Credo-OLTD 509

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Nelson Mandela

Picture by B. Atwood (2018), Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia

What is in a credo? According to the Collins Dictionary, "A credo is a set of beliefs, principles, or opinions that strongly influence the way a person lives or works." Why do I have or even need one? To my surprise, I hadn't really thought about what my educational principles were until 504. I remembered writing a philosophy of education once for a job interview but I don't think it was about my beliefs but more about what the employer wanted to hear. This is my 24th year in education and I know now that what I say are my beliefs because I live them in my classroom every day. Digging into my credo made me realize how much I have changed, and I hope, have improved, and will continue to improve in my practice. I know it will change with experiences and ongoing learning.

Here's my credo...today.

https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/nelson_mandela_157855

https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/credo

Flexible Learning

Image retrieved from https://www.pexels.com

Personalizing Learning

Growing up in a traditional education system has help to carve the person I am today. I attended a brick and mortar school with classrooms filled with desks in rows where we all students learned the same subject at the same time with the teacher at the front of the room. At a glance we were all learning but someone observing would have seen that many were not. As many classrooms today have the same learners, we have made improvements in how we "do school".

Today, we realize that students have interests and are motivated when we offer learning that is connected to something they enjoy. In the book *Blended* by Staker and Horn, 2015, they state that "today's factory model of education in which we batch students in classes and teach the same thing, on the same day, is an ineffective way for most students to learn." (p. xxvi) As explained in the book, I believe that student centered learning is what we should be focussing on in school.

Children have interests and strengths in many areas. Harnessing their passions in school will allow for more learning connections to be made and will increase their success. According to the authors, student centered learning is a combination of personalized learning and competency based learning. Personalized learning offers individual choice and pace to students and competency based learning provides the learner to work on competencies in forms of levels and supports skills to reaching mastery. I believe that these would increase engagement for students in schools.

Flexible environments

Offering students the options to learn in different places, at different paces and in different ways, will again address their individual needs. Within the brick and mortar setting, I am limited to bells and a certain schedule to follow in order to respect recesses, lunch and other scheduled activities. I do though have the option to offer a flexible learning environment within my classroom. Having different seating options such as my "living room" with a couch, carpet and a chair, stools to sit at the "tech cafe" to work on mobile devices, and tables for collaborative learning, encourages individual, partner and group work which happens in my classroom. I want my students to be comfortable and have options to position themselves to have positive learning experiences. I also know that learning doesn't all happen in my classroom. Allowing them to use the rest of the school building, in a respectful way; to venture outside in nature and to learn when they are not at school needs to be acknowledged and encouraged.

All in time

Considering that we are all different, I'm going to assume that there is a possibility that we may process and learn quite differently. By offering flexible time in my schedule, students choose areas they want to work on to improve or to move forward with learning. I believe that by providing times during the day when students get to choose what to work on, encourages responsibility. As mentioned in Beingessner and Mehrbach (June 2015), "These flexible blocks help students personalize their learning path, make connections across disciplines, and give them voice and choice in their learning."

Learning styles

Providing options for learning and to show learning in different ways also focuses on the individual child. Programs and school schedules don't always allow for this type of flexibility. I believe that knowing my students and understanding how they prefer to learn, gives me a chance to accommodate learning styles in the classroom. I believe in students learning by

focussing on independent work, providing partner and collaborative learning opportunities to work on problem solving, critical thinking and communication skills.

My content delivery offers reading and writing by using books, technology, readers and scribe capabilities. Working collaboratively with different tools and devices creates a culture of inclusion. We learn to appreciate our challenges and differences. Some of my students choose to write a book, perform a skit or create a google slide to show understanding. We complete STEM projects which encourages critical thinking skills for a task which students would encounter in the real world. These learning opportunities are engaging and motivating. It gives students an understanding of why we do what we do in school. It also gives them opportunities to explore learning they enjoy or perhaps unaware of.

Classroom Culture

As a teacher with experience, I want to create a positive and balanced classroom environment. Connecting with 30 students daily and having a personal conversation can be a challenge. I focus on greeting each student in the morning and during the day by asking about the weekend, the hockey game, the visit with the family, etc. We also do some question and answer oral practice for French language, which they do with each other, and then they share out. The students love telling about their personal activities and adventures. These talks provide insight for me on what is going on in their daily lives and also connects them to others who may be experiencing the same thing.

