

Teaching Portfolio

Lars Henke

**Elementary Teacher • SEL •UDL
•Inquiry Based Learning**

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that every child deserves access to a joyful, rigorous, and inclusive education. I strive to create a learning environment where all learners feel seen, valued, and supported academically, emotionally, and culturally. In alignment with the principles of the IB Primary Years Programme, my practice prioritizes inquiry, student agency, and the development of the whole child.

My commitment to equity and inclusion is deeply personal. Growing up dyslexic in North Carolina public schools, I often felt disconnected from learning and uncertain of my place in the classroom. These experiences shaped my understanding of how powerful it is when students feel understood—and how harmful it can be when they do not. Today, this perspective informs my commitment to Universal Design for Learning, differentiation, and inclusive practice. I believe all learners deserve access to high expectations, meaningful challenge, and the appropriate supports needed to thrive. In my classroom, differences are viewed as strengths, and learning is intentionally designed to be accessible to all.

As a white male educator, I am mindful of the privilege I bring into the classroom and the responsibility that accompanies it. I view teaching as an act of service and advocacy—one that requires reflection, humility, and intentional action. Guided by the concept of “windows and mirrors,” I work to ensure students see themselves reflected in the curriculum while also engaging with perspectives, cultures, and experiences beyond their own. My international experiences living and working in Lesotho, Ghana, India, Argentina, Senegal, Thailand, and Germany have strengthened my belief in international-mindedness and the importance of culturally responsive teaching in developing empathetic, globally aware learners.

Inquiry sits at the heart of my practice. I design transdisciplinary learning experiences that encourage students to ask meaningful questions, think critically, collaborate effectively, and communicate with purpose. Through intentional routines, formative assessment, and authentic problems, I support learners in developing agency, resilience, and reflection. Ultimately, my goal is to nurture confident, compassionate individuals who understand their role in the world and are prepared to take thoughtful action within their communities.

Instructional Practices & Classroom Approach

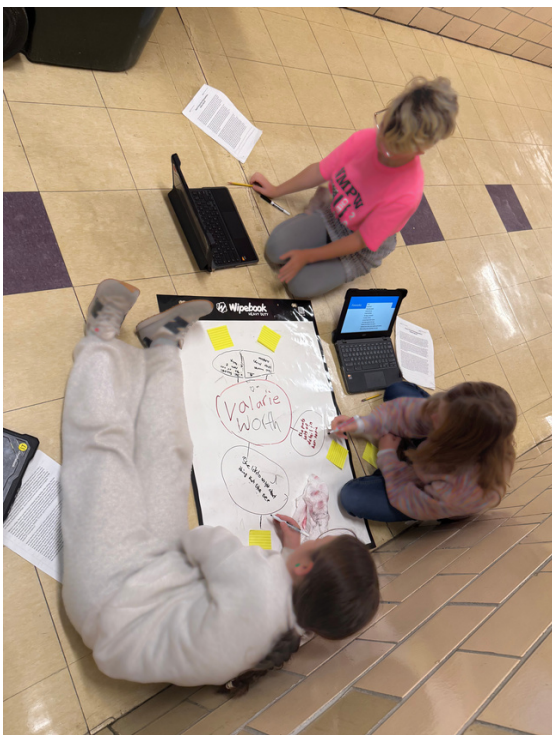
UDL

I design learning experiences through a Universal Design for Learning lens to ensure all students can access, engage with, and demonstrate understanding. I identify barriers within the task—not the learner—and plan multiple pathways for engagement, representation, and expression. I collaborate closely with learning support, ELL, and specialist teachers to anticipate learning needs and scaffold instruction, ensuring high expectations while fostering student agency within an inclusive, inquiry-driven classroom.

