

Educational Philosophy

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Autobiography

To date, my professional education includes teacher preparation courses while attending the Santa Rosa Junior College and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) in Art Education from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. The majority of my field experience and student teaching has been in early childhood classrooms. I have developed a deep passion and enthusiasm for teaching kindergarten through third grade. Throughout my undergraduate teacher preparation program, I have volunteered and student-taught in several culturally diverse elementary schools throughout the San Francisco and Rohnert Park-Cotati Unified School Districts.

In addition to my baccalaureate degree fieldwork, I have taught English to orphaned children in Cambodia and Thailand during my school breaks. This experience in Southeast Asia was the catalyst that initially inspired me to become a teacher. In January of 2013, I completed a State of California approved Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CTESOL) from Transworld Schools in San Francisco. Concurrently, I served as an ESL teacher intern at Transworld Schools teaching the English language to beginner through advanced level multilingual international students.

I am currently enrolled in the M.A. in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning and Multiple-Subject Credential program at Sonoma State University. Upon graduation, I plan on beginning my journey as a full-time educator. Long-term goals of mine are to pursue a Ph.D. in Education and eventually establish my own early learning school, dedicating my career to teaching young children.

My Goals for Young Children

My passion as an early childhood educator is to nurture my students' social-emotional development, imagination, and guide my young learners in becoming innovative visionaries and life-long learners. My responsibility as a teacher is to provide a warm, caring, and trusting environment that supports risk-taking, promotes creativity, and self-value. I will empower my students to learn and help them reach their full potential.

My goals are to develop a student-centered classroom. My curriculum planning will be influenced by observing and responding to my students' unique dispositions and interests. I will encourage inquiry, play, and reflection to guide my teaching, and abide by "the ABCs of intrinsic motivation: Autonomy, Belonging, and Competence" (Dalton and Watson, 2001) to foster my students' enthusiasm to successfully learn. I believe children need freedom within limits, to feel accepted by others, and be trusted to accomplish things on their own.

How I Believe Children Learn

If I could develop an ideal educational setting, it would be an environment where the arts, play and inquiry flourish. If someone walked into my classroom, they would find busy, engaged, and enthusiastic learners who would eagerly invite them to join their hands-on activities. My beliefs resonate with the NAEYC's position statement regarding early childhood curriculum, assessment, and evaluation. According to the NAEYC, teachers should design their instruction around the need for children "to be cognitively, physically, socially and artistically active" (NAEYC, 2003, p. 2). The words *artistically* and *active* are especially significant to me, as I

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strongly believe that children are doers and artists who actively observe and explore the world with their natural curiosity about life. I believe children learn best when they develop an understanding of a curricular concept through process and reflect upon their learning via a resulting product. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who was himself a product of the early kindergarten movement, said that a child's "environment ought to be as truly beautiful as we are capable of making it" (Wright, 1934, p. 35), so why not decorate our classrooms with beautiful visual evidence of student learning.

The role that I would play in my students' environment would be both as an inquirer and a collaborator working alongside my students. I will nurture my students' growth as creative problem solvers through project work. They will create tangible representations of their learning and reflect upon their accomplishments and the work of their peer group.

Classroom Community

I strive to make sure every voice in my classroom is recognized, instilling a sense of community that trusts as well as supports one another. I support the use of class meetings for children to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment. According to Dr. James Thompson, meetings "satisfy students' need for love and belonging because their teacher and peers are accepting them and they are taking part in an activity with their friends" (2014, p. 3).

My goal is to maintain an open line of communication with the parents and/or guardians of my students through conversing with them during arrival/dismissal, phone conversations,

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composing weekly classroom newsletters or sending emails. My goal will be to build relationships with each every one of the students' families.

I believe young children are naturally inquisitive, creative, and competent; I create classroom communities which reflect my beliefs. I believe in providing a choice-based environment where students have control over their own learning and are responsible for their own actions. I design my classroom to resemble an artist's studio where children are encouraged to experiment, explore, create, and reflect on their own experiences.

Curriculum

As my background is in art education, I support an arts-integrated curriculum, I feel that it facilitates an enriching and interactive learning environment. The visual arts will guide my instruction in teaching all areas of the curriculum. I will encourage students to learn through their senses, symbolization, and self-activity.

Engaging young learners in the arts creates a comfortable, safe, and fun environment to express themselves uninhibitedly. Unlike many other subjects, there are no "wrong" answers in art and virtually any child has the ability to be successful. English language learners are able to use art as their "visual document" in helping them through the language acquisition process. In Elliot Eisner's "10 Lessons the Arts Teach", his 8th lesson states that "The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said." Engaging special needs students in the arts enables them to think for themselves and become independent learners by practicing skills such as persistence and perseverance in the creative process. Young children can utilize drawing tools and clay as an emotional release to comfort them through any personal stresses. They will develop social skills

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through collaborating and communicating on group art projects. Physical development is enhanced through refining gross and fine motor skills. While engaging in the arts, students are able to think for themselves by creating visual imagery of personal interest and incorporating their individual identity and culture in a way that is second nature to them. The sense of accomplishment a student gains upon finishing an artwork builds a student's self-confidence and self-worth, knowing they can succeed in the arts. In an early field experience, I remember a kindergartener who once said to me, "Mr. Ryan, you're such a good artist *and* teacher!" This was a reminder that an art educator can captivate young minds with the magic of the arts and inspire students in their own creative pursuits.

The basis of curriculum originates from federal and state standards, however, it should be taught in a way that acknowledges both the child and teacher's interests. Curriculum should be adapted to a child's immediate environment (school, local community, etc) allowing the child to inquire, investigate, represent, and reflect through the process and product of their learning.

