

### **My Frame of Reference: Third Draft (September 2015)**

I have always been passionate about social justice, environmental protection, respect for nature and holistic health. As a mother, I dream of a bright future for my children: a world where every being is respected and valued, where everybody lives a fulfilled life, where community members support each other in the accomplishment of individual and common goals, where cooperation is valued over competition and where the earth is recognized as a life-giving entity that humans protect for future generations. This is the vision that brought me into the teaching profession and that informs all that I do in my life and in the classroom. I believe that in order for this vision unfold, it must be brought into the educational system. Through education, we can teach important values, habits of mind, attitudes and competencies to the next generation to help humanity evolve in the right direction.

As a teacher, I believe that an important part of my role is to be a good role-model of the values and attitudes that I want to teach. I strive to know myself and evolve my own beliefs and habits of mind. I do this by practicing yoga and meditation, by cultivating self-love and compassion towards myself and others and by adopting healthy living practices as well as a growth mindset. I see each moment - success, failure, challenge or conflict - as an opportunity for growth and transformation. Every morning, I take time to feel gratitude and wonder for the opportunities that the day will bring and I set the intention to be of service to my family, friends, students, community and the Earth.

These values are at the core of who I am and, therefore, they constitute the foundation on which I build my frame of reference for teaching. Before I move on to articulating my philosophy of education, I want to acknowledge that I teach on traditional First Nations territory. In the spirit of fostering an inclusive and post-colonial society, I base my framework of education on the [First Peoples Principle of Learning](#) (FNESC) as well as on other theories of education such as the OECD Principles of Effective Learning Environments, constructivism, imaginative learning and Ecojustice education which further elaborate on similar principles.

*“Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.*

*Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.*

*Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.*

*Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.*

*Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).*

*Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.” (FNESC)*

I believe that the future of humanity depends on the capacity of our children to think holistically, critically and creatively. Along with teamwork and cooperation, these skills will build the capacity of future generations to solve the social and ecological crisis that we face. For this to occur, each child must understand his place in the whole: everything is interrelated and interdependent. Therefore, a teacher must be a connector: I connect people, places, knowledge and action with each other.

### **Classroom connections: connecting with self and others**

In order to create a positive learning environment, I strive to create connections with my students and to help them see the connections they have with each other. In my classroom, we are first and foremost humans and we are all equals. We all have something to contribute to the community as learners and as teachers. As humans, we all share similar traits, characteristics, hopes and dreams. We all deserve to feel loved, esteemed and cared for. Recognizing all that we have in common and finding “sameness” and connections between members of the learning community will ensure that we build strong relationships guided by love, respect, care and trust. A safe learning environment is necessary for all learning to happen.

Personal greetings, warm smiles, eye connection, stories, songs, humour and positive feedback are ways in which I create a positive learning environment and show appreciation for my students. I strive to integrate community building activities and sharing circles in the daily schedule. Flexible grouping that varies according to the learning activities gives a chance to students to get to know each other.

While all learners share similar human traits and aspirations, they are all unique: a special blend of specific genetic and personality traits, interests, talents, beliefs, cultural background, intelligences and learning styles. A classroom climate centered around respect and celebration of diversity creates a safe place for each child to explore who he is and grow towards his full potential. In my classroom, children are encouraged to explore and share what they are passionate about through self-directed projects such as the Sparks project.

I also celebrate diversity by using assessment to inform differentiation, connecting students with learning activities that will cater to their learning styles and readiness to learn.

During my 2015 spring practicum, I taught a differentiated multiplication unit where I divided the class in three learning pods following the close analysis of their results in a pre-assessment as well as my knowledge of their learning styles. Through differentiated instruction, I managed to connect all students to activities that were within their zone of proximal development. I will never forget the look of pride of students who weren't used to experiencing success in mathematics and who, finally, felt like it was within reach.

Moreover, I help students make personal connections with what they are learning and I try to choose themes that connect with the interests and passions of my students.

During my December 2014 practicum, I used a hockey theme to teach two daily lessons (math, physical education, arts and science). This theme was chosen to build a relationship with - and foster the engagement of - a specific student who is a passionate hockey player but was totally disengaged in school.

### **Connecting the classroom with the community and the land**

Connecting with other teachers and community organizations to open-up the learning and facilitate a wider feeling of community is also crucial. I would love to involve my students in authentic and experiential learning projects that serve their school and their community. Implementing a composting service at the school, cleaning-up the shoreline or presenting a play for bullying-prevention week, there are millions of opportunities to connect our learning with the wider community. I also look for meaningful ways to bring the children outdoors and experience the natural world directly. This experiential place-based learning allows for the development of a strong sense of belonging and teaches children that their actions can make a difference.

