

TEACHING TOWARD JUSTICE STATEMENT

Teaching holds the promise of a better, more just future. My goal as a teacher of education is to engage in collaborative inquiry with students in classroom learning-communities that draw on the resources of all participants to learn about education and the role it can play in building an equitable society. My job as a teacher begins with love. Fundamental to all humans is our need to be loved, to be believed in, and to be respected. Teaching toward justice requires loving my students. Next, there are three objectives I have in every class I teach. First, is to ensure that students *recognize* the assumptions and systems that promote the status quo and existing inequalities. My next responsibility is to teach students to use tools and theories to *critique* dominant structures and the way things are. Ultimately, I want students to leave our classes with a better understanding of education and a defined action plan for how they will *practice* education moving forward to promote justice.

To create an inquiry based classroom learning-community I start community building on the very first day of classes. Guidelines for classroom discussions are collaboratively created and approved through a peace circle, an indigenous practice of building and being in community. This work sets the tone and expectations for the semester. We also explore the shifting and socially constructed identity markers of all classroom community participants (students and professor). Each member creates and shares an identity kit they have constructed highlighting important items or images that demonstrate how they are currently identifying themselves. Another assignment we engage in is sharing our linguistic portraits, that encourage students to explore the multiple relationships they have to language. These activities allow everyone to learn

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about the resources and backgrounds of all class members. I teach from a critical sociocultural approach, which requires discussions related to questions of power and existing inequities. To facilitate discussion, we rearrange desks or chairs so that everyone can see each other's faces either in a large circle or around a table. Changing the classroom set up helps to equalize the roles in the classroom and position everyone as both a giver and a receiver of knowledge. Through inquiry projects, generally ethnographic case studies or classroom observations, students engage with approaches to generating knowledge about educational areas or topics of personal interest. Final course projects aim to share our collectively generated knowledge with a broader audience and articulate necessary steps to take in addressing pressing societal issues through education.

Student learning drives my pedagogical decisions. I strive to set high expectations and provide clear learning goals and objectives. I design every course I teach based on principles of backwards design starting with my goals: the understandings I want each student to take away from the course. I design course curriculum using Universal Design for Learning to ensure that all students' can participate and engage in meaningful ways with the classroom content. I work to represent course information in multiple ways often drawing on technology. I give students multiple means of engaging with the material, through group work, journaling, discussions, and hands-on activities. My classrooms are spaces where we explore, model and implement different theories and approaches. I am able to assess how well students have achieved course learning objectives through providing them with multiple means of expressing their learning such as reflection papers and presentations, microteaching, portfolios, project work and action plans.

In trying to figure out how to face the overwhelming injustices in our world, I find my answer in the classroom. Building community, recognizing inequalities and learning to address them is work that teachers need to do to ensure our future is brighter. With the current situation this work has been shifted to virtual platforms. However, I know it is still possible to build community on-line and learn along with students. I am proud and passionate about my dedication to teaching and learning that aims to promote justice through education. Below is a framework for teaching toward justice that centers love and emphasizes 1) recognizing our students' identities in a lens that humanizes them while acknowledging the immense injustice they face in the context of U.S. society and schools; 2) having a critical stance toward policies and ideologies that maintain the status quo for our students; and 3) engaging creatively with practices that celebrate language and diversity and support learning.

