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Teaching Statement

Before I started teaching, I thought teaching was scary. I thought I was not knowledgeable enough to stand in front of a classroom as an authority. I thought I could not be a good teacher because even the idea of teaching made me nervous. What I did not realize then was that being the most knowledgeable and commanding has nothing to do with good teaching, and being nervous does not signal an inherent inability to teach.

My initial assumptions about how teaching works were similar to what Paulo Freire called the banking model of education, in which the teacher "deposits" knowledge in students. The students, as receptacles of this knowledge, are not expected to do anything more than store and repeat the knowledge when called upon to do so. For this model to make sense, the teacher must be the expert in the room, and students must be passive. I experienced this model as a student, and all of my teachers really did seem to know what they were talking about. If I did not feel like an expert, how was I supposed to teach students?

When I got my first teaching job as an instructor for a summer tech camp, all of my assumptions about how teaching works were shattered. Even as I planned my lessons, I realized that I could not map out all the ways in which students would use programming concepts in their projects. Some students already had programming experience, so they knew what I taught in the first few lessons (or beyond). For these students, it was about doing something they had not done before with these concepts they knew. Many students were enthusiastic about helping their peers understand things they had already learned. Ignoring the prior knowledge and experiences the students brought to the class as the "authority" would have been a disservice to the students that were ready to use and share the knowledge they had, and to the students that came to the class with no programming experience.

I brought this lesson in constructivism with me to my graduate research and instruction assistant position at the UNC-Chapel Hill Robert B. House Undergraduate Library. As I taught first-year English library instruction sessions, I was acutely aware of the fact that students would have different conceptions of college, the library, and how to find sources for research. All of these conceptions are knowledge, and all of them are valid in the context of the experiences of the students. As a teacher my job is not to dismiss this knowledge or replace it, but to extend it. One of my favorite phrases I came across in my graduate studies is Raewyn Connell's concept of "mosaic epistemology," in which knowledge systems are not hierarchical but placed beside each other in respectful alignment. This idea is a guiding principle for me.

Another guiding principle of mine is differentiation. I am a vocal proponent of Universal Design for Learning, accessibility, and accounting for different learning styles. From disseminating accessible PDFs of my slides to the classes I teach to ensuring I caption all online content, everything I say is available in multiple formats and accessible after any live instruction I do. I also taught technology workshops at the Undergraduate Library, and while some attendees followed along with me, others observed first and referred to the handouts and online materials later. Success of a program cannot be measured by the ability of attendees to complete their

learning within the timespan of the workshop, but it can be measured by how accommodated learners feel.

Although I have learned a lot through my teaching experiences so far, I am not content to stop learning as I continue to teach. I attended Racial Equity Institute training, completed my program's Diversity Advocate Certificate, and attended the Center for Faculty Excellence Equity in Teaching Institute. I learned something new from each of these experiences. In Safe Zone training I learned how to create intentionally inviting rather than unintentionally disinviting spaces and services. In Racial Equity Institute training I learned how privileging some knowledge systems and experiences above others is deeply rooted in systemic racism. In a seminar on low-income student success I learned that broad inclusivity is not always the best approach; sometimes being intentionally exclusive can create a safe space and sense of belonging for underrepresented learners. In the Equity in Teaching Institute I learned that being transparent about my own positionality as an educator is unequivocally essential. I am still learning how to talk about and implement these ideas, and still absorbing new thoughts and lessons related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This work is ongoing for all educators in all institutions.

For me, library instruction is not about teaching students what we think they need to know to succeed; it is about asking them what they need to know to achieve their definition of success and meeting them there. Library instruction is not about teaching students which sources are authoritative; it is about showing students how to analyze constructs of authority and apply them to their understanding of information. Critical pedagogy is and always will be the foundation of my pedagogical practice, and as such, knowledge in my classroom is co-created—never deposited.