Our classroom is where the teacher and students have a voice, where feedback is provided from both parties and where we look at solving problems together. I have clear expectations for behavior and work responsibilities. I like the class to be clean and organized as there are 30 of them and this helps us have a functional environment. Students sign up for the responsibility they would like to do that week and receive Mme Atwood bucks at the end of the week. (This financial literacy program is to honour work, attendance, speaking French and being responsible. At the end of the month, we have an auction. It's so fun!)

Students are also involved in class set up with seating plans, with responsibilities/jobs, and in scheduling activities. For example, the class decided to elect a student council to address some of our daily challenges and structures as well as to allow planning for celebrating learning. They collect ideas in a suggestion box and bring them to the attention of the class once a week. Students vote and the council consults with me on details of the decisions.

All my students are offered technology to learn, and not only those who require it to support their special education learning designation. Students are encouraged to work with others on daily tasks as well to show learning in different ways.

Beingessner, C. and Mehrbach, L. (2015). WHY FLEXIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS? Singapore American School, Singapore. Retrieved from

https://www.sas.edu.sg/about-us/publications-and-media/perspectives/post-details/~board/perspectives-blog/post/why-flexible-learning-environments

Horn, M. & Staker, H. (2015). Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools. San Francisco, CA :Jossey-Bass.

The Power of 'Yet'...

 Image retrieved from

https://www.nsmtc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Power-of-Yet-Growth-Mindset-Poster.png)

Student Mindset

Teaching a group of students with different personalities, prior experiences and beliefs can be challenging when you are trying to create a positive and collective way of thinking in your

classroom to move learning forward. Students bring their opinions about challenges and successes because of their personal experiences. Some come with mindsets that reflect their family life or learned behaviors. In order for my students to improve and learn, they need to learn about growth mindsets. "Mindset is a simple idea discovered by world-renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck in decades of research on achievement and success—a simple idea that makes all the difference. In a *fixed mindset*, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort. They're wrong. In a *growth mindset*, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have had these qualities." (Dweck, 2010)

I believe that by starting the year with positive ways of thinking will set a positive tone for the class. Students need to be reminded that changing their attitudes to 'not yet' leaves room for positive results that has no timeline and redirects thoughts away from failure from the first attempt. Providing students with skills to change their mindset is important. Implementing this type of thinking with my students will hopefully get them to see the positive outcomes of having a Growth Mindset that they can apply to their daily lives.

Teacher Mindset

As an educator, I am also working on a growth mindset for myself and my students. As stated in Gunn (2018), "Just as we teach our students to continuously improve, grow, learn, and change, so must we as educators.'' I believe that teachers should always be growing and learning. I took on the OLTD journey to learn more about technology in the classroom. I felt that being more informed and educated about how to learn with technology, was going was a benefit for myself and my students.

I like to change routines and tasks with my students. Having a willingness to offer new experiences helps us keep our day interesting. Letting go of our restrictive routines and the same way of doing things, gives us a change to experiment with new ways of learning. I believe

that listening to students and their wants, helps guide me towards the new STEM projects, self-directed task or technology projects. Stepping away from our norm presents new challenges and in return helps us practice our Growth Mindset with students as they see us experience challenges as we learn. There's nothing like watching the teacher who can't understand why the Smartboard won't work, to get students to understand that everyone needs to practice a growth mindset when things go awry!

Offering students flexibility in how they learn is really an important consideration for 21st century learning. Providing opportunities for students to use 21st century skills such as being able to complete tasks independently and collaboratively, being adaptable, having grit, showing perseverance and resilience as well as self-discipline to name a few will challenge their mindset. (Personal Mindset, 2019) I believe that giving students learning opportunities to develop these skills will make them aware of what they need to work on as a 21st century learners as well as recognize their strengths and challenges.

