

Scott Repicky

Final Paper Option 2

Personal Philosophy

Dear past, present, and future students,

I am so fortunate for being able to do the job I love and teach students from such a wide variety of backgrounds. To my past students in North Carolina, it seems like a long time ago I was teaching you in first grade. Many of you came to school and had to worry about your parents in ways that most children do not have to. This is because many of you had a parent or parents that were in the military and were away fighting a war in a distant land. Many of you whose parents were not in the military had parents who were struggling to make ends meet. It was often difficult for your mom or dad to help you with your education because they were struggling to keep a roof over your head and food on the table. I loved my time working with you and I know that it was the right move for me to go to North Carolina and work with you.

In regards to my past and present students in Luxembourg, I truly enjoy teaching students who come from all over the world. I hope you realize how blessed you are to have the opportunities that you have and many of you are so lucky to have traveled the world and seen more places in your short lives than most people ever do. I know that it is sometimes difficult for some of you because mom or dad are away on business often and you miss them. I also know that your parents have very high expectations of how you will perform in school and they can sometimes put pressure on you to succeed, but it is only because they want you to do well in your life. Working with you in Luxembourg has been life altering for me and I am truly grateful.

To my future students, I truly have no idea who you are or where you'll be from. This is because life right now for me is a journey and I have no idea where life will take me after Luxembourg. Regardless of who you are or where you come from, please know that you will have challenges in your lives because everyone does. When I am working with you, my job is to help prepare you to face the challenges you will see in life. I am looking forward to working with you and getting to know you and helping to shape your life and having you help shape mine.

Past, present, and future students, either you have been; are currently; or will be an important part of my life. Some of you I taught as first graders just beginning to read, some as second or fourth graders just beginning to learn English, and still others of you I have had the wonderful opportunity to teach you in both second and fourth grade. For all of you I hope that I have been able to affect your life as much as you have mine. I believe in your capabilities to become adults who are just as successful and wonderful as you have been in my classroom.

In this letter, I would like to share with you my personal philosophy on education, which is still constantly being developed, based on the experiences I have with you. I hope as I describe it that you will recognize what I say as a reality of how I worked with you in the classroom.

My philosophy really begins with the importance of making connections. I believe in order for you to be successful, you need to be able to connect and collaborate with each other. This is why I have never had you arrange your desks in rows in the classroom because I do not believe it is conducive to allowing you to learn the best that you can. I have tried to have you grouped in groups of about four or five students clustered together in your desks. This is so that

within each cluster, you can create your own small learning community (SLC). SLC's "provide and allow for students to connect with one another and with their teachers. This connection is imperative for their education to be successful (Editorial 5A)." They also give you "the opportunity to belong and feel engaged at school. They work towards eliminating the feeling of being ignored and of being an outcast (Review 5B)." Finally, with the high rate of students moving in and out of our schools (both in Luxembourg and North Carolina), I feel having you work in groups was critical for making a connection, so you could support each other and make one another feel like an important part of our classroom.

Another important connection is between you and me. This is probably the most important part of my job because I feel that students will only want to learn from me when they know I care about them. "I feel strongly that if there is a disconnect between the teacher and the student, then it will be more of a struggle for that student to be successful in the classroom (Review 2B)." Over the years I have built my connection with you through going to your baseball or soccer games, organizing a movie night in North Carolina to go see Charlotte's Web at the movie theater, or by simply taking a genuine interest in what interests you and having a discussion with you. I also think one of the best ways for me to connect with you has been through using humor. I believe "if school is fun and interesting than students will learn more (Review 1B)." Some of you have even asked me why I laugh so much at school and a big reason is because I like to have fun in my job. I feel like if I'm having fun and building on my connection with you than you will be having fun as well.

Although I want you to work in SLC's, I believe before you could work successfully with your peers, I needed to help create some structures within the classroom. These structures (Editorial 4A) are:

1. I need to make a connection with you.
2. I need to provide you with a purpose for the learning.
3. I must monitor and interact with your groups while you are working.
4. I must model what my expectations are for you.
5. You must learn to respect one another and your opinions (Pinkelman Review 4B).
6. Your groups should be heterogeneous (Pinkelman Review 4B).

