

Personal Frame of Reference

Janice Beck



"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."- W.B. Yeats

I have been so fortunate to have had numerous inspiring teachers throughout elementary and secondary school, as well as university. They all showed such a passion for education, made learning exciting, and really genuinely cared for and took interest in the lives of their students. This is what I strive to do as a teacher. I have always been a very caring person, and find satisfaction in helping others. I endeavor to make the world a better place every day, and I hope to inspire others, especially my students, to do the same. I have developed a love of learning and know that this love of learning and lifelong learning are essential to students reaching their potential so that they may enjoy success and fulfillment in their lives, which will enable them to make contributions to their families, communities, and society.

I believe that building positive relationships with students is key to teaching and learning, as connections are the foundation on which everything else is built. A positive classroom environment is essential to learning, and is one in which students feel safe, included, cared for, and respected; it is welcoming, and promotes learning, growth, and success. Classroom management should be proactive and centre around building a positive and inclusive community for students. By establishing clear guidelines and expectations together, a strong community of learners is created, where *all* students become an important part of the learning environment and process. I have learned that organization, structure, positive reinforcement and consistency are important in creating a conducive learning environment. I strive to make my classroom as inclusive as possible and ensure that all voices are heard. I promote connection and community by taking interest in both the personal and academic lives of students, and fostering their growth socially, emotionally, and academically. Students come to our classrooms with a great variety of prior experience and knowledge. It is important to recognize the uniqueness of each student, and acknowledge their lives outside of school, their interests and personalities, their differing abilities and needs, and the strengths that they bring to our classroom community. I always have students fill out a "getting to know you" question sheet, which gives them the opportunity to tell me about themselves and what works best for them as a learner. Each day, I make sure to greet each student with their name as they enter the classroom. At the beginning of each class, we often start with our "talking stick check-in," where students pass around our talking stick and share how they are feeling, something about themselves, or something they have done or are looking forward to. This allows the class and myself to get to know one another better, and promotes an inclusive and safe environment.

Aside from establishing positive relationships and a safe inclusive classroom environment, my two main goals in teaching are to: 1) have students develop curiosity, critical thinking, and a desire to learn; and 2) to see students committed to lifelong learning. I believe that all students want to learn; the task is in connecting what you want them to learn (the curriculum) with what is already important or

relevant to them in their lives. This taps in to their natural motivation to learn. I try to design lessons, activities and projects which incorporate the set curriculum, but link to current events and issues that are relevant and interesting to students. For example, when studying protests and revolutions throughout history, students created a piece of protest art that spoke to a social or environmental issue that they are passionate about. They researched different ways that they could protest this issue, and how they could bring about change. Students were incredibly engaged in this project because it was relevant to them. Another factor in student motivation is a teacher who has a strong sense of personal identity, enthusiasm, curiosity, and passion for their subject area. Students respond positively to an enthusiastic and passionate teacher, and are more likely to become curious and motivated to learn.

I really believe that education should be focused on teaching whole students rather than teaching just the subjects. The students who we teach need to be prepared to function in a society that is rapidly changing and evolving. This can be achieved by helping them to build self-understanding, awareness and reflection, and by helping each individual to appreciate the potential residing within themselves. I really love this quotation by John Gardner: *"All too often we are giving young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants."* If we focus only on the acquisition of knowledge in education, we are giving young people cut flowers; if we focus on critical skills and processes, we are teaching them to grow their own plants. When we teach whole students, there is more time spent teaching critical skills, ideas, and processes, and perhaps less time spent teaching specific facts, dates, and knowledge. While some knowledge is crucial, what I really endeavor to do is to establish a curiosity and love of learning in students. Today, facts, dates, and information can easily be accessed from online resources and books. Students need to know how to critically assess and evaluate this information, and be able to apply it to real problems in the world. By promoting active learning, collaboration, and exploration, I hope to help students understand more about themselves, others, and society at large, as well as to develop the skills and processes that will help them navigate through life.

My educational philosophy aligns with progressivism, constructivism and social reconstructionism. I agree with the progressivist philosophy that education should focus on the student and their interests rather than being teacher or content centered. I also identify with the learning theory of constructivism, which sees learning as a series of interpreting evidence and adapting our understanding based on our experiences; this is an individual process and can result in different interpretations for different people. It is my goal as a teacher to provide my students with experiences that challenge and enlarge their understandings. I believe that teaching should be learner-oriented and experiential; as a teacher, I am a facilitator or guide, who helps students uncover meaning and sets the scaffolding from where the students are to where they aim to be. I also see value in the theory of social reconstructionism; the curriculum should be applied to the real world and should focus on ideas and methods to bring about social justice in society.

A key aspect of education is to promote empathy and understanding among students to reduce prejudice and promote equity and social justice in the classroom and school; this equity and social justice will then hopefully be reflected in their behaviour, and in the diverse community and society at large. I often use stories and simulations that give students different insights and perspectives in to certain issues or situations today and throughout history. These can be powerful experiences, as they

are emotionally charged and prompt reflection and closer examination of our own identity and perspectives. As an educator, I am not only concerned with cognitive development, but I am also committed to promoting active, involved, and socially responsible citizens.

Parents and community members play an important role in the education and development of children. Parents entrust me with the education of their children, and I value their input and perspectives. My classroom is open to both parents and community members, who can enrich our learning experiences by becoming part of them. I aim to consistently keep parents informed through my teacher website and e-newsletters, and invite them to be part of our classes. Parents and community members can be very valuable resources, and it is important to reinforce these connections. Having local Aboriginal elders join our class can be an invaluable cultural experience for students, and there are many community members that can offer unique insights and expertise. Part of creating active, involved and socially responsible students is involving them in the community through action/service projects, where we can broaden our community of learners to positively impact others and connect with people in the community.

I strongly believe that we are all teachers and learners. Students should be given opportunities to both teach and learn in the classroom. Assessment should always be used to support learning. I make sure to provide students with our rationale for learning certain skills or content and give them clear and meaningful criteria for success. I use feedback as a tool to encourage and support student efforts, and hopefully motivate them to want to further the quality of their work. Students need to be taught *how* to learn; they need to learn how to ask for, understand, and use the feedback provided to further their learning. By fostering growth mindsets in my students, I hope to reinforce that learning and growth can only come from practice and mistakes. I have learned to seek feedback from my students as well, so that I can improve my practice to better meet their needs as learners. Throughout my practicum I had students complete “tickets out the door” with two stars and a wish regarding my teaching and their learning. I truly value their feedback, and they appreciated having the opportunity to reflect on what was and was not working for them in our class. In a learning community, we are all teachers and learners, and can use each others feedback to continuously reflect, learn, and grow.

This quotation by John Quincy Adams reflects my goal as an educator: *“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”* I hope to inspire my students to strive for these things, and to guide them on their own journeys as both learners and teachers.