

Ms. Beth's Teaching Philosophy

Bound by the four walls that surround our class family, I cannot deny the circumstances that have brought us together and have contributed to the people we are. When we enter this classroom, we also bring in all parts of our identity. When I enter, I bring in the parts of myself that include who I am now, who I was, and who I hope to be. I am a Latinx woman who was raised by two individuals who dedicated their lives to breaking generations of poverty and illness by immigrating to a new country. I carry this part of my identity, along with the rest of my parts, with me. The community cultural wealth that I have obtained through emerging in a country that thrived on the success of White individuals, can serve as a source of resilience and testament to the love that drives me and my endeavors (Yosso, 2005, 77-81). I dream of creating a space for lower-elementary students that acknowledges the resilience that lives within them and invites them to co-create a community that welcomes all versions of ourselves, especially the versions we struggle with. For inspiration, our classroom can look into stories of resilience that may fuel their curiosity and contribute to their emerging communities of cultural wealth. This may inspire them to create their own narratives as changemakers, especially drawing from populations that have been historically misrepresented or underrepresented. This can serve as an opportunity for students to utilize the concept of “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors”, as described by Sims Bishop. In this concept, students may use literature to find instances where they can reflect on the connections between themselves and the narrative as a “mirror”, look into a “window” and empathize with other narratives, or see a “sliding glass door” as a means to immerse themselves into a story (Bishop, 1990, np). Bishop highlights the importance of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors in the following quote,

“When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part.”

In this quote, Bishop explains how the exclusion of certain voices sends an implicit message to students in which they are told they are insignificant or unwelcome. Thus, it is critical to maximize opportunities in which students see themselves as explicit stakeholders in their education. These stories may be spotlighted as a class or offered for personal engagement.



To support their growth as their best selves, students will need a community where they feel connected to the space, their peers, and their content. This foundation can allow students to create a sense of community where they see that their actions can affect the people around them, in a helpful or harmful manner. To promote a connection between our learners and the content they learn, I hope to integrate culturally-responsive and sustaining teaching strategies that engage and foster a positive learning environment. A piece of literature that highlighted the importance of culturally-responsive teaching, as well as validated my own experiences as a person of color,

is Zaretta Hammond's book, Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students. Her book highlights the importance of creating a space that is shaped by the learners in the classroom, their interests, and their identity. In my own classroom, I want to work towards creating space for students to exemplify parts of their own identity with pride. This could involve morning meeting questions that ask students to share their memories, feelings, or events that are significant to them. This could be exemplified by the following questions: "Share with a partner, how do you feel today? What might you need?" or "What is something you do with your family?" One question can be selected by a student with the corresponding classroom job and they can post it in an area that our class family can refer to. Each day that our class is together, we can call on a person to share their response. Each day, another person is added until everyone has shared their response. The opportunity to respond on an individual basis allows students to have a designated sharing time where they may give create familiarity with their peers and engage with them by answering three questions or comments. In addition to this time, I value having 1:1 interviews with students at the beginning of the year to get to know them in their multidimensional identities. This interview spotlights their identity in various contexts, such as them as an individual, a member of a family or community, a member of our larger society, and themselves within a classroom or school space (Peoples et al., 2020). By taking the time to conduct these interviews, no matter the length, I hope to begin building a rapport with my students and understanding who they are inside and outside of our learning environment. I am fond of this activity as it gives students undivided attention while we do something fun, such as coloring or drawing, and I am able to engage in a meaningful conversation with them. This may inform my instructional time by providing me with information about their interests and self-identified

strengths and areas of support. In addition to providing recognition for the intersectionality of students, I want to actively work towards providing work that engages the zone of proximal development of students. In further regard to Hammond's book, students thrive when they are engaged in "productive struggle" as it best engages their zone of proximal development, rather than engaging their zone of frustration. Engaging this zone rather than the zone of frustration is key to growth in our classroom and is a step I can help foster.