The reason these structures are critical is because they create how we interact in the classroom.

These six structures allow for me to teach you how to work successfully in a group. This is something that will be critical for you to know as you get older, because we all have to know how to work together and to respect one another.

I also hold the belief that we need to celebrate and learn from our differences. Before moving to Luxembourg, I had never been outside of the United States other than to Canada. I was amazed about how much I learned from you about how different things are for people from other places in the world. I remember in my first year in Luxembourg correcting some of you when you said Zed instead of Z. I had never heard of Zed before. I also remember being amazed at our first international lunch when several of you came to school in your traditional costumes of where you were from. I really thought this was a great way to celebrate your differences and really educate each other so that any possible walls of bigotry would be knocked down (Editorial 1A). I hope for the future that you will remember it is what is different about us that makes us unique and interesting.

When grouping you, I believe as stated in the structures that the group needs to be heterogeneous or mixed. The reason for this is “in the real world, everyone has to be able to interact and work with people of different abilities everyday. If we are separating students so that they are solely working with students of like abilities, we are creating kids who will not understand that people do not learn or understand things the same way they do. This

understanding is a critical skill for students to learn, but they need to learn it through practice (Editorial 3A).” When you were using cooperative learning, you were able to see things from different perspectives and appreciate that people learn differently or think differently than you do (Review 4B). For example, in math class we often use collaboration because in math you can end up with the same answer, but many different ways of figuring out the problem. You can then discuss together how you found your answers.

My philosophy on equitable teaching is teachers need to find out their students’ strengths and weaknesses. Once they know this, they can then address the weaknesses while reinforcing the strengths. “With education, we need to get away from the idea that every child needs to learn the same things at the same time and at the same pace (Editorial 2A).” This thought process is illogical because everyone is different. Everyone learns things at different paces and some concepts are easier for some people than they are for others. For example, I always use the example of I was always good in math, but I am not good in music. I can’t even clap to a beat. However, most of my students know how to play at least one musical instrument in Luxembourg and I can’t play any. Does this mean that I am not smart? No, it does not. It simply means that music is not a strength for me. This is why I really don’t believe in failures. I believe that students are either beginning to develop, developing, meeting, or exceeding the different skills that they are trying to attain in the classroom.

In order for me to continue to best meet your needs, I feel it is necessary for me to continue to learn, so I can teach better. I always say that you can always improve and that is my philosophy around teaching. I feel the best way for me to learn as a teacher is by seeing what other teachers are doing or by discussing how other teachers teach in a professional learning community (PLC). “We have to open ourselves up to change and swallow our pride and allow

ourselves to be vulnerable to critique by our colleagues because ultimately this is what will improve our students' learning (Editorial 6A).” While the focus is always on student learning, PLC's can provide the opportunity for teachers to challenge each other, so that our education improves for both teachers and students. Teachers can't remain stagnant, but need to rely on each other to help move education forward because this ultimately is what is best for you (Review 6B). “As long as we keep challenging what we are doing and seek opportunities to make our teaching better, we will be helping our students by trying to teach them the best way that we can (Review 3B).”

The last part of my philosophy I'd like to share with you is that I believe that our education system needs to focus more on the big ideas than the fine details. What I mean by this is I should be more concerned with the process of your learning than the actual final product you make (Review 7B). For example, in fourth grade this year when we worked on our Geotopia country projects, it was more important to me how you worked together, than the ultimate final project. Being able to recite facts about a country probably won't get you too far in life, but being able to work with a group of your peers will. Therefore, I should worry about if what I do in the classroom is helping prepare you for the life that you are going to lead rather than worrying about the final product.

My job as a teacher is to help teach you to be caring citizens who are going to make a positive contribution to our society. This is a tremendous responsibility to have and it is one that I take quite seriously. The key to me being able to do this is by making a connection with you and then allowing for you to make connections with the other students in our SLC's. This is how we start to form a community that can help each other when we face challenges and also that can celebrate together when are successful.

In conclusion, I would like to sincerely thank you for the joy you have brought to my life from being my students. I have learned so much from each one of you and I hope that you can say the same for me. If you are a future student, I can't wait to meet you and get to know you. I wish you all the best in life and in your future studies.

Best regards,

Mr. Repicky