**Murray Teaching Philosophy**

**Personal Background**

I was born and raised in rural Indiana and attended my local public school, Pioneer School Corporation. Rural Indiana, as well as other rural parts of the country, did not have much diversity. There were a lot of middle and lower-class families who were farmers or blue-collar workers, which did not give kids much exposure to different cultures and social classes. As I moved into high school, our community started to change some, but more racial diversity occurred in the bigger towns in the area. My main exposure to other cultures was through my church when missionaries would visit and tell us about the people and communities they were trying to reach in other parts of the world. I enjoyed it when I got to learn about other kids around the world, what they got to eat, what school was like for them, and what animals were in their environment. I also got to learn about a handful of cultures through the foreign exchange program at my high school. Those kids were almost celebrities because we all wanted to know what it was like to live in another country. Other than church and foreign exchange students in high school, my education was catered more to the people in the community where I lived which meant not much exposure to other cultures until I went to college in the fall of 2006.

**Education and Teaching Experience**

I attended Pensacola Christian College in Pensacola, Florida from August 2006 until May 2010. I earned a bachelor of science degree in secondary education. My primary teaching field was math, and my secondary teaching field was business. I also had a minor in English. It was during these four years that I was exposed to people from other cultures. Pensacola had a large international student population with students from all over the globe. I had a couple of Filipino roommates, and then I had friends with roommates from other countries that I got to know when I would visit their rooms. I also did my student teaching at the associated elementary and high school Pensacola Christian Academy in which I got more exposure to students from other cultures as they too had an exchange student program.

After graduation, I moved to Fairfax, Virginia in the fall of 2010. I taught math, physics, and computers at Fairfax Baptist Temple Academy. Being just outside of Washington D.C., there was a melting pot of cultures and classes represented in the student body. Some families had moved to the U.S. from another country, and some had grandparents who had moved when their children were younger, and the students I had were the first of their families to be born in our country. Our church also had a Spanish-speaking ministry so several families had a Hispanic or Latin American background. Not only did the school have cultural diversity, there was also social class diversity. We had families where only one parent worked, a couple of families where one parent had lost a job so money was very tight, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, and even company owners. There were many different backgrounds in the classroom and many different abilities to connect to, help, and encourage. It was fun and exhausting all at the same time. I taught there for five years (May 2015), when I left because my husband and I were starting a family.

I was out of the classroom for five years. During that time, I worked from home for a local pest control company. I computed the commission checks for the sales reps, and eventually the technicians when they sold services. I also helped set up the routes for the technicians of the largest branch and put notes on accounts. I started in June of 2014. The company was bought out and my position was terminated right before my family moved to northern Indiana in February of 2020.

Since our children were getting older, I started looking for teaching jobs in the area and found the school where I currently work. I started in the Fall of 2020 at Hebron Christian Academy (HCA). I have taught math, junior high English, physics, and chemistry due to the math involved. I took the 2023-2024 school year off while I was working on my master’s degree from Purdue University in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on technology. Even though I did not teach at the school, I still subbed at HCA and other local schools. I also helped HCA go through the accreditation process with the state, and we are now an approved school to receive Choice Vouchers and do state testing. I am now working with the school administration to get accredited with an additional third-party organization.

**Philosophy of Education**

I want students to be challenged in my classroom and to be prepared for college if they so choose. I have always loved math, and I enjoyed helping my classmates with their math homework. When I got to algebra, my mom said that she had an algebra teacher who made her feel stupid and that she would ask questions in class. I vowed then, that no student would leave my class feeling stupid because I refused to help them with one of their questions. This treatment of my mom laid a foundation for my teaching philosophy when I was in junior high.

When students enter my room for the first time, they are a blank slate. Yes, I may already have some background knowledge of them, but I try to give them a fair chance to prove themselves in my class. If they have a poor reputation, I give them the benefit of the doubt and see if they have matured a little over the summer. Each student gets to prove to me who they are and what abilities they have. Those that show that they have a natural ability or gift in math, are encouraged to continue, and I try to find little ways to encourage and challenge them. I even start having conversations if they have an idea if they want to go to college and what they plan to major in. If the student is not sure, I start to suggest looking into some different careers that are math and science-related. If the student already has an idea of what they want to study, I try to see if I can make my classes more applicable to them and bring out parts that they could see in their future education or careers. For those who struggle, I offer extra help and give them some online resources that they can use to also help with their math homework. I then try to find out more about what that student is interested in and encourage them to focus on their strengths.

Math can be a difficult subject, and some students can be very nervous and stressed. I teach the concepts and terms, demonstrate one or two problems while alerting them to some things to look for, practice a problem or two as a class where the students tell me how to solve the problem, and then allow students to practice on the whiteboards. As students practice, I go around and help if there are questions or just double-check answers and work. Since math is a skill subject, I try to give the students lots of time to practice problems to help them develop and hone their skills. The day before a test, I devote the whole day to practice, and helping kids in the trouble spots. I base grades on homework, quizzes, and tests. I try to keep homework as a completion grade to allow students to attempt math problems without the fear of getting one problem wrong or having a dramatic impact on their grade. Some students will at least attempt a problem if they know that it will not hurt their grades. Quizzes and Tests are graded and 60 percent (30 and 30 each) of their grade. I have found that students leave class no longer hating math. Math may still not be their favorite class, but there is usually less stress by coming to class.

I tend to follow a social-cognitive approach in my teaching style. I have also recently had more students with learning disorders in my room, so I also try to have more manipulatives and aids in the classroom for students that may need more of a visual especially when working with geometry and statistical problems. I try to implement projects in class that will also help me apply the concepts and see them from a hands-on experience. These are ways that make math more fun and more tangible for them.

**Career Goals as an Educator**

As I have grown as an educator and an adult, my goals have changed from when I was a college student. My original goals were to graduate with my bachelor's from Pensacola, move back to my hometown to earn a master's in applied mathematics from Purdue, and then teach math and applied math to college students. However, when I did not get accepted based on the volume of applicants and the number of spots available, I was heartbroken. Then one of my professors told me that was not where I was supposed to be and that there was a classroom somewhere with kids that needed me instead. I still wanted to get my master's, but it would have to wait until later.

Then my first few years of teaching were more about self-preservation. I taught at a private Christian school so my class sizes were smaller, but I had five or six preps each year. As I became more established and comfortable, I started looking into master's programs in the D.C. area. Then my husband and I started a family, so again, that goal got put on the back burner.

We moved to Northwest Indiana in February 2020, and I started a new position at another small private school. It was like starting all over again. During a teachers’ conference, I connected with a company that creates curriculum, and the idea of writing curriculum and going to schools to train teachers how to use the curriculum fascinated me. I decided to get a master's in curriculum and instruction focusing on technology. I determined that this degree would help me accomplish a new goal of writing a curriculum and helping train teachers. Currently, I am helping my school go through an accreditation process. This allows me to work with the teachers and help them with the curriculum and adding aids and visuals to help their lessons. I believe this current position is helping me see what different teachers need to make a better curriculum.