

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Practice

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Teaching is so complex and wonderful that I find it difficult to sum up my philosophy of teaching in one essay, one sentence, one anecdote. Why do I teach? I teach because I care about students and their learning, I teach because I have a passion for mathematics, and I teach to develop myself as a teacher and person. I teach to make a difference to my students.

Caring for students is my natural instinct and I always try to nurture a positive student-teacher rapport where I care about and respect students, and they like and respect me. Caring for their learning means I want students to have fun and work hard at the same time and to be motivated by the satisfaction of achieving something they have worked hard for; it also means that I want the students to learn the curricular content and succeed against the school's external assessments.

I love mathematics, however the subject often has a bad rap with students, and many in high school think that it is just about numbers—as if literature were just about words. But mathematics is so important, both of itself as a way to understand the world and as prerequisite understanding for so many opportunities students should be prepared for, that all students need a basic grounding before they leave high school. For me as a math teacher, this means that I have to challenge students' perceptions of math by making it relevant and engaging, and just as importantly I have to continue to help students learn math even when this is difficult.

My understanding of how to achieve the goals above in my classroom is continually evolving as I develop professionally, but I will sketch some specifics of my approach below:

- *Planning:* I start from the curricular goals and work backwards, asking how I can achieve these in the time scheduled. Since math curricula are usually packed with new concepts, I plan expository elements where I explain, demonstrate and connect these concepts. I balance these with in-class group and individual work, homework and frequent formative evaluations. I am also a data-head and enjoy using student evaluation data to help focus on areas with which my students are struggling.
- *Instruction:* I maintain a predictable structure in my classes, as I find that classes flow better when students know the expectations of them. I use a board or SmartBoard and ask my students to take notes, but I also like them to actively contribute to the lesson by helping explain concepts or by working on problems and demonstrating these for the class, for instance. While keeping my classes quick-paced, I like to be relaxed and use humour or theatrics to draw students into my lessons.
- *Evaluation:* I aim to evaluate each student fairly according to the curricular goals, assess higher-level conceptual knowledge, and when necessary prepare students for a standardized exam. In practice, this means I usually assess students with written tests which include a variety of question types and test many levels of knowledge, and also assign larger math problems or projects. I allow retests as I don't believe learning should end once material has been tested.
- *Rapport:* I am friendly while remaining focused on learning. I respect each student as an autonomous person whose identity, goals, cultural background and individual perspective on the world are worthwhile. To support building positive relationships with students, I involve myself in mentoring

students, extracurricular coaching, providing academic resources outside class instruction, and organizing co-curricular learning activities such as field trips.

- *Class management:* I expect students to behave in such a way that does not disrupt others' learning. I establish and enforce set guidelines around this when necessary, but I find that in general, the two most important factors in classroom management are my rapport with students and the quality of my instruction. When students do not meet expectations, I prefer to discuss the situation with the student and if possible establish a logical consequence.

As well as the commitments to my students I outline above, I have a personal duty to respect my own identity. I am at my best when I capitalize on my strengths, so the employment and volunteer opportunities I search out will reflect my personality and diverse interests, including computer science, debate and volleyball. My curiosity about the world leads me to seek out international teaching opportunities. As well, while it may be difficult in some places, I have gradually decided that I have a duty to be openly gay as a teacher, in order to combat harmful stereotypes and signal to LGBT students that I am supportive.

Finally, I have a professional duty to continue to reflect on my practice and find professional development opportunities throughout my career. I will look for employment opportunities which challenge me to become a better teacher and offer new experiences, which also points internationally. I also reflect in order to use my strengths in practice and to manage the habits and traits that limit my effectiveness as a teacher, for example my instinct to teach to the “top” of the class.

I did have a defining moment with my Grade 10 class recently. I was ending my three-month student teaching practicum, and to say goodbye my class put one of my math catchphrases—“cancellation for the nation”—on a t-shirt; without my prompting, a saying I used to remind students to simplify rational expressions had become a class inside joke and a marker of our community. I was humbled by the recognition and overjoyed that, somewhere between graphing functions and factoring quadratics I did indeed make a difference.



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