Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Equity and Inclusion in Education

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I am committed to teaching because my experience as a student was transformative. For most of my life, I hated school. I felt subject to unearned authority, which permeated everything from my teachers' patterns of address to the arrangement of our desks, always facing the front of the room instead of each other. This was my experience until I was sent to a small "therapeutic" school where students were entrusted with many aspects of day to day life. This idea of education—one permeated with trust—was new and inspirational to me.

At their best, schools hold space for people to discover their own joys, sorrows, and opinions about the world, and to develop technical skills for engaging with it. To accomplish this task, I think that professional educators should be inquisitive and non-judgemental. Rather than reinforcing hierarchies through praise and comparative grading, I strive to let each student grow more confident of their own faculties and sympathies. When a teacher places a value on a student's work or an idea—even a positive value—it can undermine that student's own capacity to **decide** what something means, or **listen** to what something means to someone else.

Class is a social structure. While in class we are either in conversation or working in a collective studio. Among the most valuable assets in building an art practice is the sense of community. Towards this end, I seek to foster an expressive, open, and responsive atmosphere in the classroom and in discussion. In particular I seek to enact communities that valorize diversity and difference as fundamental to both interpersonal relations and society. Moreover, I strive to impart that difference is continuous*:* there are *no neutral positions or "natural" forms of being* in any frame of reference including but not limited to gender, race, sexuality, religion, culture, age, ability, and class.

When we critique student work in my classes, I usually preface our conversation by saying that it doesn't particularly matter whether you like the work or not. As a fact, you will like the work, or not, to a greater or lesser extent. Regardless of your reaction, empathize with the work- not out of kindness, but out of humility. Understand it. Whether it be complex or simple, in need of something, or mature. Develop its language. Speak about it, understand it, describe it. **Then** consider how you did or did not like it. And perhaps why, although that is not always something which can be articulated.

And of course, while work speaks to its maker(s), and their temperaments and intentions, it also has feet on the ground, and stands beside its makers. This is a difficult aspect about evaluating and discussing work; it touches on issues of free speech, identity, history. How do we evaluate work? Where do we place value in the process of discussing and understanding work? With the "thing" or with the way the thing came to be, i.e it's maker, it's process, it's context, it's intention. In reality, these are always already intertwined.

I believe it's helpful to remind students- critique the work, not its maker. But I also caution them against taking an overly formal approach to work. Art is prismatic and grows from a network of contexts. Be distrustful of neutrality and originality. Everything is part of a vast conversation and history, whether its voice is inconspicuous or angry or interventional. Neutrality is often a cover for accepted norms- for example, museums present themselves as neutral spheres, but the work which they house is (very often) ultimately determined by the particular tastes and ideas of a very small class of wealthy donors.

My teaching is both circumscribed and expanded by the diverse needs of my students. For some, school is a sanctuary from distressing situations. For everyone, I think that school can be a place to model and begin new ways of engaging with the world. Rigorous inquiry is integral to my understanding of education. The so-called "scientific method" embraces all questions, and produces no unshakeable answers. All that it asks is to transform a question into a creative situation--an experiment--which in turn generates meaningful (i.e. communicable), if circumstantial, information about the world through empirical observation.

I hold myself responsible for a learning environment that is both rigorous and open. A teacher's capacity to frame provocations and explanations with clarity should be equal to their ability to provide incomplete, complex, and/or subjective answers to difficult questions. Sometimes there are no easy answers, and I think a good educational philosophy should be comfortable in this territory. Teachers should welcome the

collective knowledge brought to school by students each day and compose their courses out of a wide range of materials. For my part, I seek to develop a curriculum reflective of my students, which draws from a diverse range of sources.

I believe in teaching useful skills: to appreciate the gifts of life; to exercise one's imagination in work and play; to socialize and contribute to one's communities; to make informed political decisions; to purposefully engage in the economy in a way that sustains one's basic and emotional needs and desires, as well as those with whom they share their life; to understand one's inheritance (i.e. history) and the role of power in shaping their life; to think critically and communicate effectively; to listen closely; and to cope effectively with and change the difficult circumstances of today such as climate change, inequity, and manifold forms of violence. I also think that education should be affordable and accessible, and that these metrics are a serious measure of an educational community's success.

In summary, I see education as a site of social reproduction, where values are suggested, passed along, resisted, and transformed. I feel drawn to education as a wonderful community oriented around curiosity and imagination, as a moment for people to connect with themselves and others, and as a battleground.