Because teachers can't do it all, I believe that parents' involvement in their child's learning journey is crucial. As a teacher, I need to provide multiple opportunities for them to celebrate and take part in their children's learning. I intend to connect with parents early in the school year and get their input on how best to serve their child's learning needs. Parents will be invited to volunteer in the classroom and during experiential learning activities. Another way that I intend to involve parents when I have my own classroom is by using technology. A classroom website and a newsletter will be established to communicate regularly with parents regarding what is happening in the classroom. I will also support my students in the creation of their own password protected website that will serve as an e-portfolio to showcase their best work. This website will allow me to post feedback on students' work and behaviour in real time, avoiding report-card surprises.

### **Connecting learning outcomes for integrated learning**

In terms of planning and delivery of the curriculum, I believe that integration of curriculum subjects within broad and engaging themes or projects better allows for children to develop holistic thinking skills. While the curriculum is separated in subjects, teaching doesn't have to be segregated and compartmentalized, nor taught without context. Learning without context can be hard to transfer to real-life situations. I feel that my role is to bring the curriculum to life by creating integrated and authentic learning situations and experiences. I connect the learning outcomes with each other and with the learner's body, emotions, imagination, mind and spirit to create a holistic learning experience that engages the whole child (Egan; Cajete). I try my best to have options for self-directed learning projects in order for children to further pursue what

interests them within the curriculum and to choose the delivery format that best allows them to demonstrate their learning (e.g. written report, oral presentation, video, comic strip, song, website, etc).

In my 2015 spring practicum, I implemented an integrated unit (social science, visual arts, drama, language arts, science) on local Indigenous culture and on the history of relationships between Canada and First Nations. We explored stories, symbols, values, arts, crafts and the traditional life of First Nations, including their use of simple machines. We also dove into the story of colonization and residential schools. The unit included an inquiry-based project where students worked in small teams (2-3 students) to learn about an aspect of the traditional way of life of BC Coastal First Nations. They had a broad choice of topics and were grouped by interests (clothing, fishing, housing, food sources, culture, potlatch). A portion of the inquiry had to include a hands-on component and demonstration of learning. We organized a celebration of learning where students presented what they had learned to their parents and each other. For this occasion, a big team of students came together to organize and host a potlatch. Within the team, sub-groups were in charge of invitations and hosting, organizing the food and beverages and preparing gifts for all guests. Final projects also included: models of long houses, a salmon weir diorama, weaving demonstrations and a dance performance.

### **Connecting assessment with learning**

In terms of assessment and evaluation of students' progress, I try to often use descriptive feedback in a formative manner, providing students with useful information on what they do well and what is the next step to improve their work. Other assessment methods that I have used include pre-assessment, anecdotal observations, tickets out the door, pre & post-lesson self-assessments linked to I CAN statements and peer assessment. I use the information gained from ongoing assessment to inform my teaching. Whenever possible, I try to provide exemplars of good quality work to help students understand what is expected of them. My wish for my practice is to use portfolio assessment and to move away from grades as a reporting method because this is better suited to a teaching philosophy based on individualized and holistic learning.

In conclusion, this frame of reference reveals my values for holistic and integrated teaching with a focus on connectedness. My goal is not only to instruct but to educate the whole person: learning should support the development of each child's potential and well-being and allow children to find their place into the world. My philosophy integrates most of the First Peoples Principles of Learning as well as the Principles for Effective Learning Environment (OECD). It is also inspired by modern theories such self-directed learning, constructivist pedagogy and imaginative education. It tends toward integration of curricular content within authentic place-based learning experiences.

## How my Frame of reference has evolved over the last year

When entering the program, I already had a strong sense of the values that I wanted to carry into my teaching. My frame of reference was a reflection of those ideas, with little reference to personal examples since I did not have any teaching experience. With a year of practicum experience and more classes under my belt, I started to add some personal examples that explained how I put those values in practice. However, it was getting very long and disorganized, and it was missing an important focus: connections. So this time, I have rewritten my frame of reference with a focus on connections: connections with students, with community, the land, the curriculum and assessment. I kept the introduction because it speaks of my core values and of who I am outside of the classroom. It is still a little long, which reflects my tendency to always overthink and over-do!

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