Pedagogies of Hope – Reflection Daniel B. Ahlquist, MSU

Against the backdrop of global, national, and institutional challenges, I have found myself sliding into despair about the state of things and questioning my endeavor as a university educator. And I've also been planting a lot of trees. In so doing, as cliché as it might sound, I'm finding hope.

With my hands in the soil and my mind free for contemplation, it is perhaps unsurprising that I've started imagining myself, as an educator, as a planter and nurturer of trees. Planting a tree is, by its very nature, a future-oriented act of hope, humility, and community. It is an act of hope because, when we plant a tree, we are investing in a future flourishing and fruitfulness that we believe is possible, but that we, the planters, may never see. It is an act of humility because we are never fully in control, nor should we be. In its formative years, we do our best to nurture, challenge, and even shape the young tree to set it up for resilience and success. But, ultimately, we need to trust the tree to be a tree, to grow and adapt to its environment in a way that enables it to flourish and to play its part in the world. And in this way, planting a tree is also an act of community. Trees interact with, support, shape and even regenerate the communities of life to which they belong.

As an educator, this is where I'm finding hope: in the awareness of our small-and-fleeting-but-import role as nurturers in students' life journeys toward personal, community, and even planetary futures beyond our own personal scopes and timelines. I'm still learning how this new metaphor might shape my pedagogy, but seeing my students show up every day with an eye toward the future – *their future* – has reinvigorated me as a teacher and helped me reinvest in my endeavor as an educator.