

Educator Philosophy Statement

As guided by Grace Lee Boggs

You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it – Grace Lee Boggs

I have always been a curious person, and this curiosity drives me as a learner and as an educator. I am curious about systems, how they work, how they change, and how they impact the people in them. I am curious about people, what makes them who they are, how they are interconnected, and what motivates them to transform the systems with which they interact. Within the classroom, all of these curiosities coalesce as an invitation for me to be an educator, to learn from, with, and about my students, and together to engage in discourse about our roles in changing the landscape of higher education to be a site of liberation instead of oppression.

I think we have to rethink the concept of 'leader'. Because 'leader' implies 'follower'... but I think we need to appropriate, embrace the idea that we are the leaders we've been looking for. – Grace Lee Boggs

Assuming the role of a teacher or an educator is a rewarding privilege. Pulling from Freirian conceptions of teacher-students and student-teachers (Freire, 2000), that to create sustainable and meaningful learning experiences all must engage in both roles simultaneously, I prefer to use the word educator to remind myself that my primary intention is to create a collaborative learning experience rather than to transmit material knowledge for passive consumption. Thus as an educator, I prioritize multi-modal learning, critical reflexive inquiry, dialogic and anti-oppressive pedagogy, and care and development of the whole student (Freire, 2000; hooks, 2003; Kumashiro, 2000). It is my purpose that through their learning experiences students develop their own voice, and a sense of agency and critical hope in their professional and personal pursuits to transform campuses and communities towards justice. One of the ways I have applied these principles is by meeting with students the week prior to their turn to facilitate class discussion. Through asking questions and helping them make connections between what they already know to what they are still learning about, I tap into their efficacies, help them think through their ideas and how to put them into practice, and alleviate any anxieties. In the mid-semester evaluations for the class, as well as during a classroom discussion about how the semester was going, many of the students I had already met with advised other students to take full advantage of those meetings, sharing how helpful they were and how they felt affirmed and empowered in those conversations.

It takes a whole lot of things. It takes people doing things. It takes people talking about things. It takes dialogue. It takes changing the whole lot of ways by which we think. – Grace Lee Boggs

Experiencing the world mostly through the margins and the in-between grey spaces of identity, I have come to understand identities, realities, journeys, and worldviews to be fluid, socially co-constructed, and intricately connected to power, privilege, and oppression. I have come to view education in very much the same way. Thus, my desire as an educator is to facilitate an environment, a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013) that encourages participants –

myself included – to take risks and to stretch ourselves beyond the binary confines of teacher and student, with their accompanying unnamed but expected roles. This queering of the teacher-student binary (Renn, 2010) is both a goal in itself as well as a tool for me to get learners to integrate intersectional and multiplistic lenses into those they already utilize when analyzing, assessing, and designing student development and experiences, as well as the institutional, cultural, and societal contexts in which they occur.

It's about critical connections. – Grace Lee Boggs

To achieve these purposes as an educator and facilitator, I utilize integrated course design principles with a taxonomy of significant student learning (Fink, 2013). This involves understanding the relevant situational factors (who are the students, what are the institution's and program's mission, where are we situated, etc.) informing a particular learning experience. I use these factors in making three sets of interrelated decisions: learning goals, feedback and assessment, and educational activities. The taxonomy of significant student learning is composed of foundation knowledge (what should students know), application (modes of thinking of doing), integration (making connections), human dimension (learn about themselves and others), caring (engaging with their feelings about and values on a particular topic), and learning how to learn (becoming self-directed lifelong learners). I use the relational feature of these categories to create a dynamic and transformative classroom.

Each of us is called upon to embrace the conviction that despite the powers and principalities bent on commodifying our human relationships, we have the power within us to create the world anew. – Grace Lee Boggs

Each opportunity I have to assume an educator role teaches me new things about myself, new ways to advance learning and praxis, and reengages me to reflect on my values and how I live them. There is a feeling of vulnerability and exhilaration that I experience from facilitating learning that I only ever experience when directly engaging in activism. Just as I know then that I am called to be in service to humanity through activism, I also know that my calling includes emboldening others through education, creating environments for intellectual challenge, and supporting individual and communal growth.

References

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