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TEACHING STATEMENT

In my time as an educator I have worked in K-16 and graduate institutions, formal and informal contexts, urban and rural settings, and local and international sites. Across all of these different spaces and places, my pedagogical goals are to connect people to the places they live so that learning is contextualized, relevant, and purposeful. In using local places as starting points for learning, there are particular habits of mind that I believe students develop. My pedagogical goals are interrelated and tied to the formation and awareness of a critical consciousness that has the power to transform unjust social structures. By engaging students in critical dialogues, exposing them to critical, urban environmental, sociocultural, and pedagogical theory, they learn the language and vocabulary associated with deeper understandings of social justice and inequality. By investigating local issues across contexts students are able to see how local issues are embedded in larger, globalizing processes and begin to make connections within and across place. Whether I am working with high school students in an environmental science class or in-service science teachers in an action research class, my goals for my students are the same: to build a social justice and critical identities that guide futures choices as citizens, students, teachers, producers, consumers, researchers, activists, and advocates.

I have worked towards this goal in my courses in multiple ways but, most significantly, through the incorporation of participatory action research (PAR) methodologies that engage students with research and knowledge production. I see my role in the classroom as a teacher, a student, a facilitator, and a co-researcher. True to participatory work we all have knowledge about our lived experiences and, by leveraging our individual and collective experiences, education, skills and knowledge, all students can access their innate ability to think critically about the context of their learning and their lives and to make connections between their lived experiences and sociocultural, environmental, and education theory

In my environmental studies course we do a lot of community research looking at how we might reimagine our conceptions and relationships to local environments. One particularly powerful participatory research study my students and I have conducted is looking at advertising in our environments connected to critical literacy and environmental psychology. Through this research students learn the skills of both content analysis and critical discourse analysis and create webpages to share their findings. To this end, I am constantly incorporating digital tools, drawing upon instructional technology and pedagogy, to enhance teaching and learning as well as disseminate research.

Utilizing PAR methodologies as a pedagogical praxis has afforded students many new lenses to understand the context of their lived experiences. However, this is not an easy task to bring into classrooms that have been historically and conventionally teacher centered and reproductive of unequal power relations. There are many ways that I have worked with students to practice the skills of critical thinking (defined here as the questioning and uncovering of the embedded assumptions in ideas, particularly who benefits and who is marginalized through the (re)production of knowledge). In my courses the physical space of the room matters and where I position myself as the teacher is important to my belief in that we are all teachers and students simultaneously. I allow students to

(re)create the learning space as they need and we typically sit in a circle, using multiple texts, films, readings, commercials, YouTube videos, and TED talks to engage in critical dialogues with the explicit intent of connecting to theory. We recognize and name resistance and prejudices and use radical listening and discussion heuristics to encourage reflection and mindfulness on our roles as teachers and students. I also encourage all students to engage in self-assessment at multiple points throughout the semester as a means to check how they are taking up the learning in the classroom.

Student evaluations and self-reflections support my vision for a critical participatory classroom. Using local environments to discuss difficult knowledge brings up many layers of anxiety for teachers and students as evidenced by this high school senior's admission, "Questioning our neighborhood environment, the media, gentrification, ourselves, asking questions, stumbling a bit when we realize getting an answer isn't so easy. Hence the learning how to walk metaphor. It was getting up, getting thrown off-balance again, then getting up again, and so on. But I don't regret a moment of it and if I could do it all over again, I would." Related, developing a critical identity is a transformative process as writes a high school junior, "I came into this class being somewhat aware of the issues we discuss in class and not caring either way because as I would say 'We can't do anything about it so might as well embrace it'. I now end this class realizing just how serious these issues are and knowing that something needs to be done. I try everyday to spread whatever knowledge I have gained from the class to my friends and family and I even look at the world through different eyes. Nothing is what it used to be and this couldn't be better." Around comfort and safety in the classroom space a graduate student in an adolescent development course writes, "I believe that the strength of this course was rooted in the intriguing readings and deep, intricate in-class discussions. The atmosphere was relaxed and safe, where I did not feel as if I was being judged by anyone. I was free to speak my mind and really delve into the issues that were presented." Finally, many students felt that their participation in the course afforded them new ways of engaging with learning, "I liked that students got to be active participants in the class rather than just listen. I enjoyed the arguments about the American dream and how realistic it is for people to work hard and succeed. I had many self-realizations in this class and I think many people did as well. I realized how biased I am to my own community and how I have separated myself because of my grades (or priorities) and the stereotypes I have. This class was a good place for having realizations and working things out in my mind." My former students are still an important part of my life. Creating a caring and nurturing learning environment is paramount to establishing these relationships.

My research focuses on reframing environmental education as a transdisciplinary, critical, and social justice endeavor that is rooted in the lived experiences of youth. My research and teaching are inextricably tied together as my research continually informs my pedagogy. I would love the opportunity to bring all of my work in STEM education together and teach courses on adolescent development from a critical youth studies perspective, contexts and issues in urban education, science and environmental education methods, qualitative research methods, teacher action research, and participatory research methods. I believe I represent a unique intersection as a critical environmental educator who has both teaching experience at the secondary level as well as the graduate level and my hope is to find a place that values the intersectionality of my research and pedagogy.