Philosophy of Education Statement

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Education is most powerful when it honors the full humanity of every child. Every child who walks into a classroom arrives with a history: knowledge from home, from community, from the years that came before. My job as their teacher is to see that history, take it seriously, and build on it. My own history with education shaped that conviction early.

I was homeschooled through high school, which gave me real freedom but also made me acutely aware of what absence of structure can cost. I didn't set foot in a formal classroom until community college. Later, raising children in an urban school district showed me what public education makes possible—and what it costs when it fails. Those experiences taught me that quality public education is a right, not a privilege, and its absence leaves marks.

Third, fourth, and fifth grade is where a lot gets decided about children's academic identities, and about what school is for. These are the grades where students shift from learning to read to reading to learn, and where children who are not yet reading at grade level begin to fall behind in ways that compound across years. It is also when children start to notice and name race, class, and social difference in ways that shape how they understand their own place in the classroom. Between third and fourth grade, many students—particularly Black and brown students—have already internalized a story about whether they are a "reader" or a "math person." This is why culturally responsive teaching cannot be treated as a layer added on top of real instruction. It is what interrupts that story before it hardens.

I approach teaching through a culturally responsive lens. Culture is not an add-on: it is the operating system through which students process new learning (Hammond, 2015). Ladson-Billings (1994) frames this as culturally relevant pedagogy, teaching that holds academic rigor, cultural competence, and critical consciousness as inseparable goals. The Funds of Knowledge framework (Moll et al., 1992) reminds me that every child arrives with expertise

rooted in their home and community, and that my curriculum should draw on that expertise, not ignore it. I bring an ethnic studies perspective to every subject area: whose knowledge is centered, whose stories are told, and what the lesson assumes about who belongs in the room. Freire (2000) argued that education is never neutral—it either reproduces existing hierarchies or works against them. These commitments shape how I understand my own role.

I think of that role in three ways: as a facilitator, an advocate, and a community leader. As a facilitator, I design tasks that require students to think, discuss, and make things, not sit and receive. Advocacy means holding every student to high expectations while staying attentive to what each child individually needs. And building community means creating the conditions that make rigorous work possible: safety, belonging, a classroom students feel is theirs. Duncan-Andrade (2009) argues that what sustains students is critical hope, earned through real relationship, not optimism. Hammond (2015) is clear that trust is not separate from demanding academic work; it is what makes rigor possible.

Holding high expectations for every student means designing for the full range of learners actually in the room: students reading below grade level and above it, students acquiring English, students with IEPs. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development grounds this: set the work just beyond what students can do on their own, then gradually release the support. Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018) shapes how I plan: multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression built in from the start rather than retrofitted. The scaffolds shift in form but not in expectation. The bar is the same for everyone. The path to it is not.

In grades three through five, that commitment looks like students doing the intellectual work, not watching me do it. Texts are chosen because students see themselves in stories of curiosity and joy, and because that investment is what makes close reading possible (Christensen,

2009). History becomes genuine inquiry—not “add a diverse figure,” but asking students to investigate whose stories are centered and whose are left out. Writing has a real destination: opinion letters to decision-makers, research tied to students' own communities, because 3rd through 5th graders are fully capable of advocacy, and most of them have never been asked. I want assessment woven into the day rather than saved for tests: frequent, low-stakes moments that show me where students are and what we need to return to.

The classroom community that makes all of this possible has to be actively tended. When a child's behavior disrupts it, I respond with curiosity rather than removal. Children don't dysregulate in a vacuum. There is a need that is unmet, and removal addresses the disruption without touching the cause. Hammond (2015) is clear on this: a brain in threat response cannot take in new learning. A child sent from the classroom has lost their belonging in it. Whatever they were trying to communicate gets handed to someone else. Without follow-up, that can be a break in the relationship that is hard to repair.

A sense of belonging doesn't start at school. Families are a child's first and most enduring teachers, and my role is to build on what they have already started. They know their child in ways I never will. I reach out early and often, treat what families know as essential rather than supplemental, and try to meet them where they are rather than waiting for them to come to me.

I have felt the weight of being overlooked, and I have seen what becomes possible when someone chooses to look. That is what I am asking myself to do every day: see every child clearly, hold them to high expectations, and build the kind of classroom where they know and want to belong. The educator I aspire to be shows up with strong convictions and stays open to being wrong. I want every child in my classroom to leave more curious, more confident, and more capable of shaping the world around them.

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