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What are your central purposes you hope to achieve in your work as a teacher, the challenges and opportunities you anticipate facing as you strive to achieve these purposes, and your thoughts about what you will need to do strategically to realize your own educational vision?

There are many reasons I want to work as an educator. I have been in school much of my life, and I know it is a place where young people experience reality, sometimes new facets of reality, together. It is a place they arrive knowing a central purpose for their attendance is learning. If I had to name a virtue of children in just one word, it would be, "humility". I have met many arrogant youth in my life, but I have not met any who did not think they had something to learn. No kid thinks they are the world expert on anything. They all know they are still learning, which takes at least some level of humility to admit. In my adulthood, I have been shocked to meet many adults who do not address each day with the curiosity, or a desire to learn, found intrinsically in children. Far worse yet it seems many folks do not feel they have anything to learn at all. Perhaps this is not the case; perhaps they spend their days questioning and investigating their wonderments. Perhaps they just did not feel they could learn from me, and thus I never saw their inquisitive nature. But children do not hide their curiosity, not well at least. I want to meet students there; in the place where humility, curiosity and reality meet.

I will interact with my students with honesty. Though I hardly agree with everything Freire wrote, I value his remarks of security with students,

"As a teacher, I should lose no opportunity to allow my students to see the security with which I discuss a given theme or analyze a given fact in relation, for example, to a government decision. My security does not rest on the false supposition that I know everything or that I am the "greatest." On the contrary, it rests on the conviction that there are some things I know and some things I do not know."¹

¹ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2000). (p. 120)

I want to be honest with my students. They should not have to guess whether I am speaking as an authority on a subject I have much expertise in, or if I am speaking as a fellow human being with biases and conjectures, just like them. Freire began his book with a declaration, acknowledging his own bias, but determined to take a position and defend the universal human ethic and the ethical nature of education.² I will do the same. I will admit my own biases, be honest about what I do not know, but strive to learn, take a stance and put forth effort to edify my students.

My classroom will be a safe environment for everyone. I hope to create a place the students, and their parents, know is safe. I want the students to feel able to speak their minds and talk about their lives. Good teachers are able to connect and relate what is being taught in the classroom with the real world outside of school. I do not subscribe to the notion of compartmentalizing the self while in class. My math classes will have room to talk about other issues which the students care about. This will take effort, math curriculums are demanding. But I believe students will learn math better if they are treated as holistic beings, rather than fleshy calculators.

Linda Henke wrote about home-visits. Contrast to the Head Start program which mandates teachers make a home visit during the academic year, the concept is hardly the norm in public schools.³ Why is this? I know I will have far too many students to make home visits to, perhaps this is the reason many teachers don't try, but from the studies we've read I know it can make an impact. This issue also exposes social justice issues I had not been aware of until recently. In meeting parents face-to-face at their homes, I gain an opportunity to acknowledge racisms the families may have encountered. By voicing a sensitivity and awareness to a family's situation, I may be able to gain involvement and support from parents.⁴

² Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2000). (p. 20-26)

³ Henke, Linda (2011). *Connecting with Parents at Home*. Educational Leadership (p.39)

⁴ Tatum, Beverly Daniel; Pollock, Mica. Cultivating the Trust of Black Parents. *Everyday Anti-Racism: Getting real about race in school*. (The New Press 2008): (p. 310)

Another way I want to relate our content to the students' lives is to involve them in selecting reading material. Christine E. Sleeter makes the case, "Students need to learn about experiences and points of view of people from racial groups different from their own."⁵ Math classes are never known for their reading material, but they are known for being the least favorite class for many students. Maybe if I can engage them in a mathematics, or mathematicians report I can open up new avenues for students to find relevance in what they are learning.

I believe Gruenewald's concept of Critical place-based pedagogy is certainly on the right heading; acknowledging the specific context a student comes from, as well as the relationships each person has with the historical and cultural reality we live in.⁶ I have a background in architecture and environmental responses; thankfully humankind's role and responsibility in the ecosystem is widely accepted now, and I intend to address these issues by integrating them with how I live, and run my classroom. The environment of our school and classrooms should support the content being taught, and help students feel a tangible connection to the world outside the building.

I want to exude a value of selflessness. As a teacher and a public servant, my job is educating and supporting the children in my classes. I take this calling seriously. I have worked in other industries, and I do not know anyone who feels underworked and overpaid. I will not be a teacher who complains of sparse salary. I want the students to know I care for them, and that I will risk for them. I want them to know I have their backs. Not every profession is like this. Former President of Harvard University, Derek Bok, reported on decisions made by early teachers relative to lawyers and doctors in his book, "The Cost of Talent". While navigating the complex history of several professions, the striking contrast of teachers' values became apparent when the medical field began limiting the number of doctors in the work force.

