

My Philosophy of Education, by Alexis Lund

In recognition that educational best practices are constantly changing as new evidence emerges, my philosophy of education is a constantly evolving sum of my ideas regarding how to best empower my students to become motivated antiracist leaders and active critical thinkers. My aim is to prepare them to analyze all sources and situations through an ever-present equity lens, regardless of the fields they pursue later in life. The foundation of my philosophy of education is my firm personal and professional commitment to antibias and antiracism. The cornerstone is to apply an equity lens to each aspect of my practice. The framework builds around diverse content, expansion of skills, and the individuality of my students, and is outlined below. The capstone is to privilege the vital role of relationship in engaging students across differences, who they are matters far more than what they learn on any given day.

Philosophical Framework

Inclusive Content

Inclusive content is a fundamental necessity in all courses across all subject areas. Students deserve authentic representation in all curricula offered to them, anything less than that erases and tokenizes their identity in their academic experience. This is most clearly true in the humanities, but STEM courses are not exempt from the imperative to have authentic representation included in the coursework and classroom. This representation must cross all aspects of difference in society—race, class, gender identity, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability, neurodivergence, and so forth. Intersectionality between these identities and a recognition of the complexity of privilege and oppression is critical.

Historical Content

Dig deeper than the dominant historical paradigm. A crucial aspect to opening students to appreciate history is to show them that history is much more than a recitation of facts

relating to ‘dead white guys.’ In this aim, I introduce my students to history through a kaleidoscope of different perspectives. Inspired by British historian Alan Munslow, I integrate into each unit a diverse array of perspectives, including women and non-cis individuals when possible, ethnic and racial minorities, and lower socioeconomic groups—the most ignored groups in history. By fusing together the “many shifts and turns” in the study of history, students are more able to see a reflection of their selves in the content of the class, and thereby gain more appreciation for the study of history and its applications in the world outside of academia.

Voice, Volume, Validity. Mere inclusion is not adequate to be authentic representation either, nor is a focus on negative aspects of history honoring the intention of sharing more stories. There needs to be a real intentionality given to balance the real trauma inflicted on groups throughout history with stories of love, joy, and celebration. Survival and resistance should be centered during the study oppression and violence, but it is the joy and celebration outside of those times that will uplift students sharing those identities and help break down stereotypes and other harmful societal perceptions of various groups. Voice means representation is present, given through primary sources as often as possible; volume means representation is consistently present throughout the year, not just one-off lessons; and validity means a whole story is built, demonstrating the vibrancy and diversity within each identity.

Mathematics Content

Include authentic real-world examples. All too often “real-world” examples integrated into mathematics curricula are either fundamentally not realistic or are obtusely tokenizing; however, the inclusion of authentic real-world scenarios, especially those that students can immediately relate to the world they live in, increases student comprehension and engagement. In an urban school, price comparisons around bus tickets will connect with students far better than comparisons of crop harvests or cattle prices, and vice versa for students in rural settings.

Also, not shying away from identity-based data sets, such as racializing comparative data in a statistics class, allows students to develop comfort asking challenging questions about racial disparities. The closer I align my examples and work sets to the experiences of my students, the more easily they can engage in abstract mathematical processing.

Critical Thinkers

Each day we are bombarded with dozens of Gigabits of information and figuring out what to do with this information—what to believe, what to remember, what to disregard, who to trust, who to be skeptical of—is a monumental task for our brains. This is even more true for the not yet fully developed brain of a teenager. Developing the skills and habits necessary to maintain a critical lens to information requires regular, guided practice. Fundamental to developing this critical analysis across disciplines is to understand conceptual “whys” and “hows” rather than merely algorithmic “whats and “whos.” The essence of critical thinking is the same across content areas and should be integrated fully in all academic settings to ensure students the widest practice field for analyzing various sources and data sets.

Critical Thinking Historians

Examine bias, both personal and textual. The study of history has, in the past, centered very strongly on an empirical-analytical approach centered on data-based sources and analysis; however, recent movements within the discipline have begun to embrace a more narrative-linguistic approach, a key aspect of which is the recognition of bias within sources, both written and data-based. I extend this examination of bias in sources to include an examination of personal bias, and the impact it has on interpretation of sources. This skill extends far beyond a history classroom into becoming a critical consumer of all information.

Develop historical empathy. A crucial part of making history meaningful to students is to help them to see events from the perspective of those involved; this requires utilizing empathy to understand perspectives outside your own viewpoints. This means students should be consistently challenged to consider historical events from various perspectives throughout the social hierarchy, stretching their understanding of an event from a data-based point of view to a deeper narrative-based perspective. This approach echoes the call of Developmental Psychologist and Professor of Education Thomas Lickona for teachers to integrate character education into their classes, as it helps students develop empathy in general.

