

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY IN DIVERSE LEARNING SPACES¹ IN LIGHT OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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This document hopes to outline a best practice approach to becoming culturally relevant² in light of cultural transformations in diverse learning spaces. The *Principles of Community* manifested below is thus offered as a conceptual baseline to begin the process of dialogue, engagement, and learning between students and teachers in cohesion. It honors the academic struggles of historically oppressed people in the United States³ while considering further the contributions of all students and their home communities in an effort to: (a) cultivate the learning of young minds, (b) bring families together, and (c) build communal wellness. At the heart of the document, reciprocal knowledge systems⁴ (harmony, balance, respect, reciprocity, compassion, family, community, etc.) reinforce learning and teaching strategies, and support further the revitalization of sustainable living practices in the classroom and in the home.

Principles of Community

I stand for:

- I. Welcoming all students into my classroom without any preconceived notion toward their learning skills and/or competence. And in the process of student introductions and instruction, learn to identify the experiences of students as contributions in classroom learning environments. I make students aware that we as educators, mentors, and sources of inspiration value their presence as communal leaders, despite a multitude of growing pressures and demands placed on educators and spaces of learning.
- II. Understanding and reflecting on my own experiences as an individual and educator, and how these match with my students. By doing so, I situate myself best to relate my own experiences with those of my students, thereby strengthening the student-teacher connection. And when those experiences do not match well, I make every effort to inspire students by providing culturally and ethnically relevant learning materials and instruction that speak to the current values of each particular student.
- III. Becoming knowledgeable about the communities where my students eat, play, and live, in order to better understand the social and economic conditions that mold their growth and the sources of inspiration where they draw energies. This might mean standing in solidarity with their social, economic, and political struggles, and responding to their calls for support, even if these appear unfamiliar and threatening at first. The same appreciation would be extended to school staff and faculty and their families.
- IV. Deepening my understanding of Mother Earth in an effort to help maintain and revitalize all her natural phenomena. This means advocating the restoration of natural landscapes and the respect of all animals in line with the reality that humans and wildlife must coexist in harmony with one another or risk the destruction of our planet. Furthermore, I invest in the creation of sustainable practices in the arenas of food cultivation and consumption to rid and heal our bodies of chronic disorders and diseases.
- V. Never ceasing the attainment of knowledge or conforming to one-dimensional standards of teaching in the midst of cultural transformations, specifically now in a period when educational funding is becoming limited and certain educational policies aim to eliminate culturally relevant teaching⁵. This requires a vow to maintain a dialogue between colleagues, to engage students, and *defend* if need be the educational freedoms of our students and their communities, and those we set before us as educators.

Final Thoughts

This document first took the form of a revised Teaching Philosophy on the anniversary of my two years of teaching college humanities and anthropology. The text quickly took the form of a more holistic document in light of cultural transformations that considered further my teaching experiences, the feedback and narrative of students, and the anecdotes of colleagues. Rather than updating my Teaching Philosophy, I felt a need to establish some guiding principles that would encompass the learning experiences of students and their communities, the natural environment, and the love I have cultivated for learning. Moreover, this document ignites *self-reflection, precious knowledge, the will to act, and transformation* (the four Tezcatlipocas, see Acosta 2007). I invite all educators to begin similar processes, having mind that we are all connected through time and space in some fashion or form.

¹ In this text "Diverse Learning Spaces" encompasses all centers of learning that serve a multitude of diverse cultural groups and ethnic populations, i.e., the reservations and tribal lands of First Nation people, and historically segregated areas of the United States.

² See Brayboy 2006, Howard 2003, Ladson-Billings 1995, Milner 2011, Sleeter 2011, and Romero et al. 2009.

³ See Fuller 2012 (pp. 30-67) and El Plan de Santa Barbara 1968.

⁴ Forms of practice and thinking that promote healthy and positive developments among people and groups.

⁵ See Powers and Williams 2012.

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