinking.

In my Secondary Mathematics Methods courses at the College of St. Scholastica, I emphasize the importance of maintaining cognitive demand, facilitating meaningful mathematical discourse, and anticipating how students might approach challenging problems. Teacher candidates examine instructional scenarios, analyze student thinking, and consider how their instructional decisions influence learning. These experiences help future educators develop practical skills alongside the professional judgment necessary to respond thoughtfully to diverse learners.

Relationships, Feedback, and Reflective Practice

I believe relationships are fundamental to effective teaching. Students and educators are more willing to ask questions, acknowledge uncertainty, and explore unfamiliar approaches when they feel respected and supported. My work in instructional coaching and doctoral research has reinforced the importance of trust, professional agency, and meaningful dialogue in the learning process.

Within my courses and supervision of teacher candidates, I strive to make feedback specific, timely, and useful. I encourage learners to examine evidence, consider alternative perspectives, and identify meaningful next steps. I also recognize that feedback is a reciprocal process. Listening to students, examining their work, and reflecting on my instructional decisions are essential to improving my own teaching.

Equity, Context, and Rural Education

My experiences in rural Alaska and northern Minnesota have significantly influenced how I approach teaching and educational leadership. Rural communities possess tremendous educational strengths, including strong relationships, local knowledge, and opportunities for learning connected to community and place. At the same time, educators in smaller systems often navigate limited resources, multiple responsibilities, and challenges accessing specialized professional support.

These experiences have taught me that effective instruction must be responsive to context. I believe equitable teaching requires maintaining high expectations while recognizing differences in students' backgrounds, experiences, identities, and access to opportunities. In higher education, I want future teachers and leaders to understand how their instructional decisions are shaped by the communities they serve and to approach those communities with curiosity, cultural responsiveness, and respect.

My Fulbright-Hays experience in Finland further strengthened my appreciation for student agency, educator well-being, inquiry-based learning, and learning environments that extend beyond traditional classroom walls. I bring these international perspectives into my teaching while emphasizing the importance of thoughtfully adapting educational practices to local needs.

Preparing Reflective Educators and Leaders

Ultimately, my goal is to prepare educators who can connect research with practice, make informed instructional decisions, and continue learning throughout their careers. I want students to leave my courses with more than knowledge of educational theories or teaching strategies. I want them to understand why particular practices matter, recognize when adjustments are necessary, and feel prepared to make thoughtful decisions in complex educational settings.

I hold myself to these same expectations. Through evidence, reflection, collaboration, and continued professional learning, I work to refine my teaching and better support those I serve. Whether preparing future teachers, mentoring practicing educators, or supporting emerging school leaders, my commitment remains the same: to create meaningful learning experiences that strengthen professional confidence, encourage critical inquiry, and contribute to lasting educational growth.