Project Based Learning



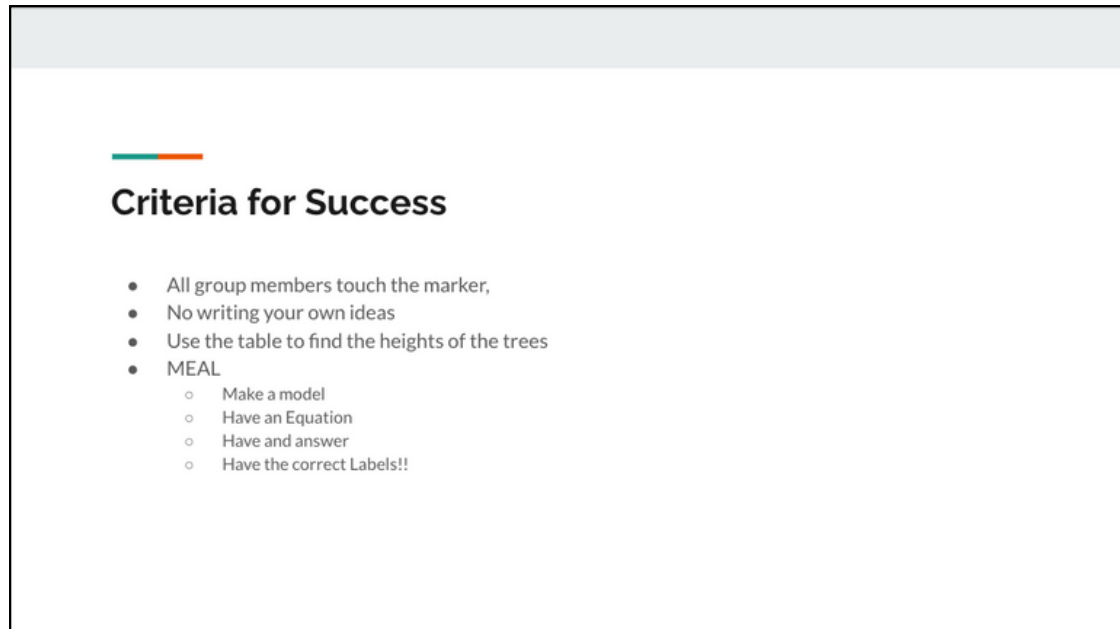
Students presenting their food trucks during our “Power of Food” inquiry exhibition.



My instruction is rooted in authentic, student-centered inquiry. In the transdisciplinary unit “What Is the Power of Food?”, students explored how food connects culture, identity, biology, and economics. Guided by a central idea and lines of inquiry, students designed and built food trucks representing their cultural backgrounds, published a collaborative class recipe book, and raised funds for a local charity.

This unit integrated literacy, mathematics, social studies, and social-emotional learning while fostering student voice, agency, and meaningful action—core elements of the IB Primary Years Programme.

Clarity, Agency, & Assessment for Learning



A presentation slide titled "Criteria for Success" with a list of four bullet points. The first three are: "All group members touch the marker," "No writing your own ideas," and "Use the table to find the heights of the trees." The fourth is "MEAL", which is expanded into a sub-list: "Make a model", "Have an Equation", "Have and answer", and "Have the correct Labels!!".

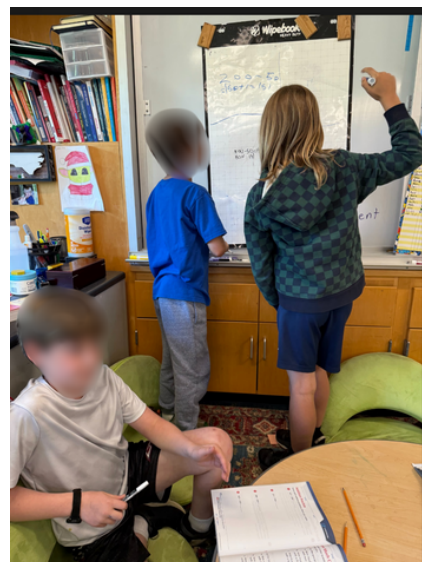
Criteria for Success

- All group members touch the marker,
- No writing your own ideas
- Use the table to find the heights of the trees
- MEAL
 - Make a model
 - Have an Equation
 - Have and answer
 - Have the correct Labels!!

Clarity & Equitable Access Through Success Criteria

I consistently use clear, co-constructed success criteria as a form of assessment for learning, supporting all learners in understanding expectations, internalizing routines, and taking ownership of their work. In this mathematics lesson, students used the MEAL framework (Model, Equation, Answer, Labels) alongside shared group norms to collaborate effectively and justify their reasoning.

These routines promote independence, equitable participation, and purposeful academic discourse while supporting the development of Approaches to Learning (ATL) skills such as communication, collaboration, and self-management. By making expectations transparent and thinking visible, students are empowered to monitor their progress and engage confidently in joyful, rigorous learning.



Students use co-constructed group norms and the MEAL framework to justify mathematical reasoning and engage in collaborative academic discourse.

Approaches to Learning

Communication:

Students regularly articulate their thinking through structured discussion, written reflection, and presentation, using accountable talk and visual tools to make thinking visible.

Research:

Learners develop research skills by asking questions, gathering information from multiple sources, and synthesizing findings to deepen understanding during units of inquiry.

