

PLACHOWSKI EXAMPLE ED PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

CMAT 5000

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Educational Philosophy Statement

Teaching is both a privilege and a responsibility, requiring constant self-reflection and a commitment to equity and inclusion. My journey as an educator has been shaped by my own experiences of privilege and marginalization, as well as the lessons I've learned from students, families, and communities over the past two decades. This philosophy reflects my dedication to fostering inclusive classrooms, balancing teacher autonomy with accountability, and grounding my practice in research-driven strategies to ensure all students feel valued and empowered.

Culture, Privilege, and Marginalization

Growing up in a rural-suburban community outside St. Louis, Missouri, I didn't initially recognize the privileges that shaped my educational journey. As a white, cisgender, first-generation college student, I benefited from systemic privileges that provided me with opportunities and access that many of my peers from marginalized backgrounds did not have. These privileges, such as being seen as "capable" or "deserving" in academic and professional settings, gave me advantages that I've come to understand as integral to my position in society. At the same time, they have required me to critically examine how whiteness operates in my teaching and learning environments. De-centering whiteness has been a continual process of reflection, vulnerability, and active unlearning, as I work to foster equitable spaces where all students' voices are valued.

Living with an invisible disability that affects my mobility and energy has also taught me to navigate the world through a different lens. This experience has given me a deeper empathy for the challenges many students face, particularly those with hidden or unacknowledged struggles. It has also reinforced the importance of creating learning environments that honor the

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diverse ways individuals move through the world. Acknowledging both my privileges and vulnerabilities allows me to build reciprocal trust with students, modeling the authenticity and openness I hope to cultivate in my classroom.

My early teaching experiences in South Los Angeles and Pico-Union were transformative in shaping my understanding of education as a tool for liberation. The students and families I worked with taught me to reject deficit-based narratives and instead recognize the wealth of cultural knowledge and resilience they bring to the classroom—a perspective reinforced by Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth. These experiences also highlighted the enduring presence of systemic racism, described by Kohli et al. (2017) as the “new racism,” which operates through covert, institutionalized mechanisms that perpetuate inequities. Recognizing how these systems shape students’ experiences has deepened my commitment to actively challenge them in my teaching.

I approach this work with humility and a focus on continuous self-reflection. My commitment to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) involves creating spaces where students’ cultural identities are seen as assets rather than barriers to success. Through restorative practices (Disney, 2018) and critical self-inquiry, I strive to build classrooms that emphasize equity, vulnerability, and trust—foundational principles that guide my teaching and learning journey.

Teacher Autonomy vs Accountability

Balancing teacher autonomy and accountability has been an ongoing focus throughout my career, from my days as a high school English teacher in California to my work as a teacher coach and mentor in Hawai‘i. As Hambacher and Bondy (2016) emphasize, autonomy must coexist with critical teacher care, which requires high expectations paired with unwavering

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support. In my teaching, autonomy manifests in the flexibility I offer students to pursue topics meaningful to them through project-based learning and inquiry-driven assignments. For example, I worked with teachers in Hawai‘i to design assessments that allowed students to research community-specific issues like environmental preservation and Native Hawaiian sovereignty.

At the same time, accountability to standards and systemic goals remains essential. Kumar’s (2018) framework for advancing culturally relevant pedagogy highlights how educators can hold students to rigorous academic expectations while tailoring instruction to be responsive to their cultural and linguistic needs. I’ve seen this dual focus succeed when students feel both supported and challenged, which is essential for cultivating their agency as critical thinkers. Accountability frameworks, when approached thoughtfully, do not stifle autonomy but can guide teachers in aligning their creative practices with broader educational goals.

Classroom Climate, Inclusion, and Learners with Exceptionalities

Creating an inclusive classroom climate is a core tenet of my philosophy, one that prioritizes community, trust, and mutual respect. I believe, as Trout and Basford (2016) suggest, that care in education must be embodied and relational, meaning that students should feel supported not just academically but also socially and emotionally. This belief has shaped how I design classroom interactions, from restorative circle discussions (Disney, 2018) to collaborative projects that build interpersonal skills.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) also plays a critical role in my teaching. I regularly integrate SEL frameworks to help students develop self-awareness, empathy, and communication skills. These practices are not merely add-ons but integral to creating a classroom environment where every student feels valued and capable. By connecting SEL to academic tasks, I aim to

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foster a culture of inclusion that goes beyond surface-level accommodations to truly center each student's humanity (Durlak et al., 2011).

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