In teaching the language arts, I understand that nurturing an intrinsic love of language and literacy is important in developing a child's communication across the curriculum. I plan to guide my students into becoming enthusiastic readers, creative writers, fluent speakers and active listeners which all facilitate their growth as literate individuals. To encourage my students to read, they will see me read, and in order to show them that I value reading, I will read alongside them. Donalyn Miller, author of "The Book Whisperer," stated that "we make time for what we value, and if we value reading, we must make time for it" (2009, pg. 52). As much as I advocate for parents to read to their child daily, the only way I will know if my students are making sense of what they are reading is if I make read-alouds, independent reading, and book talks a daily

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routine in my classroom. I want to transform my classroom into a “library” that meets the interests of my learners. My classroom will encourage students to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening as a daily integrated experience across the curriculum.

I will utilize the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) model in my classroom as a vehicle for language learning. The VTS model promotes Common Core critical thinking skills. Students are encouraged to think deeply, make inferences, draw conclusions based on evidence, and practice explaining their reasoning by describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of art. The VTS model is effective for young children who rely on picture clues to make sense of text, also English language learners generally improve their language skills by observing art. I have found throughout my field experiences that VTS is important in developing literacy skills for both native and non-native English speakers.

When I teach mathematics, students will develop into mathematical problem solvers through daily practice by encouraging them to explain their reasoning as to how they arrived at their solutions. I will assume the role of an inquirer when teaching mathematics by asking open-ended questions that challenge children to think, analyze, reason, and prove their mathematical theories. I will strive to use math as a daily integrated activity during transitional times and through classroom routines.

In teaching science, I will guide students to become curious observers of the world around them including plant and animal life. Students will conduct hands-on experiments using materials from their natural environment. Through planning inquiry and discovery-based learning experiences, students will be encouraged to figure things out for themselves. Students

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can document plant and animal life through technical drawing, and then chart their observations in their science journals. They will develop an understanding of different body parts and habitats of animals by constructing three-dimensional models. I will take advantage of local community field trips to local zoos, aquariums, and gardens to support my curriculum.

By engaging students in intercultural communication through social studies, they will become responsible community members who learn to work well with others. Through explicit modeling, students will learn respectful ways of communicating, collaborating, and understanding civic responsibility by caring for themselves, their peers, and their community. I will introduce students to a diverse range of global artists and cultural themed artwork in order for them to gain an appreciation of different perspectives in life. I hope to provide many opportunities for authentic intercultural communication by taking my students on community field trips and inviting guest speakers into the classroom.

I believe in implementing an integrated project-based curriculum through the arts, sciences, and social studies. I will utilize a combination of long-term projects and “work times” in my instructional planning. I am an advocate for developing meaningful and purposeful integrated curriculum in order to reflect real-life. Learning doesn’t happen in “scheduled slots” in a child’s life; by creating an integrated curriculum, children can see the connections between the skills they are learning and how to use them in everyday life.

Teaching Diverse Learners

I have a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CTESOL). I am certified to provide appropriate instruction to English language learners through the communicative approach. I will emphasize a learner-centered environment in which students interact and communicate while the teacher offers assistance as needed. This communicative approach promotes a relaxed and risk-free environment where mistakes will not be stigmatized. I believe in providing English language learners a curriculum that is culturally sensitive and contextualized with ample time to explore and practice the language.

Some of the most important strategies in teaching English language learners are that verbal directions are simple, clear, and concise. Vocabulary should be elicited and concept-checked multiple times throughout a lesson and wait-time increased for all learners. Visuals should be emphasized especially for limited English proficient students. English language learners need constant exposure and repetition in the target language in order to become proficient.

For students with special needs, in proper collaboration with family, special education teachers and other support staff, I will provide the most effective child-directed instruction that acknowledges my students' strengths as well as what they can do in overcoming their personal struggles.

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For accelerated students, I will challenge them in all aspects of their learning by providing them with further advancement in projects that acknowledge their interests and abilities.

Assessment

I believe in using portfolios to both formatively and summatively assess what my students have learned and provide tangible evidence of student growth. “Teachers use evidence not only to convey their knowledge of and concern for the child, but also to convey the truths the hand can touch” (Lightfoot, 2003, pg. 86). I will use process portfolios as a means of formative evaluation. Process portfolios will be developed over time and consist of artifacts of student work as a way of identifying my students’ unique strengths and weaknesses. The portfolio will include vivid anecdotes of student activities, records of written work, photographs, and even video taken at school. Portfolios are my way of making learning visible, conveying my concern for each individual student, and presenting a fair evaluation to my students’ parents. Documenting student progress will also motivate my students to self-assess and hold them responsible for their work.

In order to exhibit the best student products at the end of the year, I will develop summative portfolios. Summative portfolios will serve as an invaluable assessment tool consisting of work samples and reflective observations/writing that demonstrate how my students have met content learning goals, objectives, and state standards.

Theories that Guide Me

Piaget's theory that children learn best by doing and actively exploring is the cornerstone of my personal pedagogy. Piaget's belief that children are active learners resonate with me as I feel that young children learn best through discovery — a process in which they form their own theories of themselves, their peers, and the world.

Vygotsky's social-cultural theory also resonates with my belief that fostering a collaborative environment will nurture students' social-emotional and academic success. Vygotsky stated that “what children can perform collaboratively or with assistance today they can perform independently and competently tomorrow” (Moll, 1992, p. 12). His notion of interdependence between the child and their social environment helped me realize how truly important collaboration and communication is in guiding students to become both self-sufficient independent learners and collaborative team players.

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