As an educator, I strive to actively work towards creating a welcoming space for students to be accepted for who they are, what knowledge and experiences they bring and help them grow toward the best versions of themselves. To work towards these goals, I prioritize being a flexible, adaptive educator who can anticipatory plan and prepare for factors within my control. When things deviate from my lesson plan or I encounter factors outside of my realm of control, I prioritize flexibility to adjust as necessary and to adapt as an educator. This involves recognizing the needs of my students and supplying appropriate support to help them grow. It could look like needing more time for activity, reteaching content, providing dialogue for problem-solving, and providing movement breaks or sensory tools for students. In addition to providing these supports, it's also crucial to explain my cognitive process in order to add a layer of understanding and metacognition amongst my students. Eventually, this modeled skill could support students as they work on being an advocate for themselves and others. For example, this model could sound like explaining to students the reason "why" we are doing an activity or why we are deviating from our initial plan. By adding these supports for our class family, I hope to support them in their growth as productive, empathetic human beings who are able to advocate for their support in working towards their best selves and helping others do so too. This communicates that, as a community, we can show up for each other through every step of this journey.



Student-facing pledge:

In our shared space, I would like to emphasize the support and love that I want to provide for my students. I acknowledge that their emotional well-being can be a driving component when it comes to their motivation in our classroom. I also acknowledge that my support may need to be communicated regularly and at times, quickly. My previous students have helped me to create a pledge, “From Ms. Beth, To You”.

I pledge to hear you, see you, and be here for you when you need someone. I have a love for you and want to see you be your best self! When I gesture to you half of my heart, it’s up to you to complete the other half. Know that I am here for you whenever you need me to be.

I imagine that while this is my current pledge, it can be shaped by the future learners I have the privilege of teaching. My intent for this gesture is to symbolize the love, respect, and support I have for students I’m currently teaching, have taught, or will teach soon. This is meant to establish and build a community of adults that support learners on their journey at school and outside of it thus contributing to their funds of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005, 77-78).

This pledge will work in tandem with our class's learning goals in regard to social-emotional learning. I hope that in teaching lower-elementary students, I can facilitate powerful dialogue amongst students where they are able to safely advocate for their needs and create a plan when there is conflict to resolve it in a healthy manner. Topics that will be discussed and practiced throughout the year include growth mindset and goal setting, emotion management and regulation, empathy and kindness, and problem-solving. To guide our learning, I will refer to curriculums from Learning for Justice, Positive Discipline in the Classroom, and Second Step for Elementary.

A peek into a day in my classroom:

With my classroom aspirations in mind, I picture a day in my classroom starting with the opportunity for connections and fun activities. As students enter the classroom, they may begin their days with an activity that'll wake up their brains or support their transition into the school setting. This may look like students scattered around the room, getting ready for the day by greeting their peers and engaging in quiet conversations, playing with our classroom tinker materials on their own or with friends, or reading an independent reading book. As most students have trickled in, a classmate will choose a welcome song to signal that it is time to transition to the carpet area for our morning meeting. In these morning meetings, students will have the opportunity to greet their peers, be greeted, respond to a shared question, and have time for movement. Each day of the week, our class will engage in various greeting styles. Through this routine and structure, students will grow familiar with the greetings and can look forward to them. For example, each Monday, we may do a What's The News greeting to share our weekend news. Our shared question will offer insight into the four dimensions of a student. The norms of our morning meeting will be co-created by our class family at the beginning of the year and will

be continuously worked on throughout the year. This will also be referred to at other instructional times.

After our morning meeting, we would transition into our math time. As a lower-elementary grade teacher, our lessons will almost always begin with a warm-up activity that allows students to turn their “math brains” on and contribute to our conversation in a low-stakes way. There will be multiple access points where students can contribute in a helpful way. This can look like a Would You Rather? math-centered question, like “Would you rather receive a box of chocolates with 6 rows and 5 columns or a box with 7 rows and 3 columns?” After time for students to respond and share their thinking with their classmates, we can begin our math lesson. I imagine that we will utilize cognitively-guided instruction (CGI) to learn new content and create conjectures together as a class by demonstrating our individual strategies (Franke et al., 2015, n.p.). We will follow the traditional CGI norms to guide our grapple time and whole-group discourse. To supplement our CGI and teach specific content, I would want to supplement this knowledge with another curriculum, such as Illustrative Mathematics.

References

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