

Teaching Philosophy Statement

Submitted by Mary Napoli

As a lifelong learner and educator, I remain steadfast in my mission to encourage my students to value, extend and facilitate instructional practices that will broaden their professional lives. Operating through a sociocultural and constructivist approach to learning, I endeavor to provide my students with rich experiences, where dialogue, collaborative work, critical engagement, and choice are central. As someone who is highly interested in the art of teaching, I strive to continuously enhance the quality and effectiveness of my instruction, to reflectively model instructional approaches, and to make direct connections to real educational contexts.

Teaching undergraduate students who are studying to become PK-8 elementary teachers is one of the greatest joys and privileges of my career at Penn State Harrisburg. First and foremost, I invite my students to become active members of a learning community whereby we become co-participants in the process. Part of my overarching goal is to reignite their love of reading and writing. In doing so, I model effective literacy approaches while challenging their thinking by considering cultural authenticity, accuracy, and issues of diversity. In essence, I help future educators acquire the critical skills necessary to challenge the dominant ideologies that often appear in children's literature. Moreover, I have endeavored to assist future teachers to identify high quality selections to integrate within their classroom. Through small groups, I foster opportunities for my students to transact more deeply with literature, support inquiry of social and global topics, and advocate for the use of diverse and culturally relevant literature to transform their lives. For example, students design a social justice text set about issues such as race/ethnicity, adoption/foster care, gender, immigration, poverty, and environmentalism. Students share their work with peers and often with their field mentors as they discuss their findings. They also examine trends and the sociopolitical and pedagogical issues that surround literature and discuss ways to incorporate print, digital, and online resources to enhance student learning (e.g. author/illustrator studies, multigenre memoir, and digital storytelling).

I also believe that students must read and reflect on what they are learning through writing, talking, and peer-collaboration. For example, students reflect on the professional readings by completing digital double-entry dialogue journals. They learn from their peers by exchanging journals to foster collegiality and cooperative learning. Students must have multiple opportunities to apply what they are learning and take an active role in the process. Throughout my literacy courses, students work collaboratively with peers through literature circles, book award groups, and multimodal response projects. I also bring authors, poets, and illustrators to campus to enhance our conversations with literature. Some of the authors/illustrators that have visited my classes include Jacqueline Woodson, Brian and Andrea Davis Pinkney, Shadra Strickland, Janet Wong, David Ezra Stein, and Baba Wagué Diakité. I believe that sharing my enthusiasm about literacy instruction, children's literature, and language arts and providing hands-on engagements are key to building my students' content knowledge and interest in the subject. Students have varied opportunities to apply their learning within their PK-8 field placements. For example, my students have organized literature circles, read aloud culturally relevant books, integrated poetry into their science lessons, and utilized literature as models for student writing. During class, we discuss their field experiences in relationship to professional readings, and co-construct ways to differentiate instructional approaches to meet the needs of their literacy learners.

I also model critical listening and solicit informal feedback through e-mail, surveys, and during meetings at my students' convenience. To be an effective educator, I believe that it is essential to be approachable, flexible, and to maintain open communication which has translated to my students' success. I also provide ongoing feedback about their learning throughout the semester and seek their input on ways to improve the course for future semesters.

I remain passionate about immersing students in inquiry-based experiences that allow them to engage in hands-on, multimodal, critical, and constructivist approaches to infuse culturally relevant and global literature across the curriculum. As a teacher educator, I am constantly improving my practice and changing my course invitations to align with new trends in the field. I hope that my passion as a literacy educator will continue to make a broad and profound impact on my students as they infuse global and social justice literature to foster intercultural understandings with their own students.