Thinking:

Through open-ended tasks and authentic problems, students analyze, evaluate, and transfer ideas across disciplines while developing critical and creative thinking.

Self Management:

Clear routines, co-constructed success criteria, and reflection support students in managing time, setting goals, and persevering through challenge.

Social:

Collaborative learning structures and shared norms foster respectful communication, shared responsibility, and productive teamwork.

Assessment and Feedback

Formative Assessments

I use ongoing formative assessments to understand how students learn, not just what they produce. Whiteboard problem-solving, writing conferences, exit tickets, and annotated work samples help me identify misconceptions and analyze trends across the class. I use this data to form flexible small groups that change as students' needs evolve. These real-time insights allow me to plan targeted mini-lessons, differentiate instruction, and ensure every student receives the right support or challenge to move forward.

SEL Check-Ins

I use weekly wellness check-ins and the Zones of Regulation to help students develop emotional awareness and self-regulation. The check-ins give me insight into how students are feeling, their stress levels, and any external challenges they may be carrying into the week. Using this information, along with students' self-identified zones (Blue, Green, Yellow, Red), I can support emotional readiness, form small groups that maximize psychological safety, and ensure every learner enters the classroom feeling seen, understood, and prepared to learn. These practices build trust, strengthen relationships, and cultivate a classroom where students can take academic risks.

Family and Community Engagement

Consistent, Clear Communication with Families

I believe strong home-school partnerships begin with clear, consistent communication. Each week, I send families a detailed update outlining our learning goals, upcoming events, and ways to support learning at home. During conferences, I use individualized slideshows to share student strengths, growth data, and next steps. These tools help families feel connected to our classroom community and informed about their child's progress.

Celebrations of Learning & Community Events

I regularly invite families into the classroom to celebrate student learning. In our poetry unit, students published their own anthologies, shared original poems with families, and reflected on their growth as writers. These moments deepen the home-school connection, amplify student voice, and build a joyful community that values creativity, courage, and authentic expression.

Partnering with Families to Support the Whole Child

I view families as essential partners in supporting students' holistic development. I regularly check in with caregivers, collaborate on individualized goals, and share SEL updates when needed. By building trusting, reciprocal relationships with families, I create a support system where every child feels known, valued, and encouraged.

Math

across a very strong math student! His fact fluency is solid, and he has excellent number sense. He understands the reciprocity of multiplication and division, which shows sophisticated mathematical thinking. I'm really proud of the work he's doing.

Here's the challenge with ~~across~~ his brain works at about 100 mph while his fingers can't quite keep up! Looking at his recent assessment, in Problem 1 he successfully broke down 18×7 ($10 \times 7 = 70$ and $7 \times 8 = 56$), added them together, and got the correct answer of 126. Perfect! But in Problem 2, he rushed through without fully completing what was being asked - he didn't properly label the array parts or write an equation that matches the strategy. He knows how to do it (he literally just showed that!), but when he moves too quickly, he misses parts of the directions.

What helps ~~across~~ most is checking in with him regularly and having him focus on one problem at a time rather than racing ahead. When he slows down even just a bit, the quality of his work matches his strong mathematical ability.

DATE _____

Solving 18×7

● Solve this problem and show your thinking.

$18 \times 7 =$ _____

$10 \times 7 = 70$ $70 + 56 = 126$

$7 \times 8 = 56$

● Break the 18×7 array into two smaller arrays that could help you solve the problem. You can use the same strategy you used in Problem 1 or a different one. Label each small array. Write an equation to show how you broke apart the array.

7×8 7×16

Equation: $7 \times 8 + 7 \times 16$

Unit 3 | Area | Session 13

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Sample conference slideshow used to communicate student progress to families

About Me as an Educator



Peace Corps Swearing In Ceremony

During my time as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Lesotho, I learned how to build authentic, reciprocal relationships with communities whose lived experiences differed greatly from my own. My swearing-in ceremony represented not just a commitment to service, but a promise to approach every learning environment with **humility**, **curiosity**, and **cultural responsiveness**. This experience shaped my belief that students thrive when teachers honor their identities, listen deeply, and build inclusive learning cultures grounded in respect.

Core Values

- Equity & Access – Every student deserves rigorous learning and high expectations.
- Belonging – Students thrive when they feel seen, known, and valued.
- Curiosity – Learning is driven by wonder, questioning, and exploration.
- Cultural Responsiveness – Instruction honors students' identities and lived experiences.
- Service – Teaching is a relational profession grounded in care and community.



A student's message from my first year teaching — a reminder of the relationships at the heart of this work.