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EDUC 481  
Teaching Philosophy

### **Teaching For A Just World**

As a student majoring in education, I am often asked, “What type of teacher are you studying to be?” My reply is that I do not wish to be a teacher. Teachers and educators are one of the most critical actors in our education system, but I find that my strengths and interests align with education policy and law. However, the ability to teach is a skill that takes time, care, intention, and skill. I also believe it is important for those involved in the education realm to have experience in teaching to catch a glimpse of the shortcomings of the education system and the landscape of education as it is now. With that said, I have some informal teaching experience throughout my college career as an intern and tutor with Canopy Scholars. At Canopy, I first began by filling in for elementary tutors which consisted of completed worksheets and their homework assignments which became a routine for them. When I moved into the middle school room, teaching took on a different role. It was no longer just answering content-based questions, but also had to do a lot with their personal and social development. As many students were from low-income, immigrant, BIPOC families, it also meant that they were able to hold conversations about power and oppression in the classroom and beyond. This experience has deeply shaped my teaching philosophy thus far and stems as a basis of what I hope to see in education policy.

Though teaching is not my passion, I do enjoy being in those spaces because I loved school. My teachers were incredibly supportive and instilled confidence in me that I was capable of learning. Being told that I was smart, capable, and worthy of being in a classroom made me feel valued in the classroom and to understand the value of education. As my family began to view me in this light, I realized that I was fortunate enough to be able to learn as they were not given those opportunities themselves. My family, immigrants from Mexico and El Salvador,

were forced to drop out of school in order to work and survive, so to continue excelling in my education was an act of resilience for my community. I teach because the education system is a critical place where children become socialized – meaning it is where children begin to pick up social cues, values, and standards. If our values and standards are racist, ableist, sexist, colonialist, and centered around capitalism, then that is what we are being socialized to accept within our world. Education is a liberating tool that can provide the skills to be critically conscious and critical thinkers. Historically, our education system has been used to violently dehumanize and discriminate against non-white communities. Our valued knowledge should reach beyond surface level information, but has to be relevant to our identities, experiences, and communities as we live them today, (hooks, transgress). While there is a deep need for systemic change, individual educators are a part of the reformation movement of our schools, this is why I teach. We teach to be a force in our education system to support the critical thinking of all marginalized communities—even when administrations, laws, and finances push educators to stay within the status quo. I teach to create an interpersonal, individual impact as a method of dismantling harmful educational practices that continue to erase and oppress all communities.

I am not formally prepared or actively preparing to teach in any specific subject or course. I have experience in helping students understand their homework assignments simply using my own general knowledge or the resources available to them. Through my experience as a tutor, my main objective was to not only support the students through their course work but also developing personal skills like problem-solving and organization. While students need to know the course material, they also should understand how to problem solve when they are stuck, which can look like turning to other people, trying new methods, or stepping back. It is important to be able to name out the core of an issue and to then critically communicate what

needs to be done to overcome that barrier. This is an important objective I hold beyond academic standards, the ability to recognize oppression and know how to dismantle these barriers individually and collectively. Students come into the classroom with different life experiences and levels of knowledge that their growth should be measured on an individual basis. There must be measures of growth that exist outside of standardized testing and reveal their learning through low-stakes assignments and creative projects. What I teach is dependent on the role that I take on in different community organizations. What I want students to take away as their tutor or mentor is beyond the course work and more about the ability to critically analyze, problem solve, and to work collectively towards a shared future.

How I've taught previously in the tutoring center will look vastly different than what I may pursue in the future. We would host large group discussion questions and then break off into individual work time with their tutor. This allowed for students to interact with the topic for a day as a class and then move into their one-on-one sessions with their tutor. With diverse methods of teaching, it is important to center both individual and collaborative learning. With lectures, a teacher can lay out the background information of a topic, then students are able to lay out the ideas with one another and then independently show their thinking and understanding. One form of teaching can be effective for one student but not for another, establishing a routine that incorporates different styles is valuable to develop the student's learning. It is also important to have a variety of assignments that allow students to show their work in different ways and utilize different creative and critical skills. Low-stakes assessment should utilize notes to teach students how to effectively use their resources because in the "real world" no one works in isolation. Measuring effectiveness can be difficult as I truly do not know what that would entail. I have been in community spaces where we hold each other accountable through our

conversations and work. However, in a teaching profession it would look a bit different for students and staff to hold me accountable.

As I write this statement, I am reflecting on my experience at Canopy and how I wanted to really create a new environment of learning for the middle school students. While I did achieve some changes, there were many ways where I was bound by different rules and criteria that did not allow me to implement what I thought was valuable. It is easier to say that I want to do these things than it is to actually bring them into fruition. Systemic barriers force educators into taking the easier route or maintaining the status quo because it is simply easier. In a world where our labor is extractive and can be exhausting, it can feel helpless to actively push back against these barriers through our individual actions, especially when we may not always see the direct impact. There are a myriad of ways that we must hold ourselves accountable from perpetuating harmful practices even if we don't see our everyday actions as contributing to the problem, (washington post). However, it is for this exact reason that educators must know their purpose beyond the classroom. Our political climate continues to mischaracterize schools and label teachers as "indoctrinators" which reveals the need to collectively organize and support each other. When our teachers are committed to a liberatory education, we are bound to create the system change we dream for. Even though I do not aim to be a teacher in a formal K-12 classroom, I know my role as a mentor will be supported by the dreams, hopes, and love of my community to fight for a just world.

### ***Bibliography***

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