Philosophy of Teaching Statement
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Growing up in Alabama, I had many teachers who did not care if I learned anything in the classroom as long as I was successful on the football field. The expectations many other people held for me did not include academic collegiate success, much less completion of a doctoral degree. However, through the encouragement of my grandmother, the inspiration of intellectual Hip Hop artist KRS-One along with Dr. Martin Luther King’s principles, and the belief that education would increase opportunities available to me, I persevered and defied the odds. As I pursued my education, I greatly benefitted from dedicated college instructors who believed in me and challenged me to reach my greatest intellectual potential. It all started at the two year college where I was introduced to the world of academic learning. If not for the two year college experience I would have never ended up where I am today, so therefore I owe a huge debt to those who shaped me. Teaching at the two year college level is an absolute joy, because I see a great deal of myself in the students I teach. I am a living testimony of the impact two year colleges can have on an individual. This is what motivates me to teach on this level.

On the first day of class I share a quote from Muhammad Ali: “A person who sees the world at 50 the same as they did at 20 has wasted 30 years of their life” and I follow the quote by reassuring students to progress everyday by acquiring knowledge. Like Ali and his powerful words my desire is to be an inspiration to the students in my classroom – a teacher who challenges students to think critically about the world around them, promotes life-long learning and is available to students for conversations outside the classroom. I especially see the need to provide this type of academic mentoring relationship for college students of color, who often lack a positive role model in this arena. With that said, I try to provide students with encouragement to pursue higher education and they too can be successful through hard work and dedication.

I remember reading bell hooks’ Teaching to Transgress during my first semester in graduate school which came at an opportune time as I began teaching. In the text, hooks encourages educators to “transgress” against traditional classroom boundaries in order to create an atmosphere of genuine learning where dialogue and critical consciousness occur. After reading the text I dared to create a teaching space built upon the commitment of developing a teacher-student relationship of trust, compassion, vulnerability, and hope.

Engaged pedagogy offers the most promising strategy for me to bring forth an enthusiastic sensibility inside the classroom where students feel connected. I thoroughly enjoy interacting with students, helping them find their voice in the classroom, and watching them develop into well-rounded individuals. I believe in providing students with a distinctively engaging educational experience by establishing a one-on-one personal connection with them to inspire learning. Mentoring students is a vital component to my teaching philosophy as I welcome and understand that students look to me for guidance, support, and wise advice. This requires a willingness to put in the extra time to connect with students outside of the classroom, but I always find the results to be beneficial. Meeting students “where they are at” can be challenging at times, but it is worth the effort to see them grasp a concept or build a foundation for future learning.

My philosophy of teaching extends beyond traditional notions of conventional classroom teaching, inviting the application of multiple concepts, perspectives, and principles all directed toward creating an enriching democratic learning experience. I believe that this style of pedagogy fosters an educational community where everyone in the classroom learns, including the teacher. I am committed to diversity and share this perspective and obligation in my pedagogical approach by creating bridges that foster appreciation of cultural differences. The
two year college teaching experience provides me with a wide range of students from all walks of life. I really value all of the backgrounds that are present from the newly bright-eyed high school graduate to the wise student returning to school after 20 years out in the workforce. We all learn from one another. Preparing students to exist and flourish in a global society is vital. Therefore, for me diversity is a key component to teaching. We are all enriched from diverse viewpoints and I appreciate the broad spectrum of democratic thought that is derived from a classroom where all perspectives are valued.