⁵ Sleeter, Christine E.; Pollock, Mica. Involving Students in Selecting Reading Material. *Everyday Anti-Racism: Getting real about race in school*. (The New Press 2008): (p. 150)

⁶ Gruenewald, David A. *The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place*. (2003)

Regardless of number, or quality, of applicants to medical schools, the total number admitted country-wide is regulated, to drive the demand up for doctors, thus justifying inflated salaries.

"In contrast to law and medicine, the teaching professions were either unwilling or unable to limit entry successfully. Even toward the end of the nineteenth century, when states began to require that teachers be certified, professional associations such as the National Education Association (NEA) never sought to control the number of students crowding in to the teachers' colleges. If teachers had any collective aim, it was not to limit supply but to increase demand by pressing for smaller class sizes."⁷

I want to carry this value forward. As we have learned much of the focus on strengthening our public schools has somehow been distilled down to accountability, " Most politicians, for instance, although they may speak often about education, stress only accountability."⁸ In a river flowing toward accountability for teachers and performance defined by high stakes testing, I will steer my career into the current if it means a better education for my students. Reading "The Curie 12: A Case for Teacher Activism," I realized I may have to put my career on the line at times. The story of 12 teachers against the CASE exam in Chicago was inspirational, and a story I will not forget. I am so thankful for the precedent of a tactful, respectful demonstration of teachers putting students before their own livelihood.⁹

The reward for working with young people, will be the people themselves. I refuse to look at schools as an economic investment. No parent invests money into their children hoping for economic returns. Their hope is in nurturing a person. Their reward is in relationship to that person. I want students to feel that from me, I am not looking to gain anything from them, my reward is who they are.

⁷ Bok, Derek. *The Cost of Talent*. The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc. (1993): (p. 30)

⁸ Nieto, Sonia. *What Keeps Teachers Going? And Other Thoughts on the Future of Public Education* (2006):(p. 14)

⁹ Hogan, Katie; Schniedewind, Nancy, and Mara Sapon-Shevin. *Educational Courage: Resisting the Ambush of Public Education*. (Beacon Press books, 2012): (p. 140)

I will not dwell on systemic failures of the public education system, the bureaucrats, politicians or testing restrictions forced upon me. We have encountered, virtually from every source this term, a push-back against much of the standardized testing being developed and deployed into our public schools. There will be some things I can work to do on behalf of the students, but much will be out of my control. I will not get run down by this. Every system is designed by imperfect people, and we fill the systems with more imperfect people. It would be folly to assume any infallibility; shortcomings should be expected. I want to focus on my students. What can I do to help them, with the time and resources I have available to me? I will dwell on what I can do, rather than focusing on what I disagree with.

I know being a teacher will be difficult. I will feel overworked, underpaid and underappreciated at times. I know as a student I cannot fully comprehend the trials or joys ahead of me. We have investigated the multi-headed dragon of public education, and know enough to understand there will be no silver bullet to right all the wrongs. But I am up to the challenge. I have hopes and goals and wishes about being the change, and being an agent of change, our society and culture desperately needs. I have insecurities, unknowns and concerns; but I have a community of dedicated educators all around me I can lean on. Collaboration will undoubtedly require additional effort, as most healthy communication does, but I believe in our cause; working side by side young people to equip them and support them. The cost is great, but people are worth it.

Annotated Bibliography

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1998)

I was truly impressed with Freires unabashed, unwavering conviction to the holistic nature of education, and becoming a teacher. He proclaims the ethical nature of teaching and dives into the duties of a individual teachers. Though as humans we all have a responsibility to engage the world ethically (knowing we have free will and power to influence and affect other people), as teachers we also to be more than a means of transferring knowledge. Teachers have a duty to never cease to learn, and to continually help students connect the content they are learning to the world they inhabit.

Nieto, Sonia. *What Keeps Teachers Going? And Other Thoughts on the Future of Public Education*. (Routledge, 2006)

I expect to read this article repeatedly over the years to come. Nieto reinforces teachers as profound influencers in the lives of their students, and investigates commonalities between several successful, extended careers. Teachers of this caliber share a belief in the lives of their students, of their innate value. They also share hope, and a certain creativity for the possibilities their classrooms can provide. I aspire to a long career marked by caring for students and faithful belief in their lives.

Schniedewind, Nancy, and Mara Sapon-Shevin. *Educational Courage: Resisting the Ambush of Public Education*. (Beacon Press books, 2012)

A book filled with short essays compiled from a variety of sources. Though the book does introduce the same struggles we have heard from other sources, the book largely does not dwell on the negative, but rather was written as an impetus to encourage teachers to action. We are not doomed by the current state of public educational policies; we have resources available, freedoms and influences and a responsibility to fight for our students' education. The book includes essays on fighting fears (of both students and teachers), successes in teacher activism, and opportunities to fight social injustices.