Dweck, Carol (2010). MindSetOnline. Retrieved from https://mindsetonline.com

Gunn, J. (August, 2018). Building a Growth Mindset for Teachers. A Blog by Concordia University Portland. Retrieved from https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/growth-mindset-for-teachers/
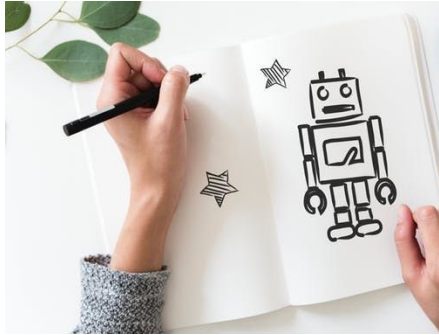
Personal Mindset (2019). MHA Labs. Retrieved from http://mhalabs.org/skill-building-blocks/personal-mindset/

Emerging Technologies

Image retrieved from https://www.pexels.com

According to Veletsianos (2010) "emerging technologies are tools, concepts, innovations, and advancements utilized in diverse educational settings to serve varied education-related purposes." (p.17) He investigated the term by asking other researchers and practitioners when the question was asked on Twitter, Facebook, in emails, and on various blogs and created this mind map of their answers.
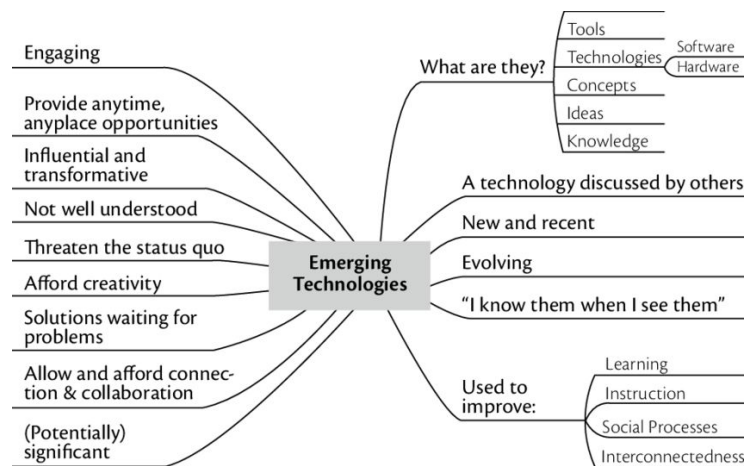
(Mind Map from Veletsianos, 2010)

As an educator, I feel that it is my responsibility to keep up (as much as possible) with what is going on in the world. In order to keep up with my students, I have to be aware of what they are experiencing with emerging technologies.

Over the past 20 years in education, I have participated in many new initiatives and programs. Many have not stayed long enough in the classroom to accurately appreciate their benefits. I like to offer current technologies such as coding, robotics and educational technologies such as Ipads and Chromebooks to get students to use as tools for learning. These new technologies help students develop 21st century skills in the classroom. Skills such as problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking and communication are what future employers seek in people to solve authentic problems in the world.

Learning and collaboration

Teachers are in a work environment where we need to assess our teaching methods and students to ensure that there is learning happening in the classroom. We have a time for teacher collaboration every 2 weeks for 1 hour at our school. We use this time to review our data to adjust our teaching and focus for students to be able to practice 21st century learning. Not only is this important for students, but it is important for us to collaboratively approach learning together as a team.

Having conversations around best practice and preparing students for the 21st century is vital to ensure we are not stagnant and continue to practice what we were teaching 10 years ago. Supporting change with research, and creating plans to implement change as well as systems of support for staff, will benefit students and staff.

I believe in life-long learning to ensure that I am current. I need to adjust my practice in the classroom as well as find ways to encourage others who struggle to make changes on their own, by collaborating on projects together. Addressing the subject of emerging technologies can get heated when staff do not understand the benefits and its place in education. I believe that having conversations and by sharing the changes I've made in my own practice, to include these emerging technologies, will give others hope and courage to attempt change in their own practice.

Veletsianos, George. (2010). A Definition of Emerging Technologies for Education. Book Emerging Technologies in Distance Education., Publisher: Athabasca University Press, Editors: Veletsianos, George, pp.3-22. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/George_Veletsianos/publication/235939794_A_Definition_of_Emerging_Technologies_for_Education/links/550895120cf26ff55f8373a8/A-Definition-of-Emerging-Technologies-for-Education.pdf?origin=publication_detail