Consider alternative explanations. When looking at history, it is very easy to accept the known historical story as the truth and as set reality. However, it is a continuation of both understanding bias and viewing historical figures with empathy to be able to consider that the story recorded to history may not be the truest version of events. Highlighting key times in the study of history where it has come to light that the dominant view of an aspect of history is incorrect is a crucial step in helping students realize that they too can be critical consumers of the information given to them in everything from personal interactions to politics and popular science.

Critical Thinking Mathematicians

Use math to drive for change. For much of history, mathematics has been a tool of the oppressors in history, dividing haves from have-nots, and serving as a justification for punitive measures taken against certain groups. However, it also has the potential to be a strong tool for social justice through its ability to reveal systemic disparities and to create more equitable outcomes. It is for this reason, each mathematics course I instruct has a social justice strand through which students learn analysis techniques that utilize the mathematical concepts we are learning to assess important issues, such as how equitable and accurate voting methods work

(and how inequitable and inaccurate methods have been utilized historically), the impact of exponential growth on generational wealth, and geometric optimization to mitigate food deserts.

Interpretation matters. A crucial aspect of utilizing mathematical analysis in social justice work is the ability to fully understand the interpretation and implications of results. This means understanding fundamentals in data analysis, such as correlation versus causation, and more conceptual findings, such as proportionate and disproportionate outcomes; and most importantly, the link between those two concepts where the most significant interpretations can be found.

Understand the procedure. Rather than simply teaching an algorithm or a procedure, I work to ensure the students understand why each method works and the background aspects that are in play producing the outcome. This teaching methodology is informed by the combination of collegiate theoretical mathematics and practical application mathematics and science courses I took while pursuing my undergraduate degree in Mathematics, as well as recalling my own struggles in middle school and high school math courses until I was able to understand for myself why certain processes were performed. In college, I began to integrate this process-based instruction in my tutoring, and it was widely successful with my students in all levels, and I have found it equally successful in engaging all learners in my teaching career.

Each Learner Matters

Differentiation of delivery. A key first step of recognizing the value and individuality of learners is to provide content learning through a wide variety of methods. Though I challenge the scientific basis for both learning modalities and multiple intelligences, there is clear evidence that all students learn better from a rich and varied learning environment. In that aim, I use a combination of traditional methods, such as textbook readings, documentary films, lectures,

guided practice, and take-home practice sets, and non-traditional methods, such as primary, secondary, and image source analysis, YouTube blast lessons, Hollywood historical fiction films, open-ended research, and real-world data analysis to help students develop a full understanding of course content.

Experiential learning. Many of the non-traditional methods, and a few of the more traditional methods, are targeted at helping students become the interpreters of information, rather than merely consumers. It is through this experiential learning that students begin to become critically thinking historians and mathematicians, and critically thinking consumers of information.

Integrating technology. Technological capabilities are incredibly important for students stepping into the twenty-first century world. To not only be competitive, but to even be simply stable, people need to be able to interact well with the technology available now and be able to adapt to and learn the technology that will continue to be developed. This means it is my responsibility as their educator to bring suitable technology into my classroom in such a way that furthers their ability to utilize it, and in an equitable way that does not create additional barriers for students who do not have the means to provide their own technology.

Differentiation of assessment. Just as I integrate a variety of delivery methods, I use a variety of assessment methods that are also a combination of traditional and non-traditional forms. One key aspect of my recognition of differences among my students comes through in my use of assessment triads within each unit. These linked assessments consist of creative projects and assignments, traditional style quizzes and tests, and regular process reflections. By allowing students to show me their learning in a variety of forms, I am able to better gauge each students' true comprehension of the material. This is especially beneficial with my students who come from backgrounds outside of middle-class white culture, as it links into the oral culture which

they may relate to more strongly, and students who tend to struggle in a content-driven environment, as it allows for a more creative outlet for all students.

Process reflections as assessment. The research question I centered my Master of Education work on was investigating the impact of utilizing regular process reflections—guided questions, designed to be self-reflective and task-oriented—on student perception of their role in the historical process. Specifically, my aim was to help my student understand their ability to utilize historical skills in their future and everyday life through a continual practice of personal process reflections; reflections which ask them to think critically about the goal of a particular project in terms of the skills it developed, rather than only the content knowledge they garnered from its completion. The results of my comprehensive study showed significant gains across all points of measure both objectively, through student grades, and subjectively, through student perception of their own growth and the applicability of the skills they utilized throughout the year. These results inform my consistent integration of process reflection in all my courses.