

Teaching Philosophy

I teach adults how to teach and counsel children and adolescents, so I strongly believe in modelling the decorum and compassion that I want learners to possess once they leave my classroom. I see education taking on three primary forms: providing good content, developing authentic relationships, and applying appropriate pedagogy.

Teaching good content means knowing what you are talking about and making it relevant and meaningful for the learner. To this end, I use brain-based learning principles, and I stay current and informed about best practices in inclusive education. I also stay informed about current educational issues and practices in schools. Connecting my research to practice includes providing real examples from the field based on my experiences as a teacher, special education teacher, resource teacher, school counsellor, principal, and parent. I teach theory and why it is important, and I work to provide practical examples to make concepts transfer. While teaching the social construction of knowledge, power, identity and difference, I explain how family, school, biology and culture influence who we are, and who we have in our classroom. I also developed and use a Head, Heart, and Hands approach to social justice education that has proved helpful in supporting difference in the classroom.

I cultivate strong interpersonal relationships with students. I have developed a model for inclusive education that I call the compassionate classroom. I believe that kindness and compassion comprise the keystone to strong relationships in the classroom. With adult learners, I maintain a professional relationship whereby students know that I am competent, effective, and knowledgeable. In fact, I consider the cost per class for students taking university courses and try to “give them their money’s worth” in every learning interaction. I also try to ensure that all of the students in my classes feel valued, authentic, and have voice. My background in counselling guides me here. I use a lot of cognitive-behavioural language to make sense of peoples’ behaviour and to understand motivation. My passion is to support those who have been disenfranchised along the way, so I teach about using an environmental approach to support difference in the classroom. I try to model andragogy (and teach pedagogy) that is developmentally appropriate as I connect my teaching moments to the zone of proximal development. This means paying attention to signals of frustration or boredom from students. I desire for students to leave my classroom having had epistemic changes in their beliefs, values, and assumptions about what it means to teach and learn in the world today. I also want them to transfer the practical skills into long-term memory. I sometimes teach didactically and other times use group work, activities, and facilitated conversations. I do believe that I have something to say, but I also know that without student voice and student-led conversation in class, deep learning (co-construction of knowledge) may not occur. Through my instruction, I teach the value of differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and the significance of technology to level the playing field for those who have exceptional learning needs. Because I believe that we need to create resilient youth who are self-confident, I provide teachers with tools and strategies to assist youth to overcome, not avoid dealing with, personal adversity and learning difficulties.

In addition to being a way to gain social and cultural capital, education is also a means of creating a more compassionate and enlightened society. I believe that we are all driven toward finding meaning, influence, happiness, belonging and freedom in life, and I strive to create ways to motivate people toward these goals in my classroom and in their lives.