

EXAMPLE #2

Dear Future Sasha,

I hope you are doing well. I am writing to tell you some things I would like to remember in regard to my career as a teacher. I feel I have a much clearer idea now of my teaching philosophies and how I want to conduct my classroom. I have a clearer perspective on how the way a teacher acts can affect their students, and this is because of learning theories.

The learning theories that struck me the most were asset-based theory, constructionism, and social cognitive theory. Asset-based theory seems to me to be the most important, because it speaks to the idea that every student has the right to learn. This has been something I have always believed in, and this theory gave me new language to speak about it. Teachers fall into the trap of blaming outside factors for the way a child's education is turning out, instead of viewing those outside factors as things that can be used in the classroom. By avoiding this deficit mindset and allowing students to use their Funds of Knowledge, by valuing everyone's unique culture, I will be able to create a classroom that is welcoming and safe for everyone. This is, of course, easier said than done, but I feel that I have the tools now to make an attempt consciously and carefully.

As for constructionism, I also feel it aligns with some long-held beliefs. The act of making things, creating something, has always made learning more enjoyable for me as a student. This theory says that when students create something by themselves, with little guidance from an instructor, deeper learning is facilitated. I envision creative projects like short stories, posters, and art for my future students. I want them to be excited about coming into school and working on something. I feel that is one of my real strengths as a teacher, creating assignments and projects that are engaging but still educational. I think the only thing I would struggle with is taking a step back and letting students decide what to do. I want them to get the full benefit from my guidance, but I also know that according to this theory, learning takes place when I don't give them guidance and let them build on their own knowledge and skills.

Social cognitive theory makes the most sense to me in terms of the science. Learning by observing is how I learned lots of things. I always find myself seeking an example when I go to write a paper or start a new task. The fact that students would learn by watching a model makes sense. I think that as a teacher, I would like to take steps back and let peers be models. I think of some video analysis where I noticed that allowing students to demonstrate their work on the board in front of everyone could be a way for them to act as a model for others. It is important to me to build community in my classroom, and for that, I want students to be in charge of their learning. This seems like one way I can do that.

Most of all, I want to be the teacher whose classroom students look forward to walking into each day. I know that the feelings I have had previously about wanting to create real community are backed up by theories like the sociocultural theory that says students are social learners and that learning from More Knowledgeable Peers can be a productive form of education. I think I will be able to foster this by doing "community" activities like morning meetings where everyone gets to share their thoughts, feelings, something exciting from the

weekend, something they're interested in. With each student given a platform, the hope is that they feel seen and included. That way, when it comes time to learn from peers, everyone trusts each other enough to do so. As an aspiring elementary school teacher, I know that so much important social development will happen in my classroom, and I want to encourage that by offering as much chance to interact with peers as possible. The fact this facilitates learning is an added bonus.

Selfishly, I want the reputation of "fun teacher" in my future school building. I want to be the teacher that kids remember when they are graduating high school years later. I want to be the person kids will cite when they say, "I learned this in Ms. Sasha's class, and I still remember." I hope that my ideas for constructionist style projects will make this happen. I also think, in terms of helping my students remember, I could tie in some information processing theories. When you rehearse something, it gets transferred to the long-term memory. Something like a game could be excellent rehearsal, because a game is usually repetitive. You take the same steps on each turn. I have heard of teachers doing Dungeons and Dragons style games where each student plays a character, decides what moves to make, keeps track of items their character is holding, etc. Doing something like that for an extended period of time, having the game continue for several days, could be an interesting thing to explore in terms of a memorable and repetitive activity.

Much of my teaching philosophy from the start of this semester looks the same now. The difference is I have the theory to back up what I said, and strategies to help do it. I mentioned specifically at the beginning of the semester how learning can and should go both ways, from student to teacher and teacher to student. I know that asset-based theory backs that up. I will be letting students take the lead and teach me about their own culture, heritage, interests. Behaviorism says that I need to offer cues in order to elicit a certain response. That is what learning is. I still believe that is an oversimplification. Students have a lot going on inside their heads. They grow and change and discover so much about themselves in the elementary school years. They are also intelligent people with opinions and good things to say. I want to listen to them as much as I can.

In the beginning of the semester, I was also quite adamant about never taking away recess, allowing opportunities to stay active. I know now that not only is staying physically healthy important for kids, but the playground can form a kind of community of practice, to use a term relating to situated cognition. Students all work together to get to some sort of goal in a setting that mimics real life: the playground is full of different groups of people, and it is up to the students to figure out how to coexist. Again, social learning is one of the most important things that elementary school offers. Taking away recess takes away that opportunity to learn.

What it comes down to is that, as a teacher, I should want the best for my students. I should want to empower them by facilitating as much learning as I can. A teacher is a caretaker, and a teacher has a responsibility when parents put their children in our hands. I want to be a force for good in my students' lives. I hope that aided by learning theories, I am more equipped to be so.

Warm regards,
Past Sasha

Thank you Sasha Burton for allowing your excellent “Dear Future Me” letter to be used as an example for future students writing to their future selves.