

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

### Dr. Lisa Bompiani-Smith

I ate my first book. It was one of those indestructible, pseudo-fabric “baby’s first book” books, but I ate it. I believe this to be the source of my voracious appetite for literacy and learning, as well as the birth of my role as an educator. The experience of reading, the experience of writing, the experience of learning awakens within me such a strong sense of aliveness and curiosity; I *want* and *need* to know and do more. I teach because I want others to enjoy those same experiences, that same awareness. And, let’s be honest - after eating my first book, it’s in my blood.

John Dewey (1938) theorized that the educator’s job is to design a series of educational experiences that not only engage the learner in the present, but also “promote having desirable future experiences” (27).<sup>1</sup> Trends in education have oscillated from and between outcomes-based, standards-based, whole language, and data-based practices. Most recently, pundits have settled on STEM learning and career pathways as the best means for developing within students the college and career readiness demanded by the Common Core Standards. Despite the swinging of the educational pendulum, my approach to teaching has remained focused on experience. In the classroom, I foster a growth mindset by emphasizing collaboration, discovery, and inquiry in the learning experience. No matter the “best-practice of the month,” I center experiences on the question, “What does this writer do that I can do in my writing?” Planning begins with the question of what skill(s) I want students to take away with them to future experiences, how to assess the learning of the skill(s), and which texts and activities will most effectively convey the skill(s). I have used Backwards Design since before the term was coined by Wiggins and McTighe!<sup>2</sup> Lessons are scaffolded, beginning with a nod to Hunter’s concept of the anticipatory set that will engage students’ and cause them reflect on the upcoming lesson’s topic. I model the skill(s) with mentor texts, guide students through skill(s) practice, and gradually release responsibility to them for independent experimentation and application of the skill(s). Throughout this process, there will be much talk as students discuss, inquire, share, and support one another’s work. Data analysis, differentiation, and formative assessment are key to my ability to adjust to and meet students’ needs. My students work individually, in pairs, or with groups. My classroom is equipped with Chromebooks and a Promethean Board, allowing technology to be an integral aspect of instruction. A student-centered environment, my classroom has a comfortable atmosphere with beanbags, friendlier lighting, yoga balls, the sounds of light music, and bookshelves, closets, bulletin boards, and file cabinets overflowing with magazines, poetry, newspapers, facts, fictions, and trivia -- anything able to satisfy the curiosity of learners. In essence, my classroom is a resource center for the exchange and sharing of immense and endless experiences. Although I conceive of the lessons and assignments, choosing the texts with which we work, the students’ voices very often determine the direction in which the lesson or assignment turns by asking questions, suggesting texts, or sharing songs, artwork, writing, and videos. Every student has something to contribute to the classroom. My role as teacher is to find a way to connect the students’ previous educational experiences with new educational experiences that will inspire future educational experiences, avoiding what Dewey (1938) calls “mis-educative” experiences that “arrest or distort the growth of further experience” (25).

Several years ago I wrote a poem entitled, “Circling.” Its central image was a dog who was circling as he prepared to lie down. He was pawing, sniffing and circling, not growling and barking; he knew that the right spot would be discovered if he just kept circling. This dog represents all of us as learners. Focusing on experience allows pawing, sniffing, and circling through educational experiences. Remember, I ate my first book; literacy is essential to my very existence, so I *want* and *need* to paw, sniff, and circle through educational experiences in order to simply survive. Supporting my students through their own circling, witnessing the development of their appreciation for reading and writing not only satisfies my hunger for literacy and learning, but also promotes a life full of educational experiences that would make Dewey proud.

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey, J. (1938/1997). *Experience and Education*. The Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series. NY, NY: Simon & Schuster Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Wiggins, G., and McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.