

## Dr. Desiree Cameron

### Diversity Statement

Born in South Africa and raised in Canada, Austria, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, I've had the great fortune of being exposed to different cultures. At home, I spoke German with my Austrian father, English with my American mother, and French at school at the Lycée Français. When the war broke out in Yugoslavia, my mother didn't feel safe in Austria and we moved to the United States. I tested out of eighth grade and landed in an American high school at the age of 13. French was the language I felt most comfortable in, especially when it came to reading, writing, and communicating my ideas. French felt like my first language. Trying to write and process all my subjects in English was extremely challenging. Even so, I was committed to do my best, regardless of any obstacle in my path. By the time I was 16, I managed to skip my senior year of high school to attend university.

This experience has had a profound impact in how I work with students in the K-12 classroom and how I work with teachers. As an educator, I have tremendous empathy for students who are learning English as a second language. Knowing another language should be viewed as an asset, not a handicap. I embrace my students who are learning to communicate their understanding in English, and I deeply honor their cultural upbringings. Having a different background and perspective has provided me with an appreciation for different educational systems, different cultures, and different perspectives.

Having had the great fortune of traveling to various countries throughout my youth, I discovered the power of the arts as a universal language. While I may not speak someone else's language, we can communicate through music, art, performance, and dance. Moving beyond the spoken word provides more freedom to express the depths of our humanity. The arts are a universal language, and as such, are inherently a powerful model of diversity. As a teacher and teacher educator, I believe that placing the arts at the heart of my courses pushes my students beyond memorization, beyond regurgitation of material, beyond a one-size-fits all educational model. I am more interested in students becoming creative thinkers and problem solvers and expressing their understanding through a variety of modes that better demonstrate their learning. The arts require doing, becoming, and transforming. I believe in planning with the end in mind, creating a clear destination for all to reach, all while providing options for my students to reach their goals.

Diversity is not only at the heart of the arts, but is at the core of my teaching philosophy. I believe the purpose of arts education is to understand ourselves, others, and the world. This includes understanding our biases and prejudices, exploring our identity, and discovering our unique strengths and areas of stretch. I create opportunities for my students to learn about others by pushing them to see beyond their own perspective. In my classes, students explore mirror and window activities. Mirror activities focus on connecting with experiences that are emotionally and culturally similar to their own background and viewpoint. Window activities provide students with another perspective beyond their own, allowing for an entry point into other people's experiences and cultures.

I embrace diversity of culture, diversity of thought, diversity of learning ability, and diversity of expression. By sharing our viewpoints and collaborating with others in constructing our understanding, we have the opportunity to not only gain insight into other people's perspectives, but to grow artistically, academically, socially, and emotionally.