

I believe that the minds of all learners are like gems inside a treasure box. There is a unique way to open each of them, and each chest holds its own supply of jewels of limitless value. As an educator, it is not my responsibility to fill the boxes as each is innately full of unique riches and wonders. My professional duty is not to pry open these treasure chests, removing learners from the process. Rather, my role as a teacher is to guide the learner to find the key that will unlock their own chest, allowing access to plentiful bounties including an understanding of personal worth and endlessness potential.

My teaching philosophy undergirds my actions in the classrooms of all types. **A primary goal of my interaction with students is to build meaningful relationships.** To this end I learn student names as quickly as possible, use active listening that sends the message that one has been heard, and share of myself with the group as I ask them to share as well. Once human-to-human relationships have been established, a classroom culture of social and emotional safety within which students feel comfortable taking risks can also be built. Such an environment affords opportunities for difficult dialogue and courageous conversations to take place around topics such as racially and economically related educational disenfranchisement. As an important part of maintaining safety in the classroom space, **I expect students to be willing to challenge, rethink, or abandon some of the normalized ways in which they have come to think that do not serve the inclusive goals of education; I also embrace it as my responsibility that students are gently and empathetically guided through this process.**

I am upfront about my learning objectives for each session and do micro-assessments throughout instruction to ensure that the group is moving forward together. **I am committed to varying my instructional style and the technologies and media utilized** in an attempt to not rely too heavily on any singular mode of communication. **I also value student voice in the classroom;** I seek out and create instances for peers to learn from one another and for myself to learn from students as well. In this vein, I often encourage my classrooms to embody the Black American communicative traditions of call and response and a cypher-style discussion that deemphasizes the importance of being acknowledged by the 'authority figure' to speak. These practices are often a stretch for my students but are made possible by the rapport we have collectively established in which adventurous, engaged learning is more important than passing judgment. Across a semester, **I offer a wide range of assessment possibilities** thus ensuring opportunities to engage both with tasks students feel are well-aligned with their personal intelligences and with tasks serving as reasonable challenge beyond their natural skill sets.

**In the realm of teacher preparation, I find my duty in preparing educators who are ready to engage with their students with an open mind, who see and embrace differences without renaming them deficits.** Though I believe in the fundamental truth of human equality, that no one person is better than any other, every day I experience counterexamples of this fact. Education is the most effective means by which to eliminate the ignorance that leads to inequity and teachers who embrace this stance can be an overwhelmingly effective means for affecting positive social change. I hope to instill in the teachers I guide a desire to be lifelong learners and to continually seek opportunities to critically self-reflect, hone crafts and expand worldviews. Each individual touched by such an educator moves society closer to a world where differences of race, ethnic background, gender, class, sexuality, ability, linguistic diversity, geographic location and other identity markers can be celebrated unconditionally.

A learning objective is nothing if decontextualized from content area information. As such it is paramount that I prepare educational practitioners who have firm foundational understanding of the material they will cover. While content drives instruction and thus requires that lessons are built around learning objectives, classroom cultivation and content delivery constitute *the art* of teaching. **I seek to prepare students who are so comfortable with the material to be taught that they can be creative and experimental in adjusting the ways they convey that content in order to meet the individual and specific needs of their students.** I hope to guide my students to unlock the gems inside themselves so that they can in turn see that each of their own students are capable of achieving the same discovery.

**I feel accomplished as an educator when I witness observable evidences that my students have begun to own some of the knowledges I have sought to stimulate as their own.** I delight in catching glimmers of the shine of my students' internal treasures as I glimpse them in brief, bright bursts. In spite of these intermediate celebrations, however, it rests in the back of my mind that the work of an educator for social justice is never truly done. I maintain a hold on the larger goal: interacting with any with whom I have the privilege of sharing a learning space in a way that contributes to furthering movement toward equity in our schools and our world. Each step in this direction is movement toward an eventual reality in which all can marvel in the display of the precious jewels each of us has to showcase, celebrate and translate into action.